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charity consulting

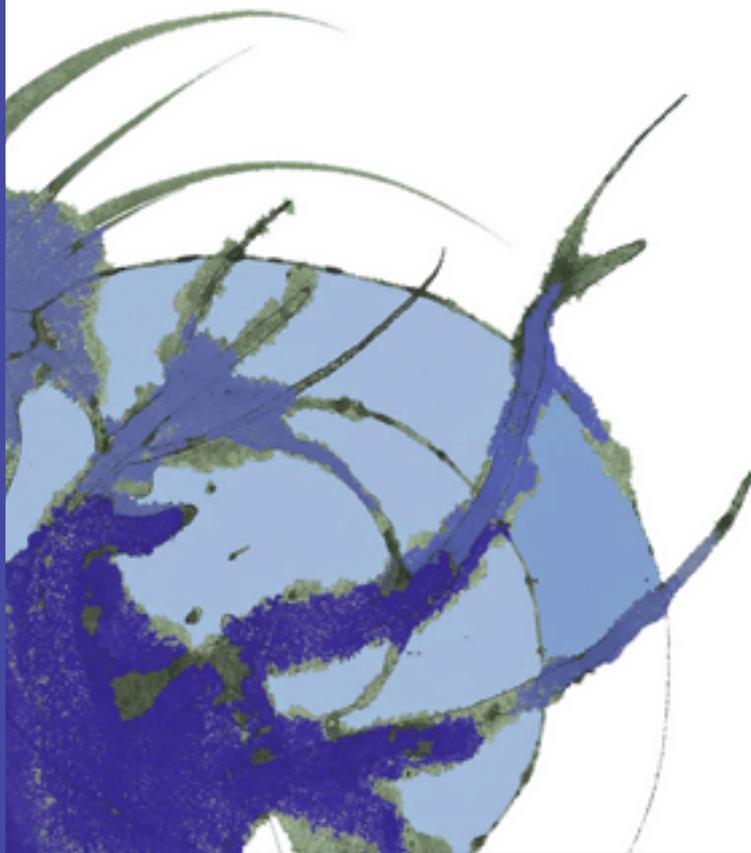
ThirdSector

Better together?
Charity Pulse 2013
Special Report

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Introduction

What is the major challenge facing your charity in 2013?

Delivering cost effective services? Raising sufficient income to meet rising costs? Retaining skilled and experienced staff? Whatever it is, this *Charity Pulse 2013* special report is here to help you.

Charity Pulse is an annual voluntary sector-wide staff satisfaction survey conducted by Birdsong Charity Consulting and *Third Sector* magazine. Each year, as well as our core survey, we focus on a different aspect of staff satisfaction. This year we've taken a look at working relationships and their impact on job satisfaction and charity effectiveness.

So, just how important are healthy working relationships?

As consultants working exclusively in the voluntary sector, we regularly observe how the quality of working relationships affects individuals and teams. Yet despite our involvement in this work for over a decade, these findings surprised us. In fact, we were astonished to discover the impact that unhealthy working relationships are having in charities.

We've written this special report to highlight our findings and to act as a catalyst for charity leaders to understand and improve working relationships in their organisations. Most leaders will be aware that their organisation has some areas where relationships are poor. We hope that this report will be a wake up call not to ignore them. The impact that unhealthy working relationships are having on your organisation, right now, is substantial. Ignore this warning at your peril!

The impact

Poor working relationships are having a dramatic effect on charities, affecting both the wellbeing of staff and the delivery of work.

Unhealthy relationships are:

- Creating stress and draining staff energy
- Stifling innovation and inhibiting creative thinking
- Blocking decision making and reducing effectiveness
- Increasing staff turnover

37% of *Charity Pulse 2013* survey respondents felt that, across their charity as a whole, working relationships are healthy. At the other end of the spectrum, however, 29% of respondents categorised working relationships at their charity as unhealthy.

Starting with the respondents coping with unhealthy working relationships. What do you think the impact is on their job satisfaction? A 10% reduction? 20% perhaps, or 25%? Well, how about 54%. As a group, just 23% of staff working in charities with unhealthy working relationships are satisfied with their job, compared to 87% of people where working relationships across the charity are healthy.

When we look at staff morale, the picture is even more dramatic. In charities where working relationships are considered to be unhealthy, only 2% of respondents think that their morale in their organisation is high – that's barely registering. This compares with a figure of 64% for the healthy organisations.

Perhaps most significantly though, only 20% of survey respondents working in unhealthy environments are planning to be working for their organisation in a year's time. The comparable figure for individuals who say that relationships are healthy is 70%.

These are just a few of many powerful statistics contained in this report that have emerged from the comparison of charities with healthy and unhealthy working relationships.

The warning

So you have been warned! It may feel like there are more important issues demanding your attention right now, but this research demonstrates that those feelings are misplaced. For charity leaders looking to improve their organisation's performance, against a backdrop of continued pressure on income and resources, there is nothing more urgent.

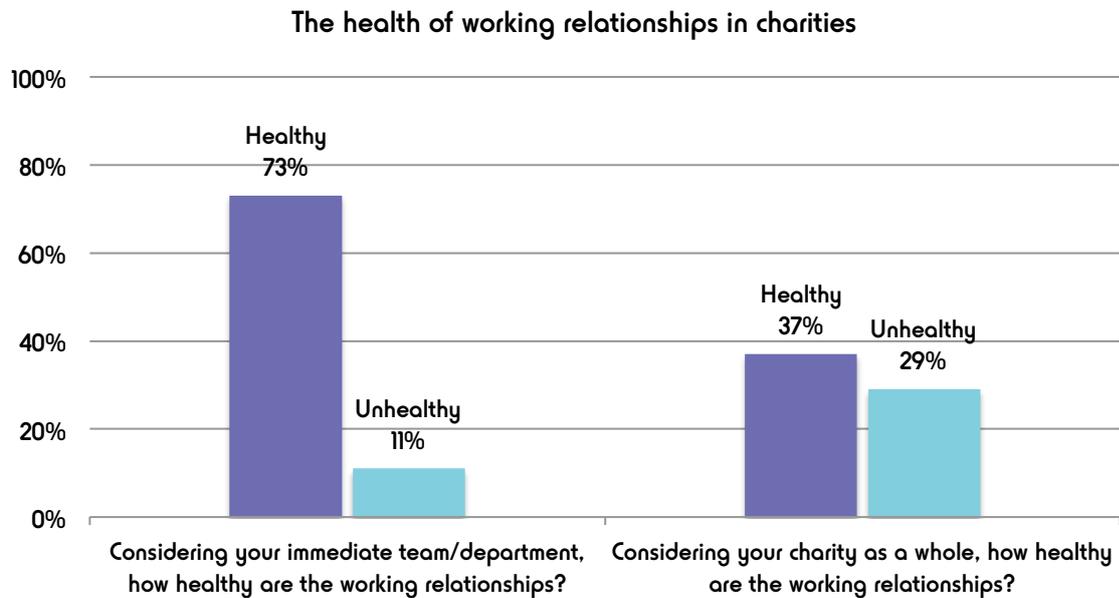
Every charity will need to address the inevitable conflict between this vital area of work and other pressing organisational priorities – but it must be addressed.

