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*charity consulting*

**ThirdSector**

**Impact of the recession  
on voluntary sector  
staff satisfaction**

Charity Pulse 2009  
Sector-wide Report

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## Introduction

*Charity Pulse* is an annual voluntary sector-wide staff satisfaction survey conducted by Birdsong Charity Consulting and *Third Sector* magazine. This year's survey ran from 10 March to 24 April 2009.

*Charity Pulse* is a unique approach to measuring staff satisfaction in the sector, because it enables individuals working for any charity to take part. The aim of the research is to build up a picture of working life in charities and help to raise the standard of people management in the sector. The survey asks charity workers questions about:

- their work/life balance
- the quality of internal communications in their organisation
- the effectiveness of their management
- their views on development, reward and loyalty

It also provides the opportunity for charities to receive cost-effective benchmarked staff satisfaction data, by promoting the survey to their staff.

We had an excellent response this year, with 800 charity people taking part, representing over 180 different charities.

This year our sector-wide report focuses on the impact of the recession on voluntary sector staff satisfaction.

### How concerned are charity staff?

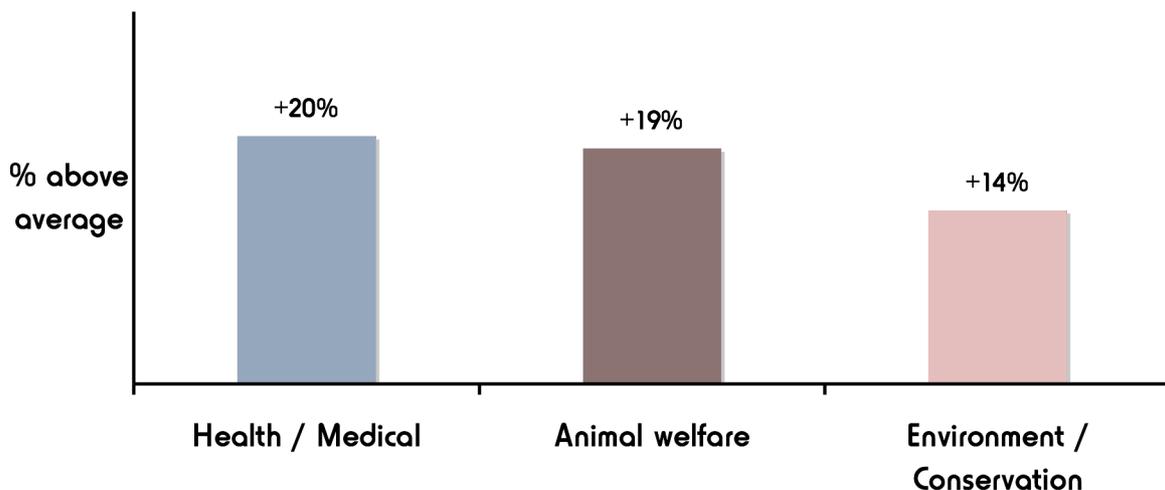
A third of respondents to this year's survey told us that they were concerned about the future of their charity and this translated into a similar proportion being worried about their job security.

Staff based in London were more relaxed about their charity's prospects than their regional and country colleagues and looking at different departments and functions, those working in finance and supporter care were the most worried about the future.

Of all staff groups, chief executives and directors were the least concerned about the future of their organisations, which is hopefully a positive finding for the sector. The most concerned - about their charities and their jobs - were middle managers. As we will see later in this report, the way in which senior management optimism is communicated to other staff makes a big difference to employee morale.

Comparing the different sub-sectors, the most concerned employees were to be found in disability charities. The charity staff who were least concerned worked for some of the most popular causes.

**Charity staff not concerned about the future of their charity**



Across the board the biggest drop in staff satisfaction over the past 12 months has been in training and development. Only 58% of staff currently feel that they are getting sufficient training to do their job well. This is down from 65% in 2008. Only 44% of respondents feel supported in developing their career - down from 53% last year. As we will see, this is more of an issue for some staff groups than others.

