

# FRUSTRATION AT WORK

**Survey**  
**June 7, 2010**

  
The Flourishing Company  
*Growing People - Driving Results*



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## **BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES**

The Flourishing Company (TFC) conducted an informal survey (survey) among professionals to explore their experience at work. The survey is titled *Frustration at Work*.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Understand if the level of frustration at work is changing
- Identify the primary source of work frustrations for professionals

## **METHODOLOGY**

TFC developed a data collection tool necessary to meet the stated objectives. The survey was administered online using Survey Monkey® and was comprised of 4 questions to be completed in about 5 minutes.

A personal electronic invitation with a link to the survey was sent by Heather L. Bradley via the following channels:

- Constant Contact distribution (900+ professional contacts)
- Coaching list-serve distribution (ORSC Global, CTI Graduate Community)
- Social media outlets (Personal Twitter, Facebook and Linked-In accounts for Heather L. Bradley)

Responses were received from 205 professionals collected during May 2010. Participants did not receive a financial incentive for participating and participation was purely voluntary.



## **LIMITATIONS**

The research which underlies this report is conducted in the form of a survey designed to produce a snapshot of each professional's perception of frustration at work.

While n=205 for the survey, breakdowns by role create pools of varying size. Exhibits B-F provide an analysis for each group despite this variance.

While participants were asked to report on whether their personal level of frustration had changed or stayed the same, no baseline was set to quantify their personal level of frustration.

All information collected in the survey was self-reported by respondents with the understanding that all response data would be reported solely in the aggregate and that appropriate steps would be taken to maintain confidentiality of individual responses. TFC did not engage in independent verification of any reported data.



## **INTRODUCTION**

While the U.S. economy seems to be making a slow recovery from the recession, TFC clients continue to report increasing levels of frustration in the workplace. We have a thirst for knowledge about this subject and a desire to learn more from a larger pool of professionals. Specifically, we want to know if the level of frustration is changing and identify the primary cause of frustration at work.

In addition, it was expected that the data analysis will assist TFC to determine if more formal research on this topic would inform professionals on this topic.

The full set of survey questions is set forth as Exhibit A to this report.



## FINDINGS

### About respondents

A total of 205 professionals responded to the survey. The majority of respondents occupy roles inside for-profit organizations (39.1%) or are self-employed (26.0%).

A significant portion (15.2%) reported something else. Raw data is provided in Exhibit A.

Which best describes your current role?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
For-profit	39.1%	75
Self-employed	26.0%	50
Non-profit	16.1%	31
Law Firm	7.7%	7
Federal	4.2%	8
Something Else (please specify)	15.2%	21
<i>answered question</i>		<b>192</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>13</b>

Half the respondents report living in Ohio (49.7%). Of the other half, 6.4% live in Washington, DC and the remainder are spread among a variety of states. Raw data is provided in Exhibit A.