The good news

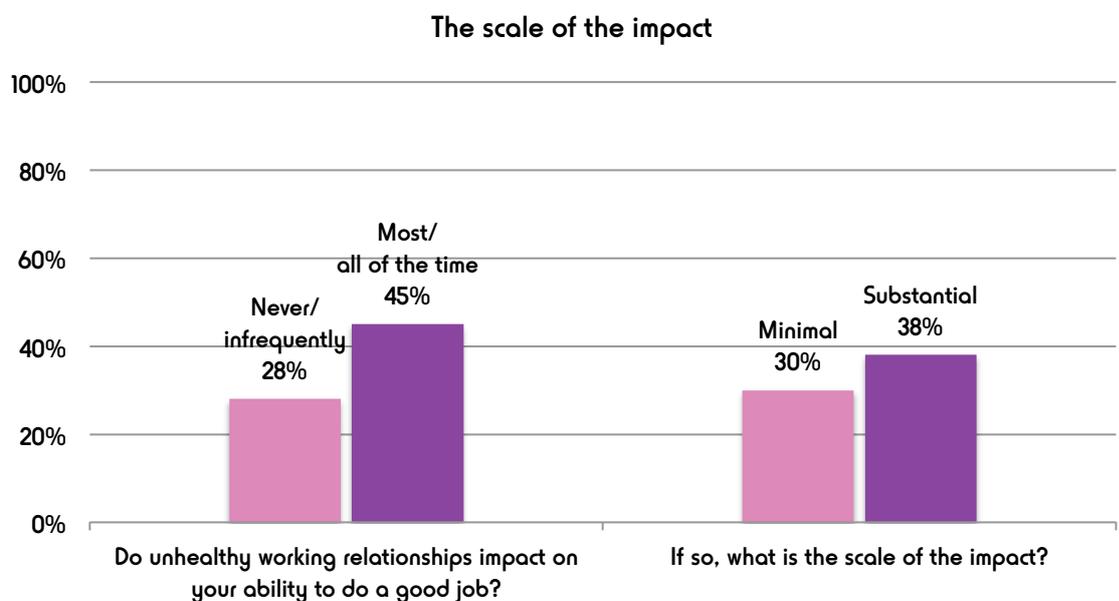
The good news is that staff are engaged with this and eager to help. And they are not short of ideas either. So involve your staff in this process or, better still, let them lead the way.

Findings overview

Most charity people get on well with their immediate colleagues. It's when working relationships have to stretch a little further, that the problems can start to set in.

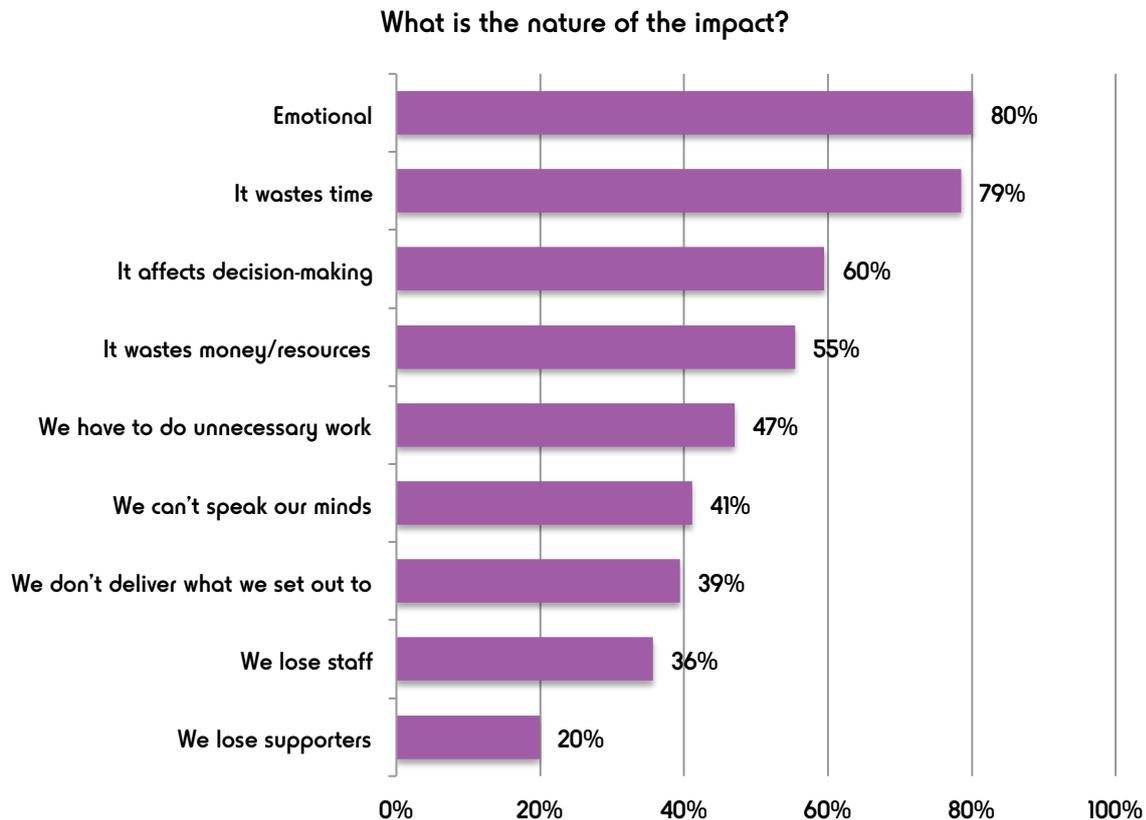


We asked all respondents to the survey about the problems they encounter with working relationships – 45% said that they impacted on their ability to do a good job, and 38% said that the impact was substantial.



