



It's about more than just 'doing good'

Why do fundraisers change jobs,
and what will motivate them to stay?

● The fundraising profession

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Foreword



Have you ever attended a conference session, and the speaker's words ended up haunting you for decades to come?

For me, it happened at my very first fundraising conference, hosted by the Institute of Development Professionals in Education. In a packed conference hall, the plenary speaker had just concluded an excellent presentation on how to build long-term relationships with alums and donors. The speaker ended with a powerful rhetorical question: What is the greatest hindrance to building long-term relationships with supporters?

The answer was fundraising staff turnover. Then, to drive the point home, they asked those who had been with their charity for more than five years to raise their hands. In a room with nearly 200 fundraisers in it, there were barely a dozen hands raised.

As a new fundraiser, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, I could not believe what I was seeing. Being very much in the honeymoon period of my career, I could never see myself leaving the charity where I worked. How could the others in the room abandon their beneficiaries and supporters? Did they not feel the same love and passion I felt for my charity?

You will, of course, not be surprised to read that I no longer work at this charity. In fact, I did not make it past four years. To echo the words of Clara, one of the research participants, "I just got bored".

But that conference speaker's words have long lingered in my mind. Having met many wonderful colleagues, I know that we both care deeply about our work and value long-term relationships

with our donors. I also know that we are all plagued by the issue of staff turnover, both in making decisions about our careers and in retaining talent within our teams.

This report - *It's About More Than Just 'Doing Good'* - is a significant step forward in understanding why, despite making a positive social difference, fundraisers change jobs frequently.

Hannah Kowszun's research illustrates clearly that while pro-social motivation might draw a fundraiser to your charity, it is not enough to retain them. Instead, charities need to create an environment where fundraisers have more autonomy over their work and can develop and practice a wide range of professional skills.

It's About More Than Just 'Doing Good' should be a wake-up call for all of us involved in recruiting and managing fundraisers. Retaining fundraisers for the long haul is vital if we want to build lasting and meaningful relationships with our supporters. And the good news is, with modest investments in CPD and adaptability in our approach to managing fundraisers, we can turn the tide on fundraiser attrition.

Thank you, Hannah, for producing this valuable piece of research and allowing Rogare to publish it.

The next time a conference speaker asks how many fundraisers have been with their charity for over five years, I hope we will all be proud of the sea of hands raised. 🙌

Stuart Chell
• Chief executive - Chell Perkins (Rogare Associate Member).

1

Introduction – we know little about why fundraisers leave their jobs

Clara had six different fundraising jobs in her first seven years of work, none of them lasting more than two years. Helen moved into a new fundraising job, excited about the new opportunities it would provide, only to leave after nine months. These are not isolated cases when it comes to fundraisers changing jobs.

Research by XpertHR in 2022 that compared staff turnover across different sectors identified that nonprofits had one of the highest at 18.1 per cent. In contrast, private sector staff turnover was 11.7 per cent (Carty 2022). Why is staff turnover in the nonprofit sector so high? There are intuitive answers to this question, such as boom and bust funding cycles or time-limited project roles, but there may be other factors at play, not least the job itself and people's experiences in the workplace.

In 2022, research was published that explored the interplay between turnover intention and length of time in a job for US fundraisers (Shaker et al. 2022). Of the 1,663 professional fundraisers surveyed, 20 per cent intended to leave their organisation, of whom seven per cent of these intended to leave fundraising altogether. The less time a respondent had spent in their current job, the more likely it was that they intended to leave.

In their 1997 book *Fund Raisers: Their Careers, Stories, Concerns, and Accomplishments*, Margaret Duronio and Gene Tempel found that female fundraisers were likely to have less time in their role than male fundraisers. This was also a finding in the CloF's Change Collective publication *Missing Out: Understanding the Female Leadership Gap in Fundraising*, where there was a four-year gap between the average years of experience for men compared with women (Breeze and Dale 2020). Considering 80 per cent of the US fundraisers surveyed were women, it would be reasonable to assume that women are therefore more likely to show intention to leave.