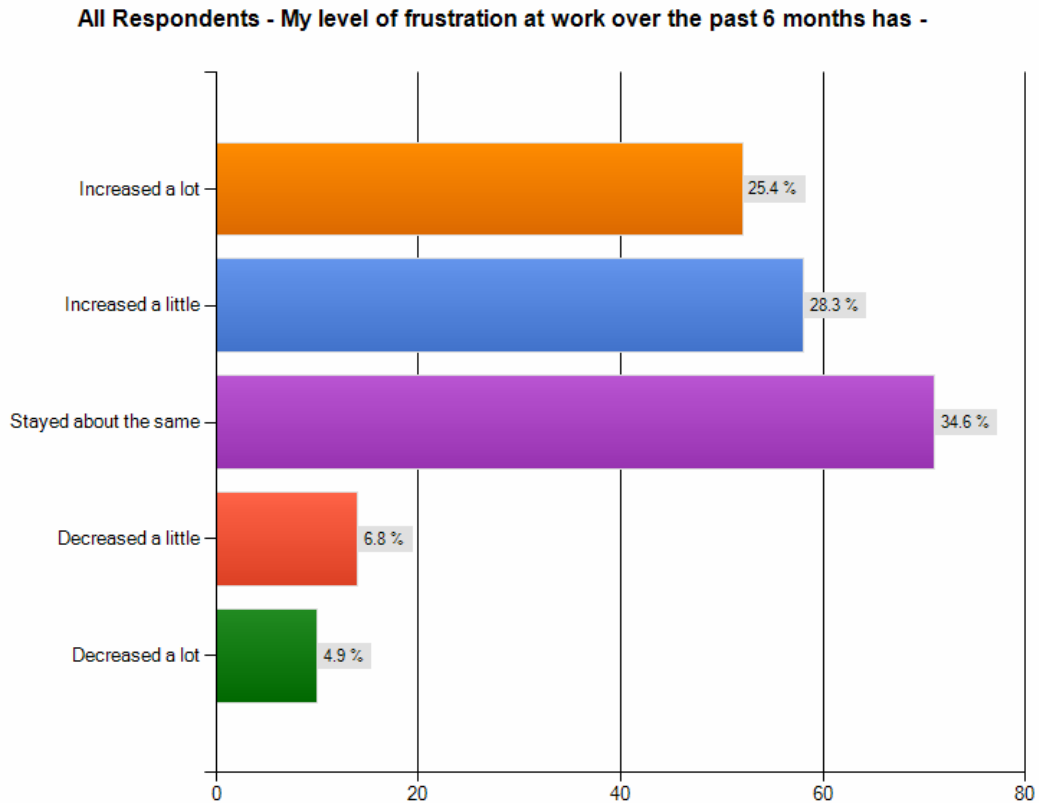
Which state do you live in?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Ohio	49.7%	78
Washington, DC	6.4%	10
Other states	43.9%	69
<i>answered question</i>		<b>157</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>48</b>



## Change in level of frustration

Over half of the respondents experienced an increase in frustration at work over the last six months (53.7%). A quarter (25.4%) report their level of frustration has increased a lot.

While 34.6% report frustration levels stayed about the same, what is not known is whether the level is acceptable to the respondent.

