

What Makes a Great Boss?

– A Review of Management in UK Workplaces

By One4all Rewards

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About the report

Britain's bosses play an essential role in driving our economy forward.

From the smallest start-up to the biggest corporation, every business needs a boss or leadership team capable of making strategic decisions, coupled with the skills to grow the business.

But even the best boss is incapable of building a successful company on their own and much of this success is underpinned by happy and hardworking staff who feel motivated and incentivised to perform for the business.

When it comes to developing the optimum atmosphere, bosses are the starting point and the relationships they develop with their staff are key to ensuring workers are willing to put the effort in for the business.

By surveying more than 1,000 workers over the age of 18 in the UK, this report will shine a light on the attributes that make a great boss and how many actually demonstrate these qualities in the workplace.

The report will examine how positive and negative relationships impact on the atmosphere of a workplace and the attitudes of the workforce towards a company – including the impact a great boss can have on performance, retention and morale.

Finally, this study will look to eradicate stereotypes of who makes a better boss in the real world, looking at whether men or women are actually thought of as better bosses, and whether a university degree or life experience is the bigger factor in being a better business leader.

Foreword

Being an effective boss is an essential part of running a successful business. One major factor in being a good boss is having the ability to motivate and incentivise your workforce to ensure they stay happy and focused in their work.

But are business' current crop of leaders doing that?

Are today's business leaders succeeding in making their workers feel valued? Are they demonstrating the attributes that are conducive to an effective work environment? And how are their attitudes and skills impacting the way staff view them and the company they represent?

In this report, we will seek to answer all these questions and paint a picture of the types of boss that people are more likely to respond to, what type of person is most likely to be respected as a leader, and how much the background of that person plays into their ability to connect with their workforce.

By finding out what workers look for in a good boss, what kind of relationships lead to the most efficient business practices, and how working to improve relationships can improve moral and cut recruitment costs through staff retention, we will find out exactly what it takes to be a great boss in modern Britain.

Highlights

- The vast majority of workers (56%) would rate their boss as either good or excellent
- More than one in 10 workers (13%) rate their boss as poor or very poor
- Good communication skills are the most treasured quality that 78% of UK workers look for in a boss
- Being disorganised is the most common weakness in UK bosses, according to 33% of respondents
- Bosses in Manchester are most likely to be described as excellent or good (63%)
- Many people wouldn't change anything about the relationship they have with their boss (30%)
- One in five people (20%) would like their boss to show more gratitude for the work they do
- 17% of people would like their boss to be more supportive
- Nearly half of workers (49%) share the opinion that men and women make equally good bosses (10% would prefer a male boss, just 6% would prefer a female boss)

Quality, or lack of it, among UK bosses

While the vast majority of workers in the UK are perfectly happy with their boss (41% rate them as good, 15% say their boss is excellent), there is nevertheless a significant number of people who think their boss leaves a lot to be desired.

In fact, more than one in 10 people (13%) would describe their boss as either poor or very poor, not necessarily based on their ability to do their own job, but more on their ability to manage positive relationships and get the most out of their staff.

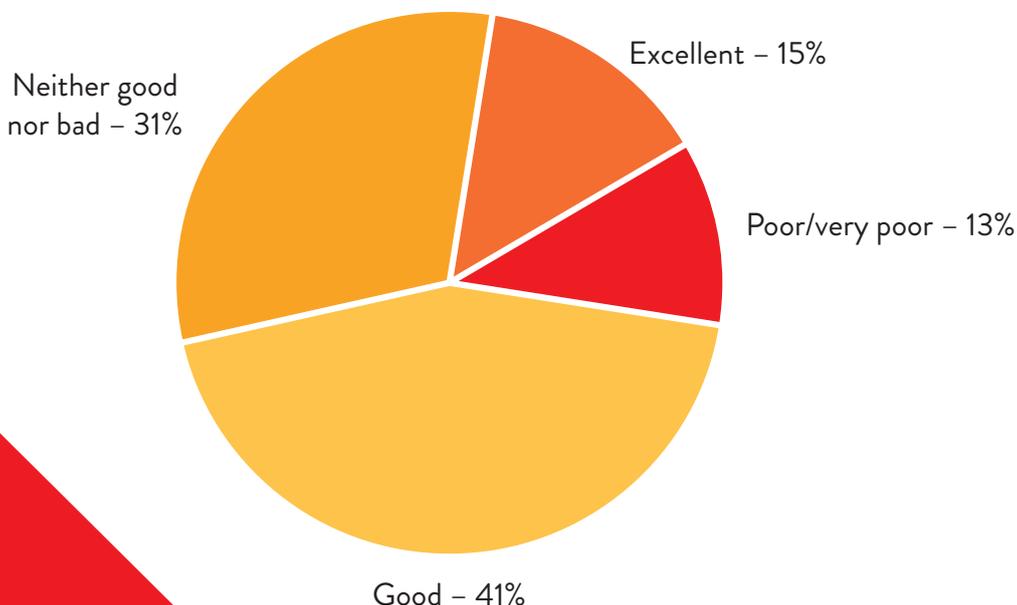
While not definitive, it does show the potential for workplaces to suffer based on poor staff/management relationships.