The nonprofit sector in the UK employs approximately 978,000 people (NCVO 2024). The sector is also heavily dependent on a volunteer workforce: 16.3 million people volunteered through a group, club or organisation in 2020/21 (ibid). This is more than 15 times the number of paid staff within the sector. For comparison, the paid workforce of the UK armed forces, both service and civilian personnel, was 181,550 as of October 2023 (MoD 2024). Despite the size of this workforce – both paid and voluntary – there is less research into the experiences and motivations of employees within the nonprofit sector compared with the public and private sectors (McMullen and Schellenberg 2003; Schepers et al 2005).

Within the subset of the wider nonprofit sector are fundraisers – a unique category of job role that does not have an equivalent in either the private or public sector. A simple search of Scopus, one of the largest multidisciplinary databases of peer-reviewed literature, using the keywords "fundraiser OR fundraising OR fundraise" AND "job satisfaction" returns only 14 documents worldwide, of which only eight involve fundraisers in their research. This means that there is less robust, valuable insight into what factors might contribute to job satisfaction for people in fundraising roles. This also means that there are limited starting places for new research.

This paper summarises the research I undertook as part of a Master's dissertation in organizational psychology at Birkbeck, University of London. It explores whether pro-social motivation, contact with beneficiaries, and the five constructs within the Job Characteristics Model (task significance, autonomy, feedback, task identity and skill variety) have an impact on job satisfaction and turnover intention among nonprofit staff in the UK. ●

Hannah Kowszun

- Independent consultant.

2

What factors might affect fundraiser turnover?

With so little existing research to draw from, there's a wider scope to consider what factors might affect fundraisers' intentions to leave.

It is tempting to assume that salary is a motivating factor. In the 2022 report *What Makes Fundraisers Tick*, salary was identified as a consideration for where individuals chose to work next, rather than in their current role (Sargeant and Edworthy 2022). However, in Shaker et al.'s research among US fundraisers, there was no statistical significance to the relationship between respondents' salary and their intention to leave either their current job or the fundraising profession (Shaker et al. 2022).

There was, however, a significant correlation between a lower number of paid staff and higher intention to leave fundraising, suggesting that burnout may well be a factor. This is something that Michelle Reynolds has explored in depth in Rogare's most recent publication, *Caring Too Much: The Burnout Dilemma Faced by Fundraisers, and the Emotional Toll of a Fundraising Career* (Reynolds 2025).

Job satisfaction is highly correlated with intention to leave, across many sectors and many types of job. It is also a more useful starting point for what might affect fundraisers' experiences enough to motivate them to leave. This research therefore explores both the turnover intention and the levels of job satisfaction among respondents.

Fundraisers are unique to the nonprofit sector. This means that they are likely to have a unique working environment. I wanted my research to delve into this uniqueness, to identify factors that are bespoke to jobs in nonprofit organisations.

One of these is the very purpose of the organisation itself – positive social impact.

- Does the pro-social motivation of nonprofit staff, and fundraisers in particular, affect their job satisfaction and therefore their intention to leave?

The second factor is related to those the organisation serves – its beneficiaries.

- Does contact with beneficiaries/service users have an effect on job satisfaction and turnover intention?

The third factor is the job itself – how it has been designed; how it is experienced?

- In what way do the characteristics of a fundraiser's day-to-day job affect their satisfaction and turnover intention?

My original research surveyed nonprofit staff at registered UK charities, not just fundraisers. Some of the findings were similar across the different job roles, while a few identified demonstrable differences between non-fundraising respondents (of whom there 201) and the 81 fundraising fundraisers who participated. ●

2.1 Job satisfaction and turnover intention

Job satisfaction signifies, at its core, how happy you are in your job. There are many different validated scales that are used by researchers to measure this. There are also plenty of unvalidated scales used by organisations to gauge the contentedness of their staff. For this research I used three questions that are part of Hackman and Oldham's (1974) Job Diagnostics Survey, which are scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Turnover intention is less common within research, perhaps because it feels more instinctive to ask if someone is happy than whether they want to quit. I used three questions from two different scales: two from Cammann et al. (1979) and one from Mayfield and Mayfield's "intentions to stay" scale (Mayfield and Mayfield 2007).