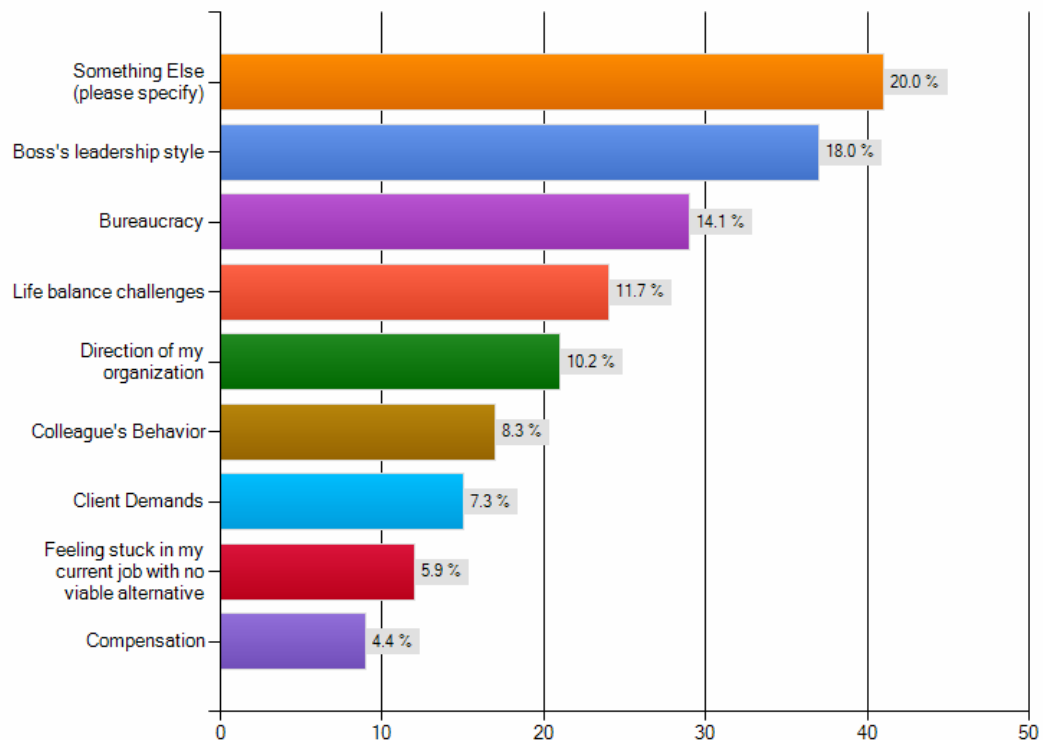


## Primary factor affecting frustration level

When asked about the #1 factor affecting frustration levels at work, 18.0% report their boss' leadership style as the leading cause. Despite economic conditions, compensation (4.4%) and feeling stuck in their job with no viable option (5.9%) were reported less often.

A significant number of respondents (20.0%) reported reasons not identified in the original question. As noted in Exhibit A, multiple responses were extracted and include volume of work (2.9%) and economic factors (2.0%). In addition, 2.0% reported have no frustrations.

**All Respondents - The #1 source of frustration for me at work over the past 6 months is:**



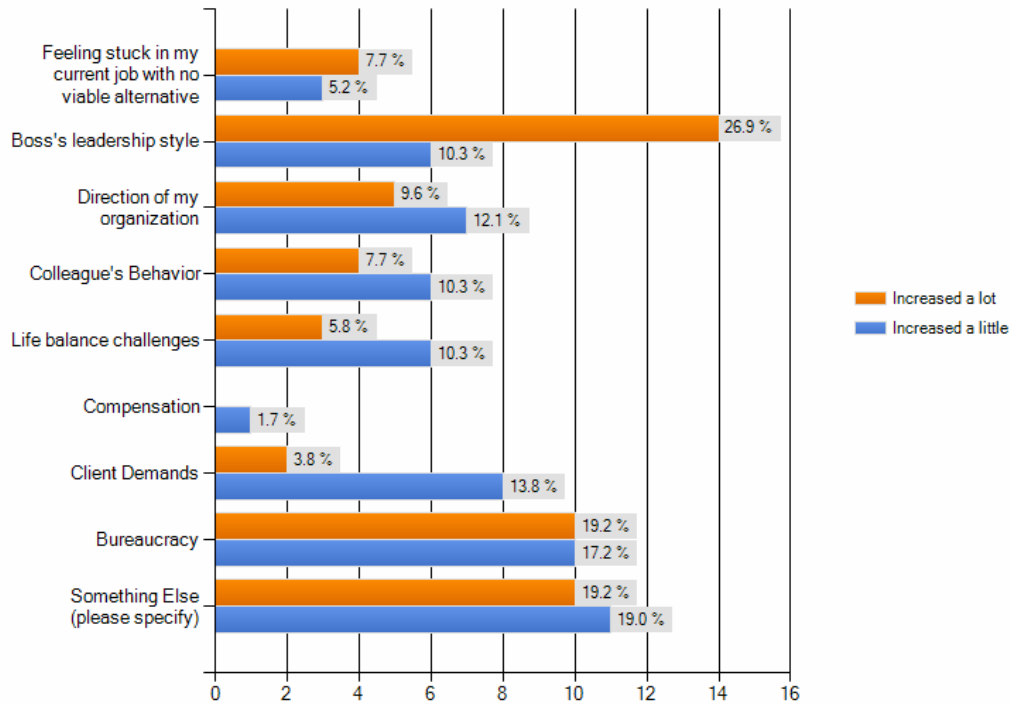
## Primary factors associated with increased frustration

For respondents reporting their frustration has increased a lot over the past 6 months, 26.9% identify the leadership style of their boss as the #1 factor. Bureaucracy (19.2%) is also a leading cause for this group.