Perhaps surprisingly, being disorganised is by far the biggest weakness most likely to be encountered in bosses in the UK, according to a third (33%) of workers.

When it comes to personal qualities that people think their bosses could do without, dragging the office atmosphere down by being moody is described as a problem by 13% of workers, followed closely by 12% of people who would describe their boss as controlling.

And for people looking for a settled working environment, 11% are out of luck, describing their boss as unpredictable, with the same proportion saying their boss' biggest weakness is that they are lazy and rely too much on other people to pick up the slack in the business.

How do you rate the performance of your boss?



Biggest weaknesses in Britain's bosses

- Disorganised – 33%
- Moody – 13%
- Controlling – 12%
- Unpredictable – 11%
- Lazy – 11%

“As the leaders of British industry it is reassuring to see that, for the most part, people are confident in their boss’ ability to run a business and get a job done. However, there is a significant, and worrying, number of workers who have a bad impression of their boss. Being disorganised, lazy and moody are not qualities you would associate with successful business leaders and, thankfully, these would appear to be a minority of isolated instances.”

- Declan Byrne, Managing Director, One4all Rewards

Britain's ideal boss – does the dream match the reality?

Being a good communicator is the most sought after skill in a boss, according to 78% of the UK's workforce.

Having a boss who is grateful for hard work and regularly thanks staff for their efforts is most important for 65% of workers.

Of those who stated this, the majority said that having a boss who makes them feel appreciated is a contributing factor in motivating them to work harder, showing the importance of fostering positive relationships as a boss.

Developing positive relationships with staff is a key factor in running a successful business, and being more approachable would help with this according to 35% of the workforce.

And while having a tough boss can be difficult at times, 24% are willing to deal with this as long as they are also fair.

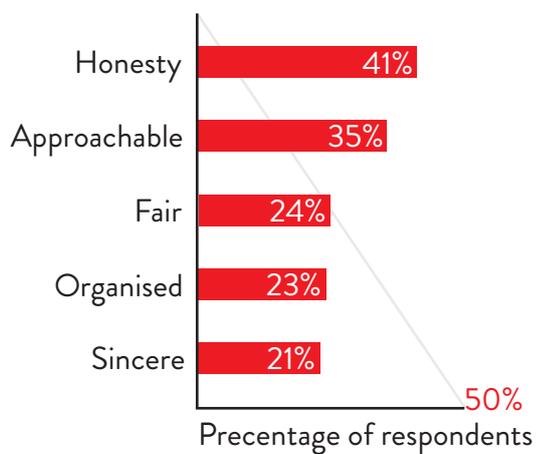
For 62% of people, having a boss who is willing to get involved and help out with additional tasks during busy periods is an essential trait they value.

Female employees are most likely to value a boss they feel is approachable (44%), while men are more likely to value a boss who is honest (45%).

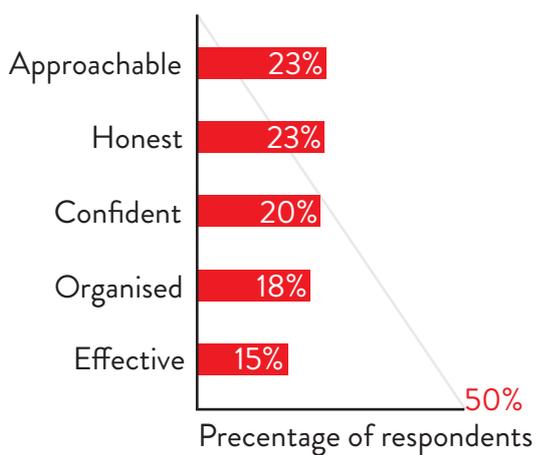
Showing a willingness to invest in their workforce through training and development opportunities is an attribute many workers consider vital in their boss, although surprisingly this is more important for older workers (65% of 45-54 year olds, compared to 48% of 25-34 year olds).