'The value of contact with beneficiaries for fundraisers is in the content of their work, rather than in contributing to their positive feelings about their job.'

Findings

Across the board, job satisfaction among all respondents was high. The average for fundraisers was lower, at 4.89 (out of 7), compared with 5.23 for non-fundraisers, and had a slightly greater spread. This means there were fewer fundraisers clustered at the top end of the scale for job satisfaction. Considering how many more respondents were non-fundraisers than fundraisers, there is a suggestion that fundraisers may, in general, be experiencing lower job satisfaction.

Turnover intention in comparison was almost exactly the same distribution for both fundraisers and non-fundraisers. It was bimodal, with peaks at the higher and lower levels, which indicated a relative split between people with high intention to leave and low intention to leave.

Despite these very different distributions, the correlation between job satisfaction and turnover intention was both high and statistically significant. In short, if you're happy in your job, you're more likely to want to stay. This sounds like an obvious conclusion! But it's a useful one, because it means we can go into more depth on what might be influencing job satisfaction alongside an intention to leave.

2.2 Contact with beneficiaries

Does contact with beneficiaries/service users have an effect on job satisfaction and turnover intention?

It's common, particularly among larger nonprofits, to ensure that fundraisers meet the people their nonprofit supports. One of the main benefits of this is to provide inspiration for explaining the value of the organisation's work: encouraging storytelling that is underpinned by real life stories.

The equivalent in the commercial sector is 'contact with customers', which itself has limited research within work psychology. Since many jobs – or rather the kind of jobs that tend to be researched – do not involve direct contact with customers, this has not been a common theme in theories of job design and job satisfaction.

Findings

The distribution of responses related to contact with beneficiaries was relatively uniform, with no clear pattern. This was also the case for non-fundraisers. Some people have a lot of contact with beneficiaries, some have little, and the rest are somewhere in between.

As with pro-social motivation (s2.3), for fundraisers there was no statistical significance, or effect, between contact with beneficiaries and job satisfaction or turnover intention. However for non-fundraisers there was significance as well as a moderate effect size.

This suggests that perhaps the value of contact with beneficiaries for fundraisers specifically is in the content of their work, rather than in contributing to their positive feelings about their job.

2.3 Pro-social motivation

Does the pro-social motivation of nonprofit staff, and fundraisers in particular, affect their job satisfaction and therefore their intention to leave?

Pro-social motivation is, at its essence, the desire to protect and promote the wellbeing of others. It represents a wider category of behaviours, from altruism to self-interest, since the outcome of pro-social behaviour is positive, regardless of the intention behind it.

A 2011 research paper compared the level of "social service" between for-profit and nonprofit employees, finding that – unsurprisingly – nonprofit respondents scored more highly (DeCooman et al. 2011).

Pro-social motivation as a construct specifically related to workplace behaviour was developed by the academic and author Adam Grant in his paper 'Relational job design and the motivation to make a pro-social difference' (Grant 2007). He proposed a model of relational job design that attempts to explain the source of pro-social motivation for employees who wish to make a pro-social difference through their work.

His theory proposes that the motivation of employees can be influenced by the relationships inherent within the design of their job: "Relational job design...

[enables] employees to become aware of their impact and to redefine their work in terms of making a pro-social difference" (ibid).

Job design itself is a far older concept, which focuses more on the tasks and structure of a job, and their effect on employee motivation. This is explored in more detail in section 2.4. To measure pro-social motivation, I used five questions from a scale developed by Grant and Sumanth (2019), scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Findings

The pro-social motivation of all respondents was extremely high, with the average for both fundraisers and non-fundraisers measuring more than 6 out of 7. It is reassuring to know that people who work in nonprofits are motivated to make a positive social difference.