For those respondents reporting their frustration increased a little, the cause was spread more evenly among a number of factors: bureaucracy (17.2%), direction of my organization (12.1%), client demands (13.8%), colleague's behavior (10.3%), life balance challenges (10.3%).

For both groups a significant portion (19.2% and 19.0%) identify something else as the #1 factor.

**Increased frustration - The #1 source of frustration for me at work over the past 6 months is:**



## Frustration level by role

As previously noted, a limitation of this study is the inability to quantify the personal level of frustration. It is possible, however, to compare the change in level of frustration by role pool. Due to pool size, data from the law firm and federal pools was not included in this portion of the analysis.

While similar percentages of respondents in the for-profit and non-profit pools experienced an increase, the percentage of self-employed respondents was about 18% less.

Which best describes your current role?						
Answer Options	My level of frustration at work over the past 6 months has -					Response Count
	Increased a lot	% of role pool	Increased a little	% of role pool	Total increased	
For-profit	25	33.30%	17	22.70%	56.00%	75
Self-employed	7	14.00%	17	34.00%	48.00%	50
Non-profit	10	32.30%	10	32.30%	64.52%	31

One quarter of those in the non-profit pool report their level of frustration stayed the same. Higher percentages of those in for-profit and self-employed, (32.0% and 40.0% respectively) report their frustration level stay about the same.

Which best describes your current role?						
Answer Options	My level of frustration at work over the past 6 months has -					Response Count
	Stayed about the same	% of role pool	Response Count			
For-profit	24	32.00%	75			
Self-employed	20	40.00%	50			
Non-profit	8	25.80%	31			

Similar percentages in all three pools report their level of frustration decreased.

Which best describes your current role?						
Answer Options	My level of frustration at work over the past 6 months has -					Response Count
	Decreased a little	% of role pool	Decreased a lot	% of role pool	Total increased	
For-profit	7	9.30%	2	2.70%	12.00%	75
Self-employed	2	4.00%	4	8.00%	12.00%	50
Non-profit	1	3.20%	2	6.50%	9.68%	31

Raw data for each role pool is provided in Exhibits B-F.



## **CONCLUSION**

The level of workplace frustration has changed over the past 6 months for a significant portion of the respondents. While 53.7% of the respondents report an increase in frustration levels, an additional 11.7% experienced a decreased level of frustration during the same period. The remainder, 34.6%, report frustration levels stayed about the same. What is not known is whether the level is acceptable to the respondent whether the level of frustration changed or remained the same.

The leadership style of the boss is a major factor affecting frustration levels at work. In the total pool, 18.0% report their boss' leadership style as the #1 factor causing frustration. A deeper analysis reveals that when frustration increased a lot over the past 6 months, 26.9% cite the leadership style of their boss as the primary cause.

The reported experience for those in self-employed roles is different from those in for-profit or non-profit roles. When the data for the three larger groups defined by role is compared, those in a for-profit or non-profit role report a comparable experience; 33.3% and 32.3% respectively report their frustration level increased a lot. Of those in a self-employed role, 14% reported their frustration level increased a lot, 18.0% less than those in the other two groups.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

The opportunity exists for further research in the area of frustration at work. Specifically, the following objectives were identified during this study:

- Create a tool to allow respondents to quantify their existing level of frustration and establish a baseline measurement.
- Determine the aspect of a boss's leadership style causing frustration for respondents.
- Determine if the level of frustration is acceptable to the respondent, whether their frustration level has changed or not.
- Determine the contributing factors for those who report no frustration caused by work factors.