For the most part, British bosses are at least meeting expectations, with most workers describing them as approachable (23%), honest (23%), confident (20%), organised (18%) and effective (15%).

The dream – The personal traits workers most want to see in their bosses



The reality – The qualities people say their bosses possess



The professional behaviour workers want their bosses to demonstrate

- Good communication skills – 78%
- Regularly thanking staff for their efforts – 65%
- Showing a willingness to muck in and help out when times are tough or busy – 62%
- Showing consideration for workers' work/life balance – 60%
- Actively trying to develop workers' skills (arranging training etc) – 56%

“We all have an idea of the kind of boss we'd like to work with. Whether it's someone who inspires us, motivates us, or makes us better at our own job. But with so much expectation it is very hard for these perceptions to match reality; bosses are only human after all.

“With that in mind, it is quite surprising to see just how many bosses live up to these expectations. This shows an impressive understanding among managers in the UK of what is expected of them, and clearly they work to live up to and match those expectations.”

- Declan Byrne, Managing Director, One4all Rewards

The British boss and their workforce – a delicate relationship

For most people, the relationship they have with their boss is perfectly fine and most, (30%) wouldn't want to change anything about it.

But not all working relationships are fine all the time, and there are a number of aspects of their working relationships that many workers would like to change when it comes to their boss.

The biggest improvement people would want their boss to make would be to show more gratitude for the work they do, with one in five (20%) saying they do not always feel appreciated.

Other workers say they often feel unsupported at work and 17% would like to see their boss make some strides towards improving that situation, although a similar number (14%) think they are not given enough opportunity to work more autonomously.

Younger people in the workforce are much more likely to want to change something about the relationship they have with their boss, with just 15% of 18-24 year olds saying they are content with their current situation.

The biggest change they would make is getting their boss to share more expertise with them (26% would want this) as some feel they are too often left to just get on with a job without the proper support.

The top 5 changes Brits would make to their relationship with their boss

- I wish my boss would show more appreciation for my work – 20%
- I wish they would be more supportive – 17%
- I wish they would provide me with more expertise and help – 14%
- I wish they could help me more with my professional development – 13%

“Looking at the kinds of attributes workers want in a boss, clearly some managers are overlooking the importance of their working relationships. For example, a number of them could do with showing more gratitude and being more supportive.

“Employee engagement and keeping a positive morale is key to ensuring good productivity and an effective workforce while reducing staff turnover.”

- Declan Byrne, Managing Director, One4all Rewards

The importance of the boss/staff relationship

We've already seen that most people are happy with the relationship they have with their boss, as well as the changes some would like to make.

And the importance of developing positive relationships with their staff is a point bosses should never underestimate, as succeeding in this can make the difference between their company being a success or failure.

Indeed, having a good relationship with their boss is a deciding factor for a significant number of people in the UK when it comes to staying with a business or leaving, even if they enjoy the work they are doing.

Having a good relationship with their boss would be enough to make more than a quarter (26%) of workers more likely to stay with a company for a long period of time – at least five years.

This is compared to a similar proportion of workers (23%) who say they have left a job in the past specifically because of the relationship they had with their boss, while 19% have considered quitting as a direct result of a poor relationship with their boss.

Being approachable has already been identified as a key attribute people like in a boss, and this is backed up by the 23% of people who feel like they can talk to their boss about any problems they are having at work.

Showing an interest in the workforce can also be a positive aspect of the boss/worker relationship and 20% of people feel they have this relationship, saying their boss cares about their happiness at work.

How important is a positive boss/staff relationship?

- A good relationship with my boss would mean I would consider staying at a company for a long period (at least five years) – 26%
- I believe bosses and their staff can be friends and still work effectively together – 26%
- I have left a job in the past due to my working relationship with my boss – 23%
- I feel like I can talk to my boss when I have a problem at work – 23%
- I feel like my boss cares about me as a person – 23%

“As the head of a company and the person workers look to to set the tone, bosses have a tough job managing relationships across the business. Letting these relationships sour or allowing smaller issues to fester can be severely detrimental to the wellbeing of a workforce and ultimately the wider business.