Particularly striking, however, was the lack of any statistical significance, or effect, between pro-social motivation and job satisfaction, or turnover intention, among fundraisers.

This suggests that while fundraisers may be pro-socially motivated to pursue a career in nonprofits, once in the job, it's other factors that provide job satisfaction.

2.4 Job design

In what way do the characteristics of a fundraiser's day-to-day job affect their satisfaction and turnover intention?

Job design is a concept in work psychology concerned with the tasks and structure of a job, and effect of these on employee motivation.

One of the more established frameworks for job design is the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham 1976). It was developed in the 1970s as a way of explaining how different factors in the design of a job affect intrinsic motivation of employees to contribute to job satisfaction.

Intrinsic motivation derives from internal satisfaction: enjoyment of the work itself, alignment with personal

values etc. Extrinsic motivation derives from external factors: public recognition or credit, financial value etc.

The focus on intrinsic motivation within the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) translates well to the context of working in a nonprofit. Indeed, it is the one most commonly applied by researchers in nonprofit work psychology (Bassous 2015; Kettenbohrer, Beimborn and Eckhardt 2015; Knapp, Smith and Sprinkle 2017), and in several research papers by Adam Grant (Grant 2007, 2008; Grant and Sumanth 2009).

One of the likely reasons for this is the inclusion of 'task significance' as a characteristic, which is more easily applied within a charitable or public sector setting than a private sector one.

The five characteristics that comprise the JCM for job design are:

- **Task Significance** – the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, whether in the immediate organisation or in the external environment.
- **Autonomy** – the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employee.
- **Feedback** – the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the employee obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of their performance. This is not the process of feedback from others, but from the work itself.
- **Task Identity** – the degree to which the job requires completion of a 'whole' and identifiable piece of work; that is, doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome.
- **Skill Variety** – the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work, which involve the use of a number of different skills and talents of the employee.

I used the Job Diagnostics Survey developed by Hackman and Oldham (1974) to measure these five factors. Each factor has three questions, all on a scale of 1 to 7.

Findings

For fundraisers, four of the five factors were significantly correlated with job satisfaction, but only two of these were significantly correlated with turnover intention: **Autonomy** and **Skill Variety**.

Task Identity was the only factor that had no statistically significant correlation with either job satisfaction or turnover intention for fundraisers. However, there was significance with job satisfaction for non-fundraisers.

Task Significance was significantly correlated with job satisfaction but not turnover intention, and the effect size was not as large as for other factors.

This may be part of a similar equation for pro-social motivation and contact with beneficiaries: where fundraisers are already satisfied by the context of working for positive impact, there is less motivation from impact-affirming experiences within the job.

This means that it is even more important for organisations and managers to ensure that the job itself is well designed, rather than relying on the goodwill of those employed.

Autonomy within the context of the JCM is operational – it represents the extent to which fundraisers feel like they have control and influence over the job they do and how they choose to do it.

It could also represent the professional autonomy that fundraisers feel. This is the freedom of the fundraiser (or any professional) to act in what they perceive to be the best interest of their client, without their actions being prescribed or directed by someone outside the profession, including the client themselves (MacQuillin 2017).

The effect size of autonomy on both job satisfaction and turnover intention was strong. This suggests that fundraisers who feel they have a meaningful say over how they do their job will be less likely to want to move on.

This effect size was also notably larger among fundraisers than non-fundraisers, particularly for turnover intention.

Skill Variety represents the difference between a job that involves doing the same routine things over and over again, and one that involves doing many different things, using a number of different skills and talents. It also represents the need to use high level skills rather than simple and repetitive tasks.

There was significant correlation and moderate effect size between **Skill Variety** and both job satisfaction and turnover intention among fundraisers, with a smaller effect size for non-fundraisers.

This finding suggests that fundraisers as a group are more motivated by variety in their job, as well as use of high level skills. ●

3

How can we encourage fundraisers to stay in their jobs?

The role of pro-social motivation is front-weighted for nonprofit staff: the intent to have positive social impact inspires people to a career in fundraising; however, once in the job, its design is more important than any reminder that your work serves a greater purpose.