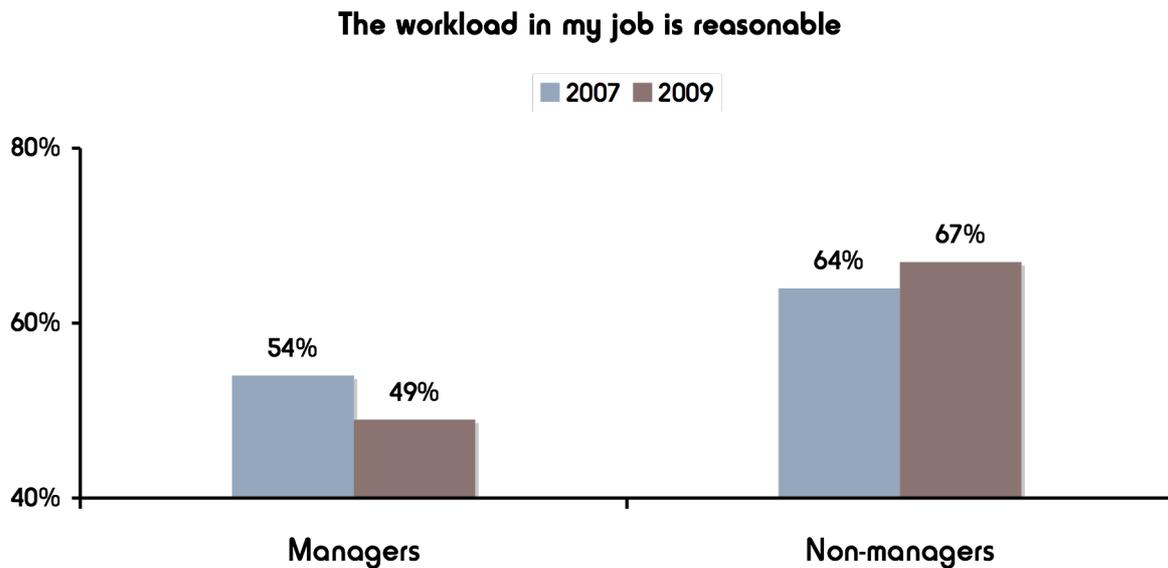
Overall, the less worried staff are, the happier they are - with their jobs, their leadership and their charity. At the end of this report we provide some tips for charity leaders on how to reduce anxiety levels and build staff confidence during these uncertain times.

## Main findings

### When the going gets tough...

As pressure increases on budgets and services, it won't surprise you to learn that staff are going the extra mile for their charities. Work/life balance is slipping with 64% currently believing that they have a good work/life balance, down from 71% two years ago.

Managers are taking the brunt of the pressure with only 49% now believing that their workload is reasonable compared to 54% two years ago. The comparable figures for non-managerial staff are 67% this year, slightly up in fact on 64% in 2007.



Just 61% of managers now believe that the results expected of them are realistic, down from 66% two years ago.

Stress levels are, understandably, higher for managers and, worryingly they are also more likely to have been bullied in the past 12 months. 16% say they have had this experience up by a third on last year. The comparable figure for non-managers is 12%, no change on 2008.

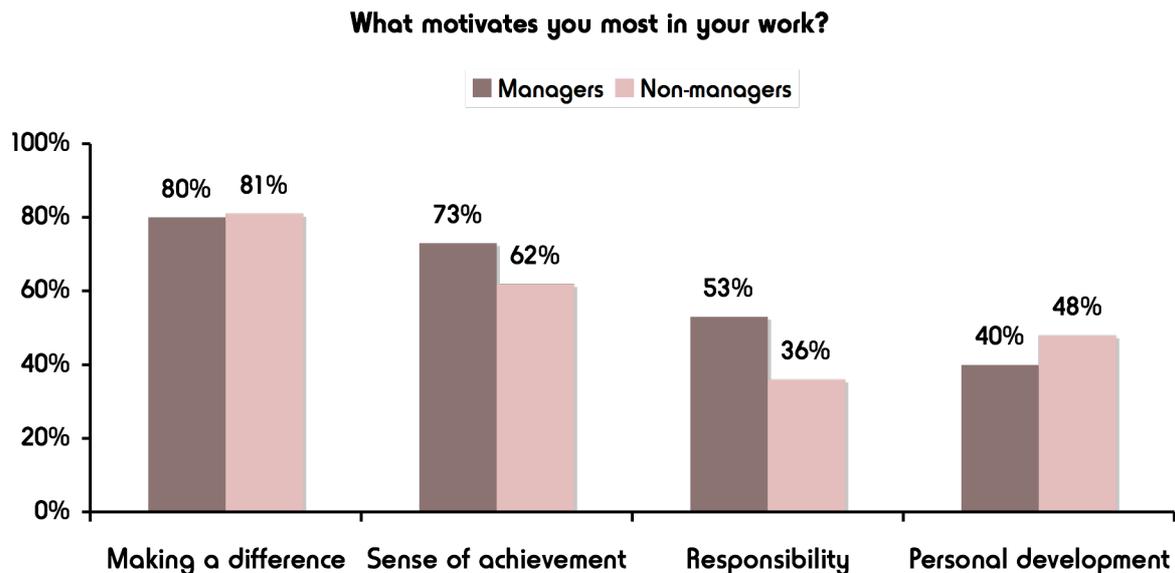
But its not all doom and gloom for managers. 92% say that they are enjoying their work, compared to 82% of non-managers. These figures compare with 89% for managers and 86% for non-managers in 2007.