## EXHIBIT A – Survey responses by question

My level of frustration at work over the past 6 months has -		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Increased a lot	25.4%	52
Increased a little	28.3%	58
Stayed about the same	34.6%	71
Decreased a little	6.8%	14
Decreased a lot	4.9%	10
<i>answered question</i>		<b>205</b>

The #1 source of frustration for me at work over the past 6 months is:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Boss's leadership style	18.0%	37
Bureaucracy	14.1%	29
Life balance challenges	11.7%	24
Direction of my organization	10.2%	21
Colleague's behavior	8.3%	17
Client Demands	7.3%	15
Feeling stuck in my current job with no viable alternative	5.9%	12
Compensation	4.4%	9
Volume of work*	2.9%	6
Economic factors*	2.0%	4
No frustrations*	2.0%	4
Something Else (please specify)*	13.2%	27
<i>answered question</i>		<b>205</b>

- Something Else\***
- This is not a ONE answer question, for me. This answer is a combination of leadership style, direction, and compensation combining with how bonuses were distributed and distorting the communication about why most didn't get a bonus.
  - Clients delayed payment of their bills
  - Learning the nature of the environment (new job, July 2009)
  - Personal issues
  - N
  - All of the above.
  - Not knowing how best to serve the company
  - My role is ever-changing with little clear communication as to how or why. Confusion and mixed signals.
  - The dozens if not hundreds of vendors who want just a few minutes of your time ... We have a 4 question survey to check on your frustration, we have a question (about something that is clearly answered on your website or in your marketing literature if only they'd stop to read it), a call during your lunch or just before you're getting ready to leave the office about a task that's RED HOT but really is on a topic that leaves you cold.
  - Lack of interest on my part
  - Lack of performance by sales staff
  - Challenge
  - Fewer hours and no benefits.
  - Employee attitudes and economic culture



- Apathy of others
- Market financial constrictions
- Lack of progress
- Schedule changes, shifting priorities, lack of predictability
- Unresponsive clients
- Cash flow (I'm the financial person)
- Lack of cooperation to accomplish specific objectives
- People, including me, having our positions eliminated as a result of poor management. My frustration has decreased because I no longer work there.
- Less business means more anxiety
- Diminishing teamwork
- Issues with the industry (autos)
- Government mandates
- Unwillingness to change of my direct reports

\*Factors reported multiple times in the open-ended questions were extracted and percentages recalculated.

What state do you live in?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Alabama	1.3%	2
Arizona	0.6%	1
California	4.5%	7
Colorado	1.9%	3
Connecticut	1.3%	2
Washington, DC	6.4%	10
Florida	0.6%	1
Georgia	0.6%	1
Iowa	0.6%	1
Illinois	2.5%	4
Indiana	1.3%	2
Kansas	0.6%	1
Massachusetts	0.6%	1
Maryland	3.8%	6
Michigan	5.7%	9
Missouri	1.9%	3
North Carolina	1.3%	2
New Jersey	1.9%	3
Nevada	0.6%	1
New York	1.9%	3
Ohio	49.7%	78
Oklahoma	1.3%	2
Pennsylvania	0.6%	1
Tennessee	1.3%	2
Texas	1.3%	2
Virginia	3.2%	5
Washington	1.9%	3
Wisconsin	0.6%	1
	<i>answered question</i>	<b>157</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>48</b>



### Which best describes your current role?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Self-employed	26.0%	50
For-profit - C-level	2.6%	5
For-profit - Executive	8.3%	16
For-profit - Manager	19.3%	37
For-profit - Other	8.9%	17
Non-profit - Executive Director	3.1%	6
Non-profit - Staff with Direct Reports	7.3%	14
Non-profit - Staff individual contributor	4.7%	9
Non-profit - Other	1.0%	2
Federal - SES	0.0%	0
Federal - GS 12-15	3.1%	6
Federal - GS 7-11	0.5%	1
Federal - GS 5-6	0.0%	0
Federal - GS 1-4	0.5%	1
Federal - Other	0.0%	0
Law Firm - Managing Partner	0.0%	0
Law Firm - Partner	1.0%	2
Law Firm - Associate	0.5%	1
Law Firm - Other	2.1%	4
Something Else (please specify)	10.9%	21
<b>answered question</b>		<b>192</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>13</b>