Nonprofits do not pay as well as many private sector or even public sector organisations, especially for entry-level roles. It can therefore be tempting to lean on positive impact as a tool for improving job satisfaction. There are, however, other ways of encouraging retention among professional fundraisers that cost little, but may have far-reaching results.

3.1 Fundraisers' need for autonomy

"I remember when targets were not being met, we were all put on the spot with the head of team going round the room interrogating why each of us hadn't met our target yet."

Helen, professional fundraiser

The clearest finding from this research is that fundraisers who feel they have more autonomy in their job are more likely to stay in that job. In practice, this means allowing fundraisers to make their own decisions about how and what they do, trusting in their professional competence.

However, there can be a mismatch between a fundraiser's perception of their autonomy and that of their manager. The survey questions used to measure Autonomy are available online here – www.rogare.net/turnover – and could be used to set a benchmark for the level of autonomy a fundraiser currently feels in their job. There are two key aspects of a fundraiser's job where the sense of autonomy – or not – can be most acute: target setting and activity planning.

Target setting

Setting of fundraising targets should ideally be a collaboration between fundraisers and senior management. However, this isn't always the case and that can be to the detriment of a sense of autonomy.

The environment for fundraising is challenging at the same time as demand for charitable services is

increasing. Fundraisers are acutely aware of this and want to help.

If targets are set that are unachievable, this undermines fundraisers by not inviting their expertise and insight as part of the target-setting process. If their concerns are not taken into account and the targets remain, this not only undermines fundraisers, it creates a potentially hostile environment where fundraisers' hard work is not rewarded with success.

Activity planning

Professional fundraisers should be best placed to advise and plan fundraising activities. However, there can be decisions made by others, including trustees and senior staff, that are imposed upon fundraisers and therefore feel out of their control, which diminishes their professional autonomy.

At a minimum, fundraisers should have the opportunity to explain the potential risks of an activity that they feel may not be best suited to the organisation.

If the activity is greenlit without the endorsement of the fundraisers tasked with delivering it, then they will feel less responsibility for either success or failure.

In contrast, a fundraiser or fundraising team that is given full responsibility for how they choose to fundraise will be more invested in the potential for success. ●

3.2 Fundraisers’ need for variety and skilled work

“I left [charity] because I just got bored! I was eager to progress and get into a role where I had actual fundraising responsibilities.”
Clara, professional fundraiser

Specialist and more technical knowledge in fundraising does not have as much prominence as it should, which Rogare has highlighted previously (MacQuillin 2017). When considering the risks of not retaining great fundraisers, it is worth exploring the extent to which fundraisers feel they are being stretched in their job.


One of the potential advantages of new technology and generative AI is reducing the number of repetitive, simplistic tasks within fundraising. The flipside is that fundraisers need to have the technological competence to set up automated or AI-enabled administrative functions well, a competence that Rogare has previously highlighted may be missing in general from the fundraising workforce (Koshy and Rogare 2024).

There should be more training at the tactical and operational level for professional fundraisers, alongside the relentless focus on leadership and management training.

Skills-based professional development
Self-determination theory posits that motivation relies on how well an employee’s need for connection, autonomy and competence are met in their work (Deci and Ryan 2012). Competence is not simply an ability to do the work, it represents mastery.

To achieve what feels like mastery requires intentionality. Professional development does not happen by accident, but by design – through investment of time and tailored support.

Skills-based professional development discussions explore which skills a fundraiser requires to do their job effectively, and the extent to which they feel they have mastered these skills. Where areas of development are identified, it is much easier to then plan ways to improve. These discussions should be integrated into appraisal and management processes.

The matrix on p11 could also be used as part of the job design for recruitment: to identify which skills are genuinely essential in a candidate before being hired. The expectation would then be to structure a fundraiser’s further professional development over time, giving them the opportunity to experience mastery of their profession. 