The impact of unhealthy working relationships

When unhealthy working relationships get in the way of doing a good job, what exactly is the nature of that impact? This is what the respondents said:



NB. Respondents could choose multiple categories

Topping the chart, with 80% of respondents affected, is emotional impact. This includes factors such as frustration, stress, tiredness, insecurity and fear. Not only will these feelings be undermining charity staff morale and enthusiasm, they will also be stifling creativity and innovation.

Coming in at number two is time wasting. With 79% of people affected, just think how much more effective charities could be - even with just a few more healthy relationships!

Beyond that, this table shows that unhealthy working relationships are significantly affecting decision-making, wasting money and resources, creating unnecessary work and generally holding charities back.

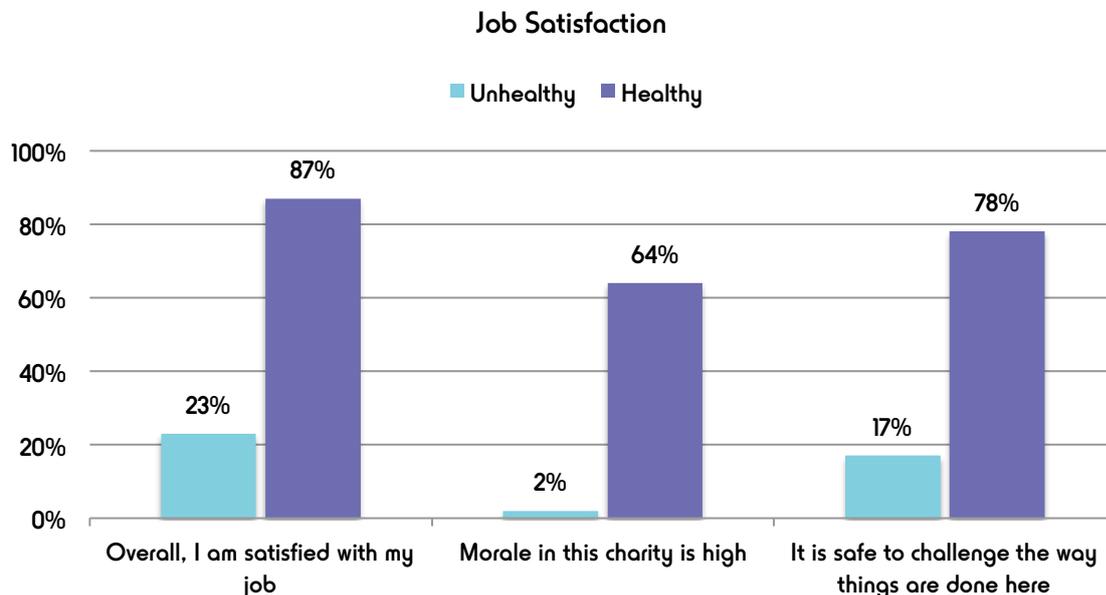
So we're starting to get the picture now. Unhealthy working relationships in charities are having a substantial impact on performance and delivery.

No one is saying that tackling some of the long-standing problems out there will be easy. But neither can unhealthy working relationships continue to be brushed under the carpet, considered an irrelevance or, worse still, treated like a taboo subject.

Still need more convincing? Let's take a look at the detail...

Job satisfaction and morale

Lets start with that job satisfaction statistic: 87% of staff working in charities with healthy working relationships are satisfied with their job, compared to just 23% of staff where working relationships across the charity are considered to be unhealthy.



As well as job satisfaction, morale is affected in a big way. 64% of those working in healthy environments believe that morale in their charity is high. But in unhealthy charities, the impact this is having on morale is so substantial, that a positive response to this question is barely registering.

Looking into how staff behaviours are affected, 78% of respondents working in healthy environments say that they feel safe to challenge the way things are done at their charity – of vital importance to innovation. In comparison, only 17% of those working in unhealthy environments feel the same way.

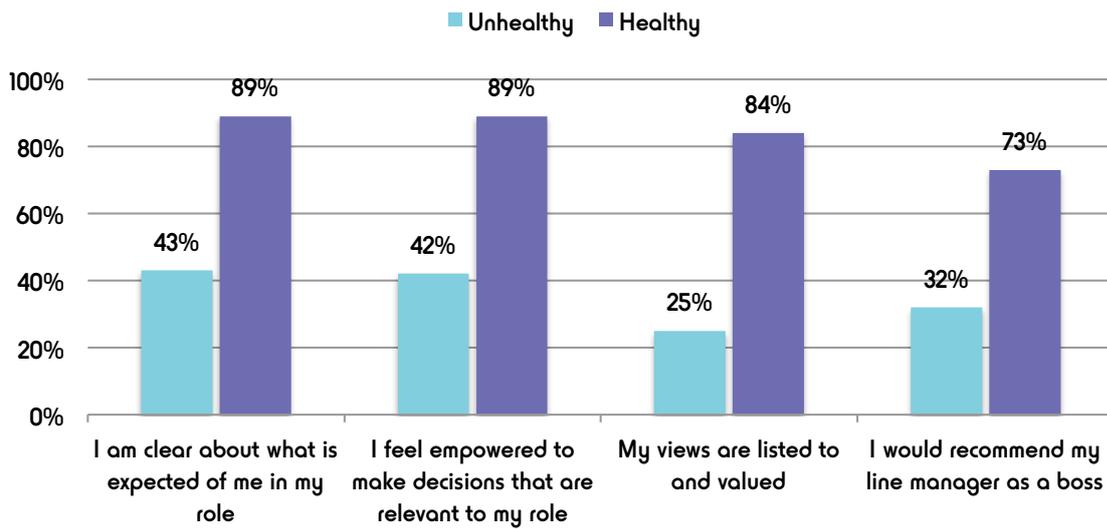
People management

How do respondents feel about their management? Well again there are substantial differences between the healthy and unhealthy working environments.