“Seeing how much value workers put on these relationships when deciding to leave or stay at a company alone should serve as a warning to bosses to take their staff relationships seriously.”

- Declan Byrne, Managing Director, One4all Rewards

Who makes the best boss?

Men or women? Younger or older? Graduates or the university of lifers?

When it comes to the type of people who make the best bosses, there are no shortage of opinions or headlines as to who exactly has the edge.

Probably the most contentious topic in this sphere is the gender dispute and whether it is in fact men or women who make the best bosses.

It is clear that when it comes to the gender gap, there is a bias towards putting men in top positions (a recent research report by the Directory of Social Change found that women make up less than a quarter of UK boardrooms).

However, British workers are clearly supportive of having more equality and diversity in a management team, with nearly half (49%) of workers saying they believe men and women make equally good bosses.

By far the biggest split of opinion comes when looking at the age of bosses in British businesses, with older people (aged 40-65) being preferred by 50% of the workforce, compared to just 15% of people who think people aged 18-39 make the better bosses.

Not surprisingly, workers are also more likely to prefer a boss closer to their own age.

71% of people aged over 55 say they think older people (aged 40-65) make the best bosses compared to 30% who think bosses aged 18-24 are better to work for.

Of those who think younger people (aged 18-34) make better bosses, 26% are aged 18-24, compared to just 5% of people aged over 55.

Male workers are much more likely to put a value on age in their boss (55% compared to 45% of women).

While the past decade has seen a great deal of emphasis placed on a university degree to get ahead in the workforce, this appears to have no bearing on the quality of bosses, at least in the eyes of the workforce.

The general consensus is that grads and non-grads make equally good bosses – 28% of people would agree with this statement.

Maybe surprisingly, of those who do have a preference between working for a graduate or non-graduate, slightly more people (8% compared to 5%) think those who bypassed university and went straight into the workplace prove to be better bosses.

Which types of people make the best bosses?



“Age, gender or education levels are no indicators of whether people will make a good boss, and clearly this is the case in the real world, as most people have an equally positive view of their boss, whether they’re male or female, young or old, or whether or not they went to university.

“Particularly when looking at the gender gap, this research suggests that UK workers are very forward thinking and don’t particularly care if their boss is a man or woman, as long as they can do the job. However, it is clear that age – and the perception of greater work or life experience – is a much bigger factor for workers when judging a boss’ ability.”