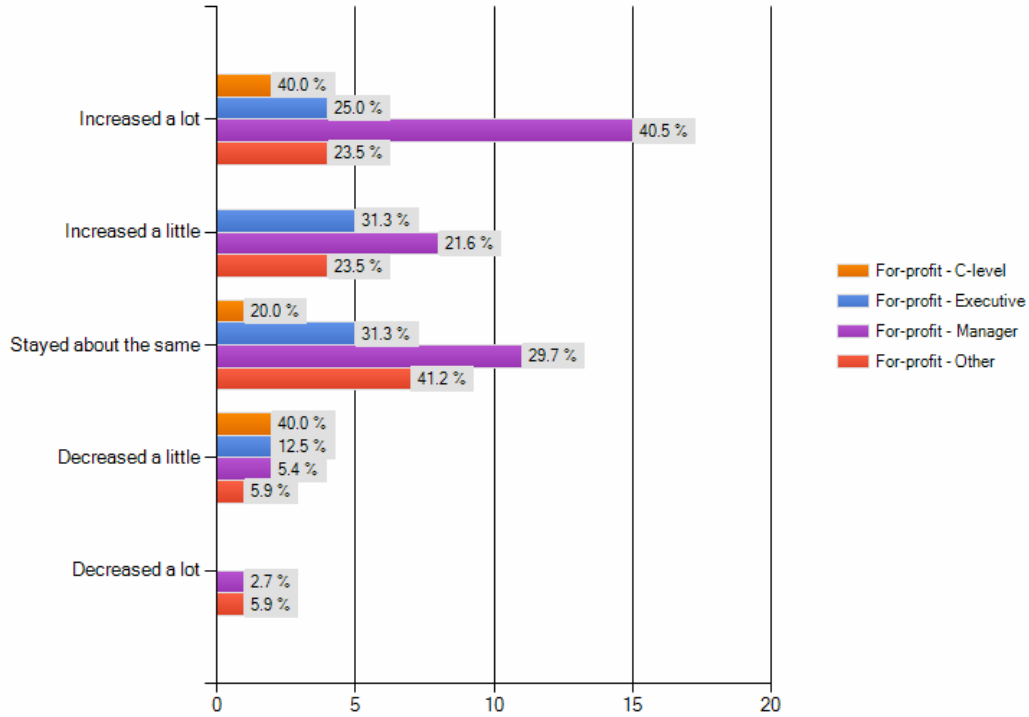
### Something Else (please specify)

- State government, judicial administration
- I am now retired (2 months)
- Health service
- State government
- State university-director
- State University
- On-air talent, TV News
- Self employed or contract worker
- Between career successes
- ODJFS
- Unemployed
- State
- Contractor
- College Adjunct Instructor, private practice
- PROV GOV
- State Civil Servant (Federal GS 7-11 Equivalent)
- Temp worker - Data Entry
- Service worker
- College
- For Profit On site Contractor with Federal Government
- Contractor with community mental health