89% of those with healthy working relationships think that they are clear about what is expected of them in their role, compared to just 43% of those immersed in unhealthy cultures. Lack of clarity of this nature invariably contributes to confusion about roles and responsibilities and will be significantly undermining team working.

Looking at the graphs overleaf, empowerment to make decisions is impacted to a similar extent. Where individuals are held back in this way, there will inevitably be an unnecessary slowing of decision-making and reduction in productivity.

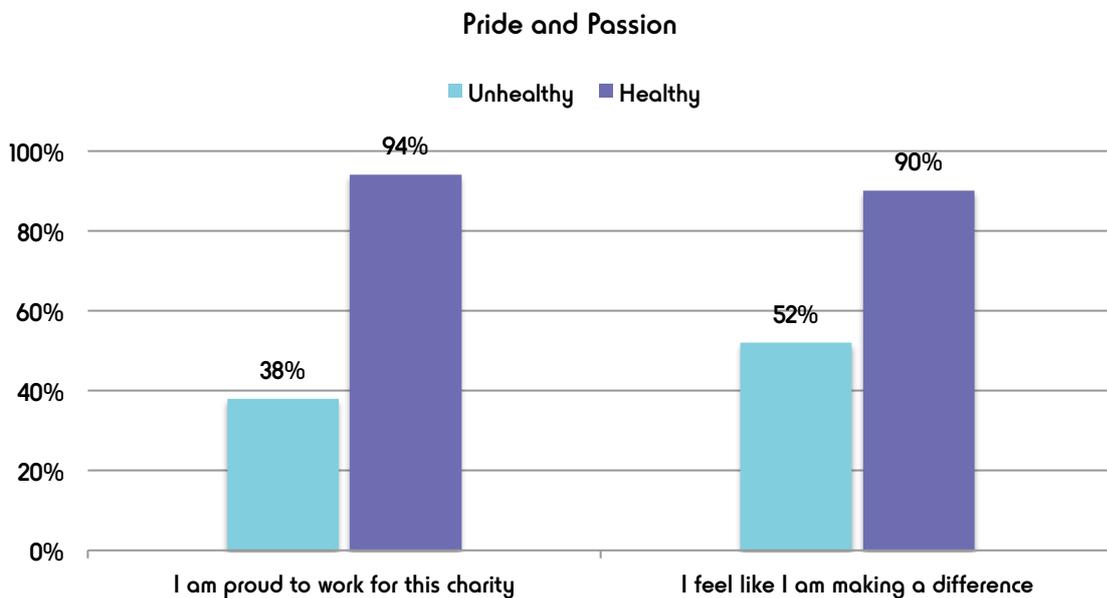
People Management



In the unhealthy charities only 25% of staff feel that their views are listened to and valued, compared to 84% in healthier organisations. Feeling that your views matter is a major driver of morale – and job satisfaction overall. Just 32% would recommend their line manager as a boss, compared to an average of 73% elsewhere. Surveys across sectors consistently identify the quality of line managers as a key factor in staff engagement and retention.

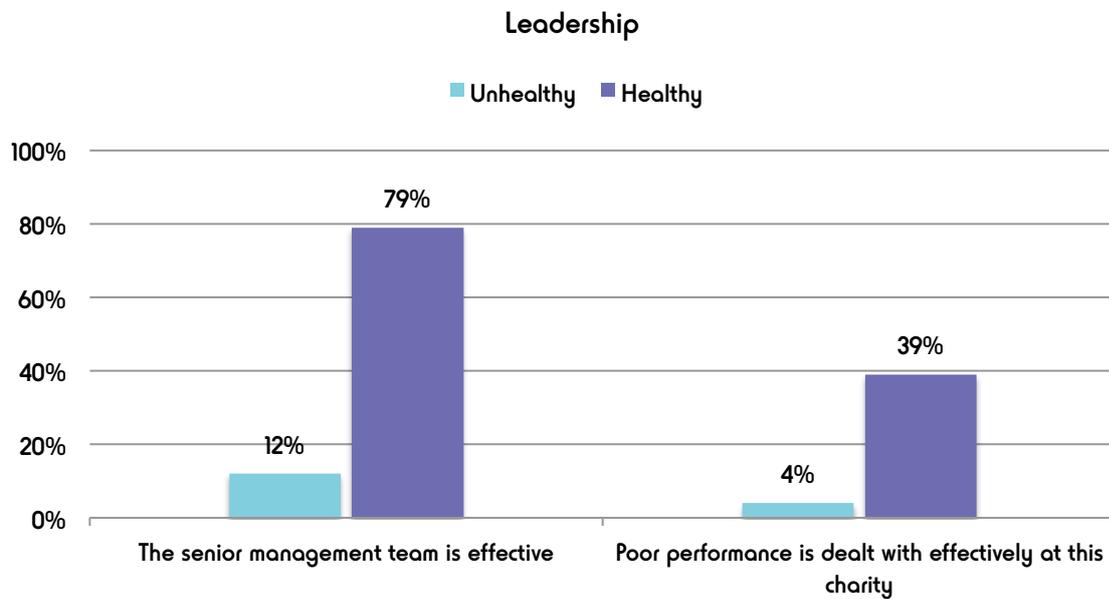
Pride and passion

The effect on morale and effectiveness is perhaps understandable, but what about the meaning that individuals derive from their work – such an important factor for charity people. How is that affected? The graph below shows that sadly, even in this area, the impact is considerable.