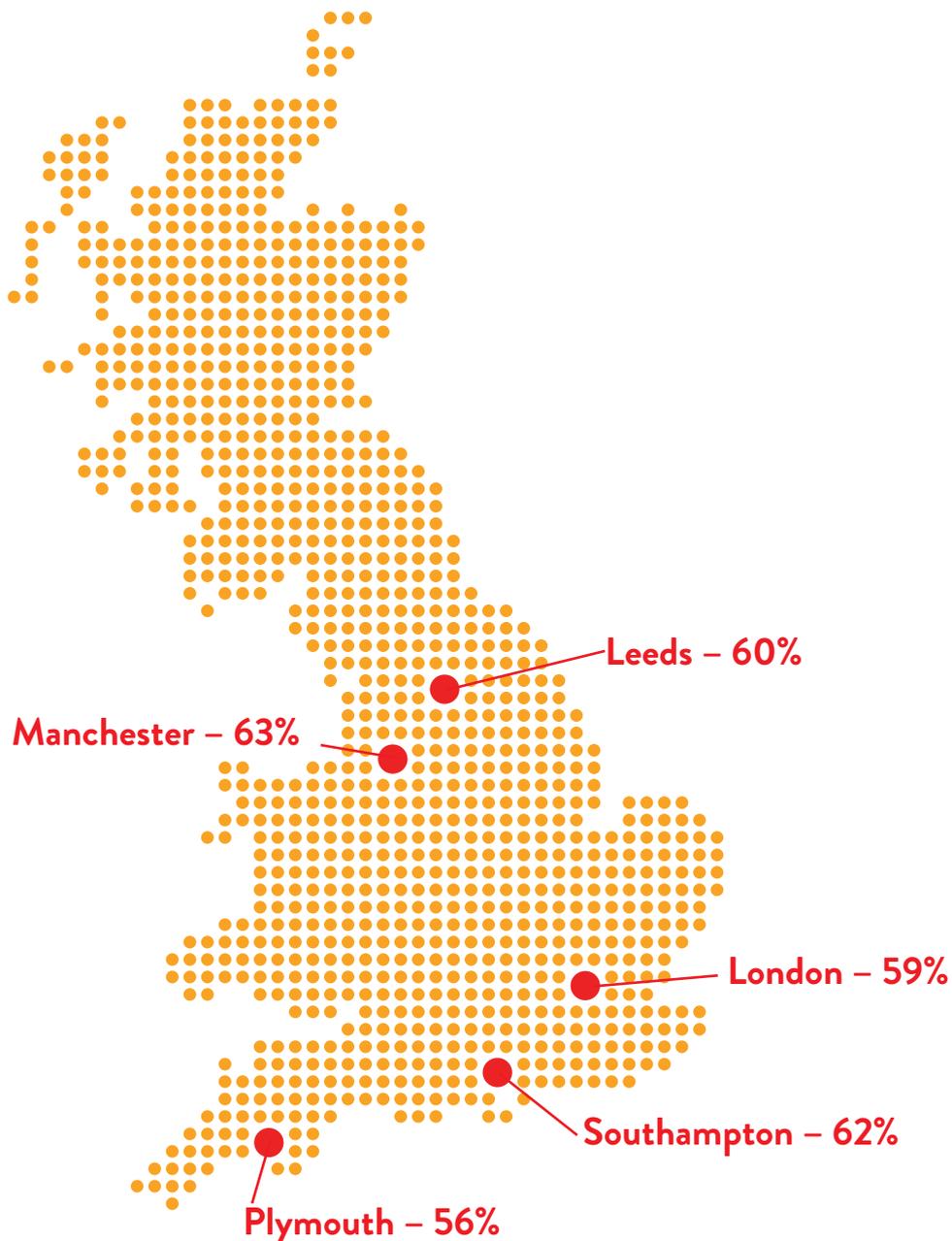
- Declan Byrne, Managing Director, One4all Rewards

Where are Britain's best and worst bosses located?

Manchester is home to the UK's best bosses, with 63% of workers in the city describing them as either very good or excellent – more than any other place in the UK.

This is just ahead of bosses in Southampton, who achieved a 62% approval among their workforce.

Bosses in Brighton take the unfortunate title of being Britain's worst bosses, with 19% of workers describing them as poor or very poor, more than anywhere else in the UK.



Conclusion

British bosses are, on the whole, proving to be effective leaders of industry, with 56% of the country's workforce describing them as excellent or very good.

But with 10% of people saying their boss is inadequate in their business, there is clearly a gulf in management talent that needs to be addressed, particularly with growing uncertainty in Britain's economic situation.

It is also clear that, despite age old stereotypes, there is no correlation between being a good boss and fitting into particular social sectors. By far the majority of the workforce believe men and women, as well as grads and non-graduates, are equally proficient at leading a business and managing people.

There is a developing gap, however, when it comes to the age of bosses. Older people are clearly better thought of when it comes to being bosses within a business. This could be because age naturally demands more respect, or the genuine benefits of older people having more knowledge and experience in their industry and therefore better able to lead.

When it comes to relationships between bosses and their workforce, for the most part, people are content. However, while the majority are happy, there remains some work to be done by a minority of bosses to foster a more positive relationship with their workforce.

Showing more gratitude, offering more support, and trusting staff to work more independently are all qualities bosses could work on to improve relationships.

Workers have also revealed the biggest weaknesses in their bosses, suggesting that being more organised, less moody and less controlling would go a long way to making work relationships more positive.

It is abundantly clear that workers put a premium on the relationships they have with their boss, particularly when it comes to their future in a business. Many people base their decision to stay or leave a business solely on their perception of their boss, with a surprising number having left a business for this reason.

These findings should serve as reassurance to most bosses that they are doing an effective job, but should also sound a warning to some that they are failing to meet the expectations of their workers and are seriously risking the future of their business.

For more information about how to reward your staff,
call 020 7608 2008 or email corpsales@one4allgiftcard.co.uk