3.3 Retention is about good job design, not just doing good

Fundamentally, the finding that pro-social motivation does not affect job satisfaction and turnover intention suggests that, as a sector, we should not rely on the intrinsic desire of staff to do good to retain them in their roles.

It is likely that people with higher pro-social motivation will seek out employment as a fundraiser, but this is not the reason they will stay. Similarly, although less starkly, encouraging fundraisers to feel that their role is meaningful will have some small positive effect on their levels of job satisfaction, but it is unlikely to be a strong motivating factor to stay in a particular job.

Fundraisers are in a job where they expect to make a positive difference, so that is the default position – lowering this could make fundraisers want to leave, but increasing it won’t make them want to stay.

We therefore have to look at other aspects of job design to identify more significant influences on fundraisers’ potential reasons for staying in their job.

Here are three suggestions for cost-effective ways that nonprofits could invest in their fundraisers for the long term.

Dual promotion tracks
More than 50 per cent of nonprofit staff work in an organisation with fewer than 50 employees (NCVO 2024). This means that opportunities for promotion may arise rarely within an organisation. Promotion tends to also be tied to managerial responsibilities, which means that progression within an organisation is dependent on additional income to pay for new roles.

Research from Gallup suggests that only 10 per cent

Fundraiser skills matrix

Skill description	Competence/confidence level (low/medium/high)	Example of skill in practice
Adapts communication method according to stakeholders’ needs (internal and external)		
Identifies and applies solutions to improve or solve challenges		
Uses data to validate a proposal and/or evaluate an activity		
Sets out a budget that is well-structured and justified		
Identifies potential supporters using insight and evidence		
Manages time effectively to meet deadlines and support colleagues		
Builds effective relationships with stakeholders to achieve objectives		
Utilises technology to save time, improve processes or work effectively		
Adapts communication content and style to meet the needs of stakeholders		
Articulate a/the case for support for the charity appropriately		
[Include additional skills relevant to fundraiser’s role and responsibilities]		

This matrix – which has been adapted in part from the list of skills for the fundraiser apprenticeship (Skills England 2025) – can be used to create good design and plan recruitment. While this is taken from the framework for apprenticeships, any competence framework – such as the one devised by the Chartered Institute of Fundraising (CioF nd) – can serve as the basis for a skills matrix. This matrix is an example of the type of matrix that fundraising leaders ought to use to guide their recruitment and retention of fundraisers. However, any skills matrix used should be directly relevant to the job the fundraisers does; and while charities are free to use this matrix, they should only do so having assessed whether it meets the skills requirements for the job. N.B. if you can’t provide an example of putting the skill into practice, then consider whether it’s: a) an essential skill for this person, and b) whether their competence/confidence level is right.

'Professional fundraisers should be best placed to advise and plan fundraising activities. However, there can be decisions made by others, including trustees or senior staff, that are imposed upon fundraisers and therefore feel out of their control, which diminishes their professional autonomy.'

6

of people have a natural talent for managing people (Beck and Harter 2014).

Dual promotion tracks have been developed as a way of retaining and investing in people who are not good at managing people, but who do have excellent technical skills (Happy 2023).

The non-managerial promotion track breaks the salary ceiling between non-managers and managers, allowing people who excel at the technical aspects of their job to be recognised for this in their job description, job title and salary.

This could be a powerful approach for nonprofit organisations to adopt in order to retain excellent employees without relying on growth in headcount.

For organisations that do have a higher headcount, this could also be a valuable way of retaining excellent fundraisers who are less good at people management.

Continuing professional development

There are professions where continuing professional development (CPD) is mandatory every year. Anyone with a professional credential, such as chartered status, is expected to invest in their learning each year as part of their commitment to professional standards.

At its heart though, CPD is about recognising that there is always more to learn, and time should be invested in learning.

For organisations that have an annual appraisal process, this is an ideal opportunity to explore and identify areas of potential learning.

The framework for apprenticeships uses Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) as distinct areas for professional development. This could easily be adapted for a discussion about which KSBs a fundraiser would like to improve upon, and how.