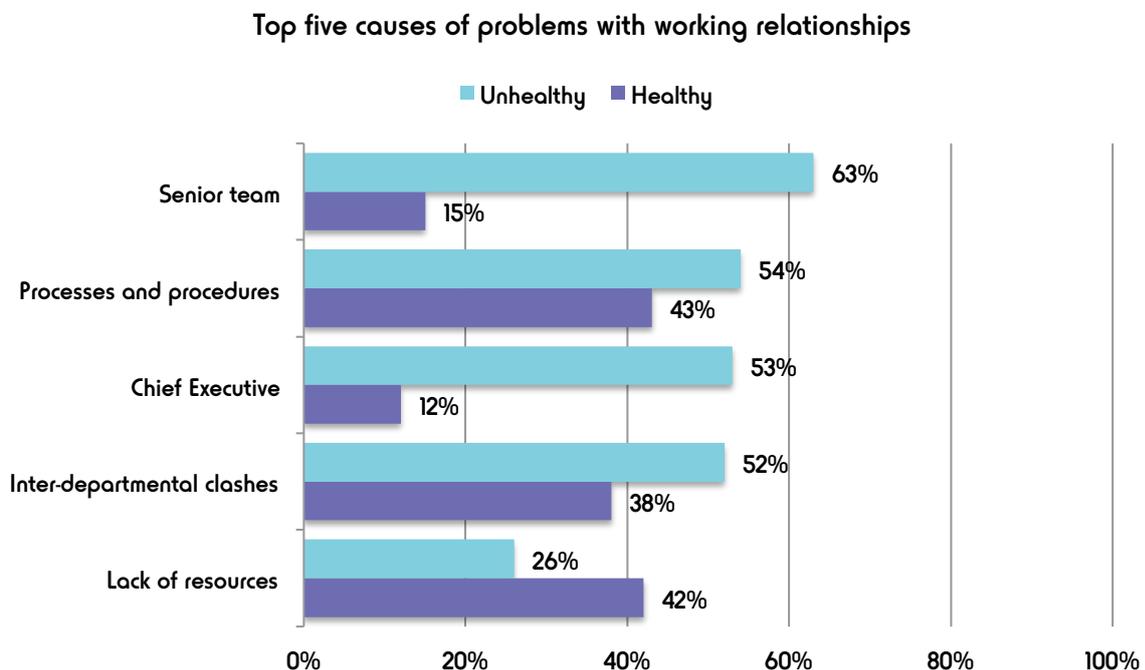


Leadership

Moving on to leadership, charity peoples' views of the effectiveness of their leadership are hugely affected. As is the organisation's ability to deal with poor performance. If some of that poor performance included an inability to build healthy working relationships, then that might explain the exceptionally low response!



Charity leadership cropped up again when we asked survey respondents what they thought the *causes* of unhealthy relationships were. Ah, I hear you say. The staff will always blame management for all an organisation's woes won't they, nothing new there! Well, that isn't what's going on here. Take a look at the graph below:

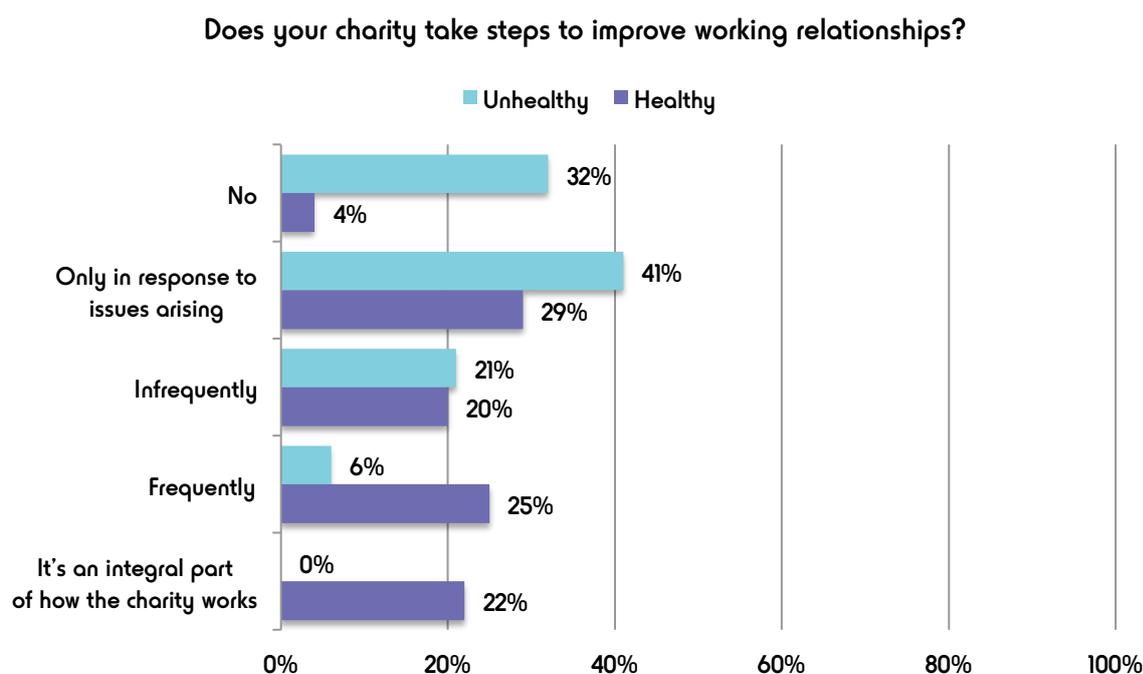


Where there are healthy working relationships across the charity, problems with processes and resources top the list of causes of difficulties when they arise. But in charities with working relationship issues, the senior team and Chief Executive are seen as a major part of the problem.

Improving working relationships

We then asked the *Charity Pulse* survey respondents what their charity was doing to help develop strong working relationships. Are all charities working hard at making relationships work?

Again, there were stark differences revealed between those with healthy and those with less healthy working relationships.