Managers are certainly being stretched - and perhaps some are finding the challenge rewarding with 58% now claiming that their skills are being used to the full in their job, compared with only 45% of non-managers.

## Whatever turns you on

The differences identified above can be explained, in part at least, by looking at the relative motivations of managers and non-managers.

Although the primary motivation for all charity staff continues to be 'making a difference', managers are more likely to say that 'achievement' and 'responsibility' are equally motivating. Non-managers, on the other hand, are more likely to say that 'personal development' is an important motivator for them.



Recent reductions in training and development provision are of most concern to non-managers - and for staff under 30 across the board. Looking at the responses of this younger age group, 58% say that personal development is a key motivator for them, compared to just 44% of all respondents.

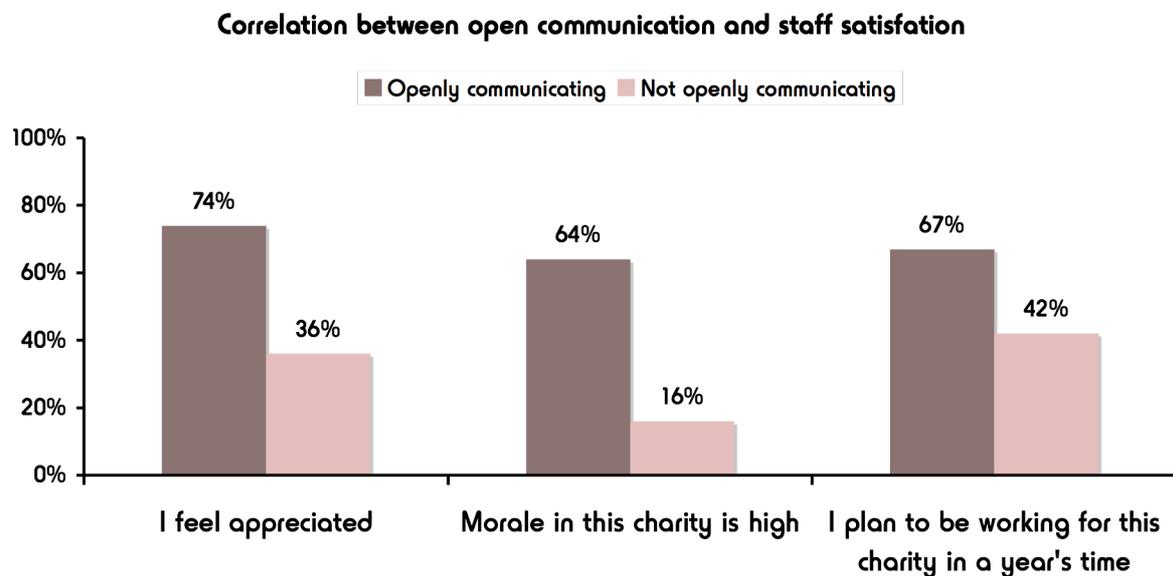
There are also some interesting variances between the motivations of individuals working in charities of different sizes. Those working for small charities (with less than 50 staff) are the most interested in flexible working and the most motivated by a sense of achievement.

Those working for medium-sized organisations (with 50 - 200 staff) are the least interested in flexible working and are least motivated by having a position of authority.

Those working for the biggest charities (with over 200 staff) are the most motivated by 'making a difference', but also by having job security and some decent pension provision.

## It's good to talk

Our respondents tell us that two-thirds of charities are communicating openly with them about the impact of the recession on their charity - and this is making a big difference to staff satisfaction.



Perhaps surprisingly, small charities are communicating least openly with their people. Employees in medium-sized charities are the happiest with the information they are getting from their leaders.

## If you leave me now...

One consequence of the recession and the pressure on jobs is that there has been an increase in the percentage of staff planning to still be working for their charity in a year's time - up from 56% last year to 61% in 2009.

The biggest change of heart is among those working for small charities. 63% of individuals working for charities with less than 50 staff are planning to be working for their charity in a year's time, compared to just 48% last year.