There are many ways of learning: from structured teaching to informal coaching; from regular practice to reward bundling. It is the intention to learn that is crucial in professional contexts, along with targeted investment where needed.

Retention interviews

Why is it that we wait until someone's exit interview to find out what they really thought?

Retention interviews, also known as 'stay' interviews, are an opportunity to learn how someone feels about their job and the organisation before their feelings lead to resignations.

The onus is on the employer to take the outcomes from the interview seriously. Employees will be more likely to be open if they trust that their feedback will be taken on board and acted upon.

There should be a structure to the interview, but it does not have to be formal. It could be conducted over coffee or on a walk. It should explore employees' career hopes as well as their feelings about the organisation as a whole.

A retention interview is not a solution to potential resignations, but it can provide useful insight. The process itself can be motivating, and if done well it can contribute to a more open, trusting culture within an organisation. 6

4 Final thoughts

Fundraisers are adaptable; our approaches should be too

We often take it for granted that fundraisers are motivated to stay in their jobs because of a pro-social motivation – that what matters is work that has purpose. But while that may be a reason why they become fundraisers in the first place, it's not a factor that keeps them in their jobs.

Fundraisers work at the nexus between supply and demand: if your nonprofit's purpose is not compelling, then fundraising itself is that much harder. Reminding fundraisers that the work they do has value is not new news! And it will not be enough to retain them when other aspects of their job are lacking.

While the role of fundraiser is unique to the nonprofit and commercial sectors, fundraisers are nonetheless just like members of every other profession in that they want autonomy over, and ownership of, the work they do, and to exercise a full range of skills in carrying out this work.

When it comes to tackling the retention crisis in fundraising, this is what we need to consider. Yes, fundraisers will always deserve remuneration commensurate with their level of knowledge, expertise and competence. But give fundraisers more control and invest in their skills, and they are more likely to carry on delivering for their chosen charity, rather than go searching for better.

This starts from before even recruiting someone into a role: what skills and knowledge are essential from day one, and what is your plan to intentionally develop this person's skills over time? For people in more senior roles and with more experience: how can you empower them in their own professional development, what are you doing to show you trust their judgement and their decision-making?

The interventions suggested above do not require heavy investment. Rather they require adaptability: a willingness to try different approaches and learn from what works and what doesn't. It requires a cultural shift from hierarchy and control, to trust and support. 6

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Appendix – Methodology

This research – conducted as part of a Master's degree in Organizational Psychology at Birkbeck College, University of London – explored the factors affecting turnover among UK staff at registered charities through a positivist lens. I used a quantitative methodology, employing validated scales developed by academics from previous research. 282 people (over 80 per cent of whom identified as female) responded to an online survey during April 2022. All were paid employees at a registered UK charity, and 81 respondents (29 per cent) described themselves as fundraisers.

The research sample was broadly representative of the size of organisations in the sector, although there was greater representation among larger registered charities and less among the smaller ones. People responding to the survey were presented with a series of questions from different scales to measure pro-social motivation, contact with beneficiaries, the five factors within the Job Characteristics Model, job satisfaction and turnover intention. All were answered using a seven-point Likert scale.

About the author

Hannah Kowszun



Hannah has worked and volunteered for nonprofits for most of her professional life, specialising in fundraising, communications and strategy development. She has worked for charities both large and small, as well as being a trustee for charities with no staff at all. She was part of the team at Macmillan Cancer Support that grew the World's Biggest Coffee Morning from £7 million to £20 million in the space of two years. She also ran her first – and only – marathon in 2023 raising over £2,000 for charities supporting families with Down syndrome. Both were equally satisfying as a fundraiser.

Motivated by her experiences as an employee, she gained a Masters in Organizational Psychology – the scientific study of human behaviour in the workplace. She is passionate about the potential for nonprofits to be better employers, inspired by their uniqueness rather than adapting approaches from the corporate sector.

Hannah is currently an independent consultant, specialising in support for nonprofits. She is a very proud mum to Reya and a committed South Londoner.

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