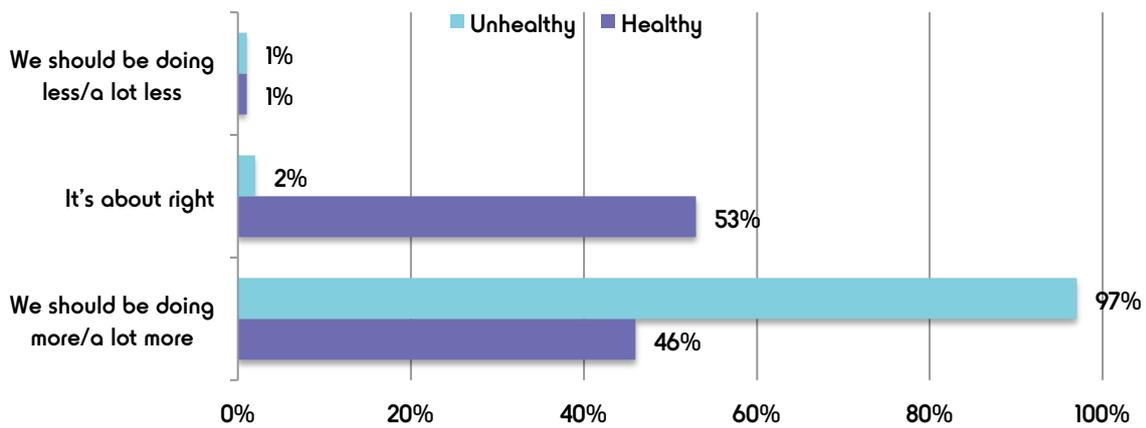


Of the charities with healthy working relationships, a total of 47% take steps to improve them either frequently or as an integral part of organisational culture.

On the other hand, of those with unhealthy working relationships, only 6% are putting in more than infrequent effort, with most only responding to problems as they emerged and one third doing nothing at all.

Working relationships and other priorities

How do you feel about your charity's current efforts to support healthy working relationships?

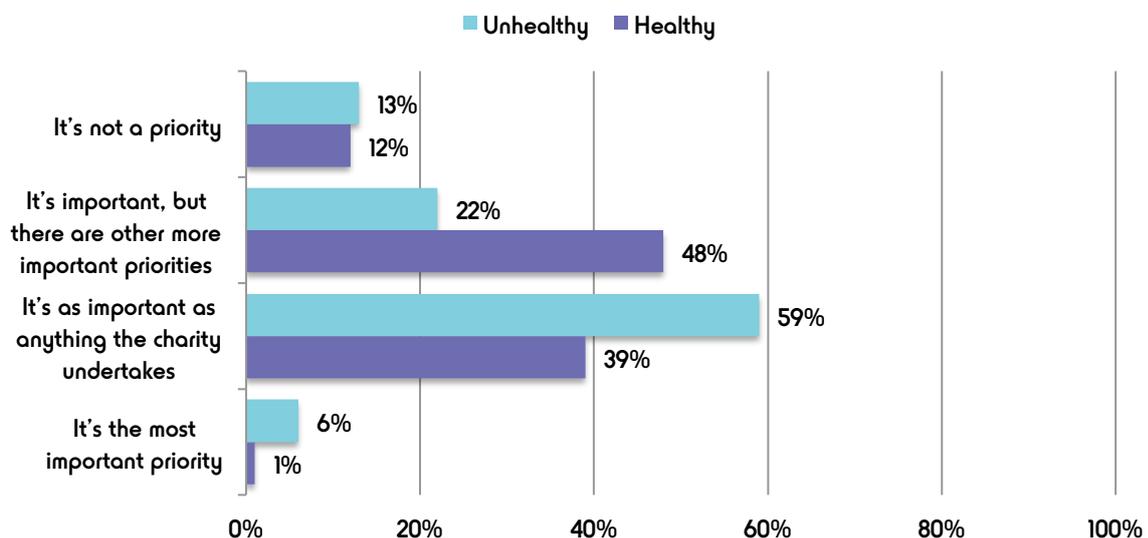


When it comes to thinking about their charity's current efforts to support healthy working relationships, staff are certainly clear with their feedback. 97% of those currently affected by unhealthy working relationships, think that their charity should be doing more to address the problem. That's 97%. Interestingly, 46% of those working amid healthy working relationships also feel that more could and should be done. So this is seen as a serious issue.

On the other hand, whether they work in healthy or unhealthy environments, just 1% of respondents think that this area deserves less attention than it currently receives.

With other pressing organisational priorities vying for position on the agenda, how can charities effectively address the inevitable conflict between this vital area of work and other urgent demands on their resources? What guidance do the *Charity Pulse* respondents provide?

How important is improving working relationships compared to other priorities at your charity?



In charities where working relationships are broadly healthy, 39% of staff feel that this area is as important as anything else the organisation undertakes. For unhealthy environments, this figure rises to 59%, highlighting the negative impact these issues are having on staff ability to enjoy their work and get the job done.

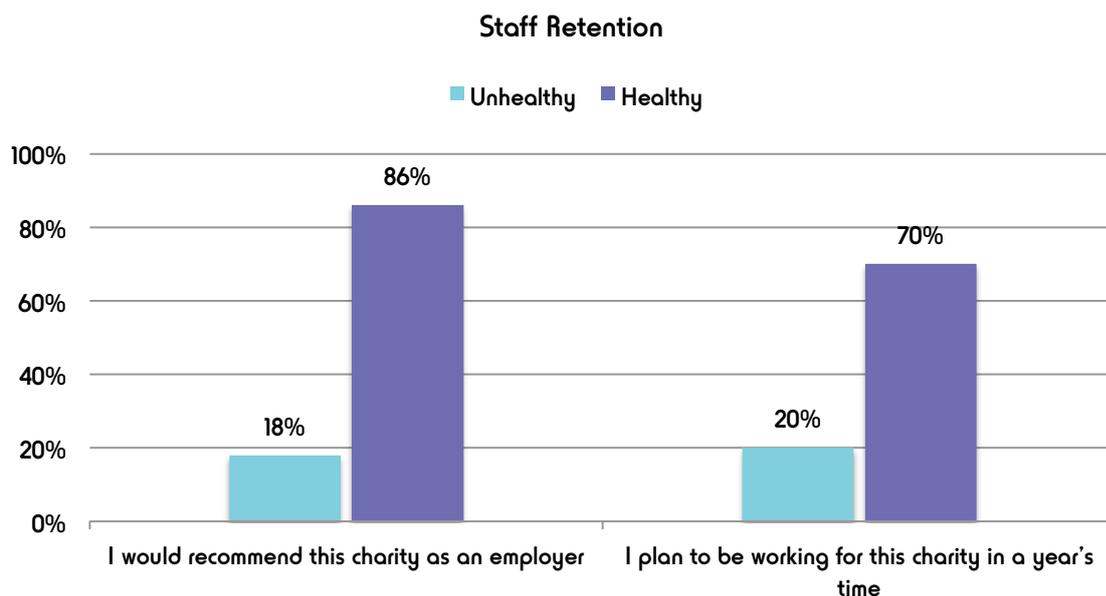
In short, where there are working relationship problems, tackling these issues once and for all is a high priority.