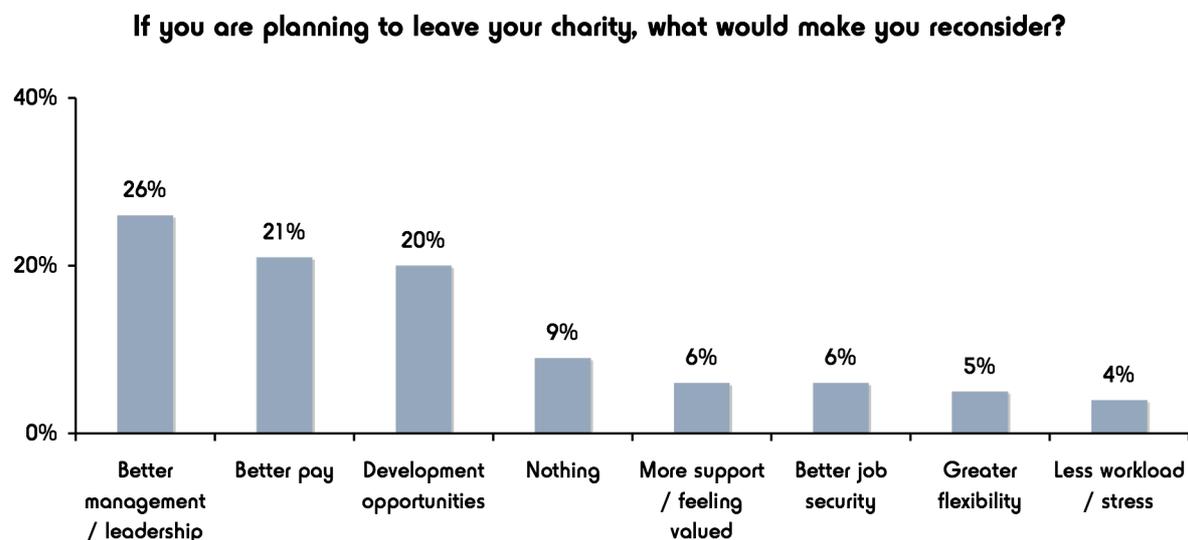
London based staff still have more nomadic tendencies than charity employees in other parts of the UK. Even in the current climate, only 52% are planning to be working for their charity in a year's time, up from 48% last year.

Non-managerial staff are still changing charities more frequently than their managers. 59% of non-managers are planning to be working for their charity in a year's time, compared to just 51% last year. For non-managers thinking about moving on, the main reasons given are to progress their career and improve their salary.

Managers are a more stable staff group - with 63% planning to stay put. Those still considering handing in their notice are less likely to be looking for a pay rise than non-managers, but twice as likely to cite workload and stress as contributory factors.

Workload is a more significant issue for those looking to leave small charities. Those wishing to move on from the larger charities are the most likely to mention frustrations with management.

When those who are planning to leave their charity were asked if there was anything that would make them reconsider, only 9% said that there was nothing that would make them change their minds.



An insight into the real impact of the recession was revealed in the comments that accompanied the data. Some respondents mentioned their negative equity and fear of losing their homes and, understandably, were raising pay as an issue. Some of those planning to stay on with their charity commented that the economy was making them more cautious about leaving.

Overall, respondents to this year's survey have worked for their current charity for an average of 3.7 years. The average was 3.9 years in 2008 and 4.2 years in 2007.

Those who had come from another charity role had stayed with their previous charity for an average of 3.8 years. The average was 3.6 years in both 2008 and 2007.

## Top Ten Tips for charity leaders in a recession

In uncertain times, leaders can make a big difference to staff satisfaction by what they say and what they do. It is important to take positive steps to reduce anxiety levels and build staff confidence.

Here are some specific actions you can take:

- 1. Be clear about direction. Staff are looking to you**
- 2. Be open about the charity's situation. What will change and what won't?**
- 3. Don't shut yourself away. Be visible and available**
- 4. You are the message: your attitude and behaviour. What does yours say?**
- 5. Involve staff in solutions. How they can contribute?**
- 6. Resist the tendency to tighten controls. It reduces staff creativity when you need it most**
- 7. If training budgets are tight, get creative about developing staff in other ways**
- 8. Manage stress - yours and others. Be alert to the signs**
- 9. Develop staff resilience. Remind everyone what you've achieved together**
- 10. Show that you care!**

## Birdsong Charity Consulting

People work best when they feel good about themselves - when they are enjoying their work, feeling motivated and appreciated. They don't work best when they feel stressed, over-worked and over-looked.

Healthy people create healthy organisations and Birdsong exists to help charities work more effectively with their people. We help charities to become thriving, vibrant organisations where people love to work.

To find out more about Birdsong or to download other free guides and research reports visit: **[www.bird-song.co.uk](http://www.bird-song.co.uk)**

## Charity Pulse 2010

Look out for *Charity Pulse 2010*! The survey will open in March next year and the more charity people who take part, the more interesting the results will be.

If you would like to register your charity's interest in a benchmarked *Charity Pulse* staff satisfaction survey please contact Frances Hurst at **[frances@bird-song.co.uk](mailto:frances@bird-song.co.uk)** or visit **[www.bird-song.co.uk](http://www.bird-song.co.uk)** for more information.