Staff retention

In case you still need some more persuasion that healthy working relationships are vital to a charity's success – or perhaps you just need a little more ammunition to convince others – let's finish up with a look at the impact on staff retention.

Most of us would agree that retaining skilled and experienced people is crucial for charities, so what effect do the state of working relationships have on charity people's career decisions? Astonishingly, across seven years of *Charity Pulse* surveys, the health of working relationships has generated a higher degree of variance in intention to stay than any other factor.

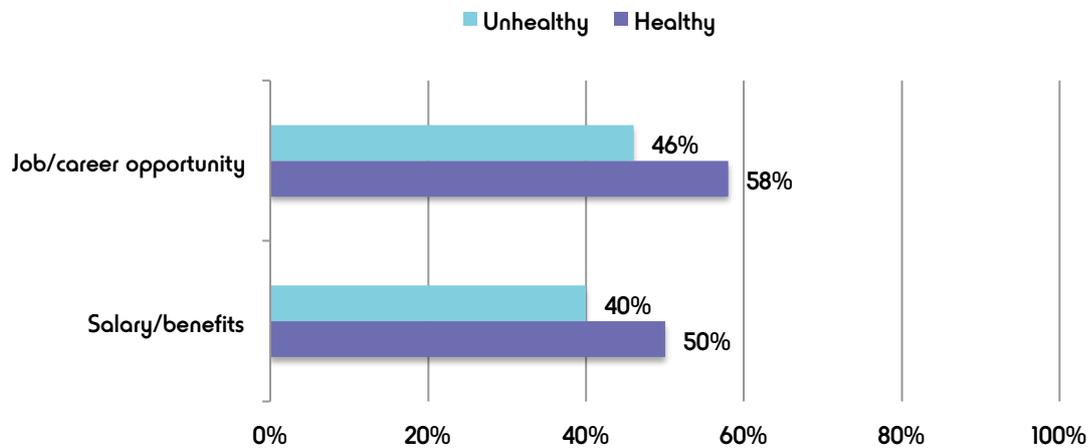
So, looking at the detail, 70% of staff in healthy charities are planning to be working for their organisation in a year's time, compared with just 20% of those in less healthy environments. 86% of respondents working in healthy environments would recommend their charity as an employer, while only 18% of those working in unhealthy environments would do the same.



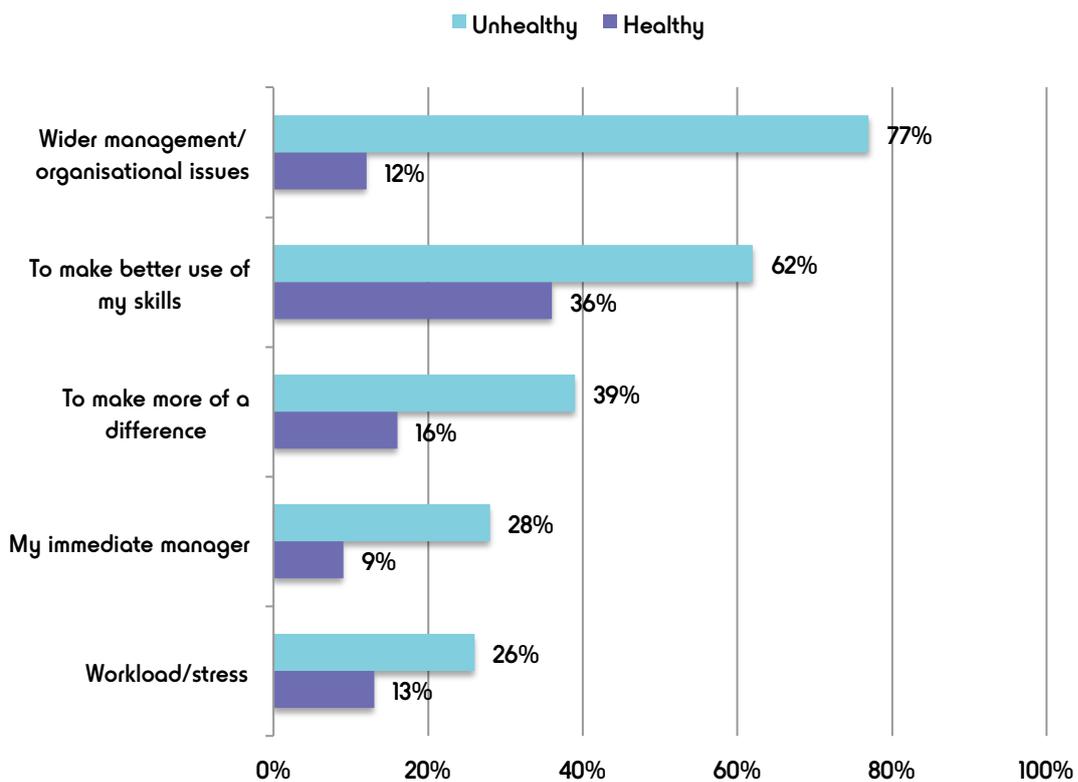
Now things get even more interesting... We then asked people who were considering of leaving their charity, what the main reasons were for their decision. The comparison between those experiencing healthy working relationships and those who were not reveals another significant difference, this time between *push* and *pull* factors. That is, the difference between the attractions of a new role pulling them away from their current job versus difficulties with their current employer pushing them out of the door.

Although there are modest differences when we compare the pull factors, it is the variances in the push factors that are much more significant. And what a push the staff in the unhealthy organisations are being given! 28% cite their line manager as a problem and a whopping 77% quote wider management/organisational issues as a reason for dusting off their CV.

Reasons for leaving: Pull factors

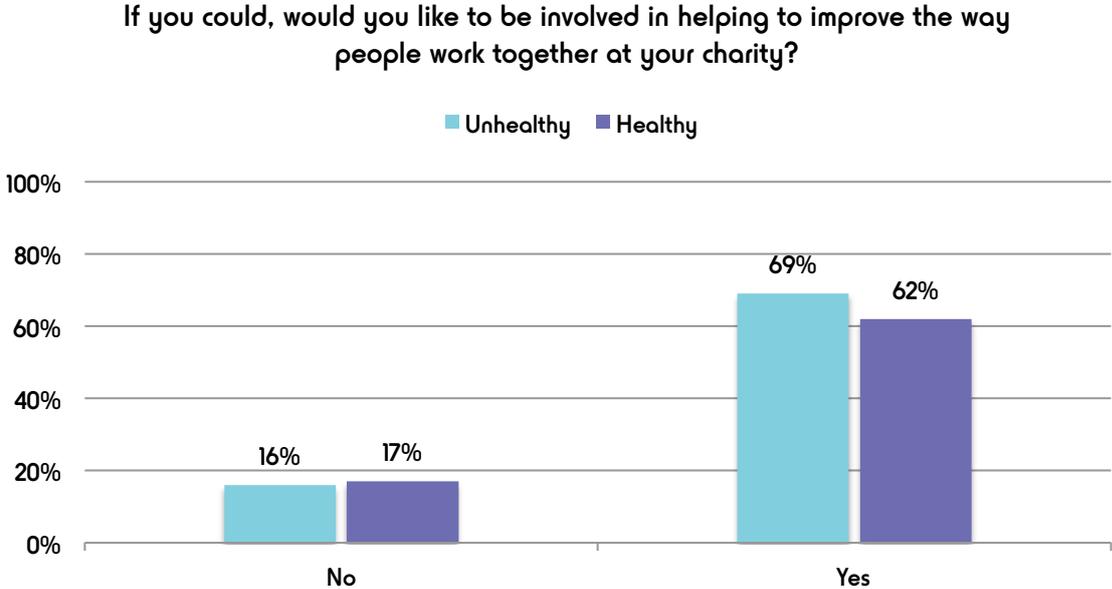


Reasons for leaving: Push factors



Staff engagement

After this we asked the survey respondents whether they would be interested in getting involved in helping to improve the working relationships at their organisation – and the answer was a big fat YES. In fact, whether charity people work in more or less healthy environments, two thirds of them are up for the challenge.



Staff ideas

Finally, we asked respondents for their thoughts on what they would do differently to improve working relationships at their charity. And one thing is clear, people are not short of ideas and input.

The suggestions divided into eight main themes and we've highlighted some representative comments below to conclude this report.

Cross-team working

Build understanding between departments so that they can place appropriate value on each other's time and resources.

Explain to other departments what we do in our team and let them know how they can be part of it.

Culture

Real transparency when communicating challenges and bad news. Real work to promote reciprocity and respect.

Spend 12 months focusing on people rather than money generation.

Allow staff to take more risks and not crush them when the risks don't achieve everything senior managers think they should.

By allowing open and honest discussion without retribution.

Communication

By communicating better and being willing to help/hear about what is going on around the charity.

Make effective and open communication a key behaviour (and demonstrate this from the top).

Priorities/clarity

A much stronger vision and mission that brings together the different areas of the organization.

...more transparency and less politics and empire building would improve relationships across the board.

Shared understanding of objectives and how every member of the team helps these be achieved.

We all need to be on the same page about what the charity's outcomes should be and how our specific roles contribute to that. We need to respect and value everyone's roles and as a result respect and value the charity's outcomes. And get rid of the petty attitudes that get everyone down.

Get people focused on what matters - discourage an obsession with hygiene factors.

Leadership/SMT

Ensuring bad behaviour (i.e. aggression) is not tolerated.

Listen to staff and act on what they hear.

Honesty when things go wrong.

Training Senior Management in how to lead and manage.

Stop undermining staff and support them through more challenging times.

Team-building

Team building exercises, frank discussions about issues as a team, no defensive attitudes towards issues arising...

Guidance on teamwork and mutual respect.

Process & systems

Better decision-making discipline, clearer task management and ownership and conflict resolution process.

A systematic review of processes and procedures and how they link with objectives and outcomes so that priorities can be identified and appropriate systems, processes and resources can be accurately assigned and improved.

Line management

Introduce some level of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) training into managers' training/induction.

Improve the quality of managers and train them in the importance of effective people management and appropriate recognition of the contribution of staff and especially volunteers.

Improve middle manager's skills and abilities to enable them to better manage difficult situations or resolve conflict between employees.

Stronger performance management both in terms of managing poor performance and also recognising and rewarding good performance.

About Charity Pulse

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 during March and April 2013. This is the seventh year that we have run the survey.

Charity Pulse is a unique approach to measuring staff satisfaction in the sector, because it enables individuals working for any UK 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 46 questions about working life at their charity exploring:

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

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

Many thanks to everyone who took the survey this year. We had an excellent response with 675 people taking part, representing over 190 different UK charities.

Look out for Charity Pulse 2014!

The next survey will open in March 2014 with *Third Sector* magazine. The more charity people who take part, the more impact and relevance the results will have - so please join in!

If you would like to find out more about running a benchmarked *Charity Pulse* staff satisfaction survey for your charity at any time of year, visit **www.bird-song.co.uk** or contact Frances Hurst or Sam Attenborough at **info@bird-song.co.uk**.

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 over-stressed, over-worked and over-looked.

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's work or to download *Charity Pulse* survey reports from previous years visit: **www.bird-song.co.uk**

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