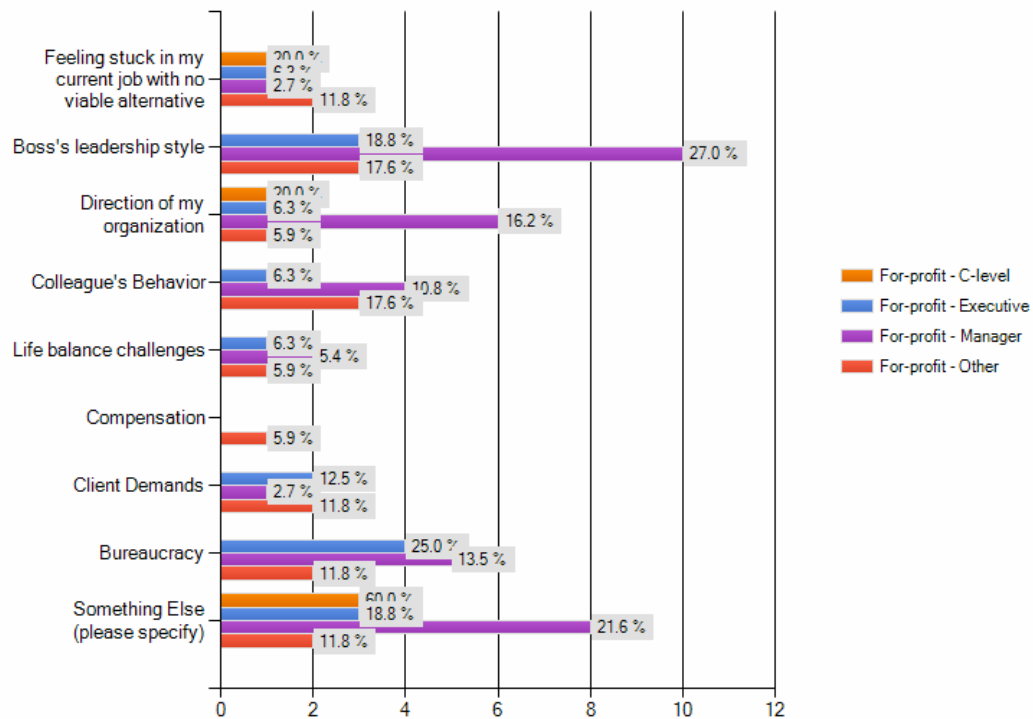


## EXHIBIT B – Frustration in for-profit roles

For-Profit Respondents - My level of frustration at work over the past 6 months has -

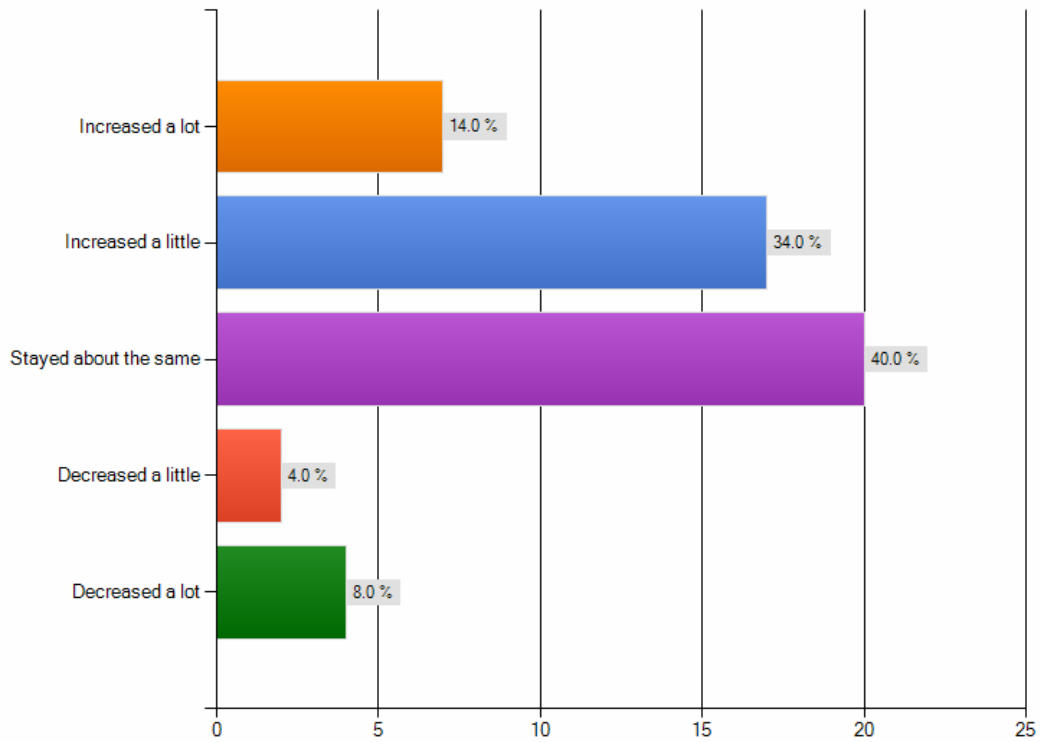


For-Profit Respondents - The #1 source of frustration for me at work over the past 6 months is:

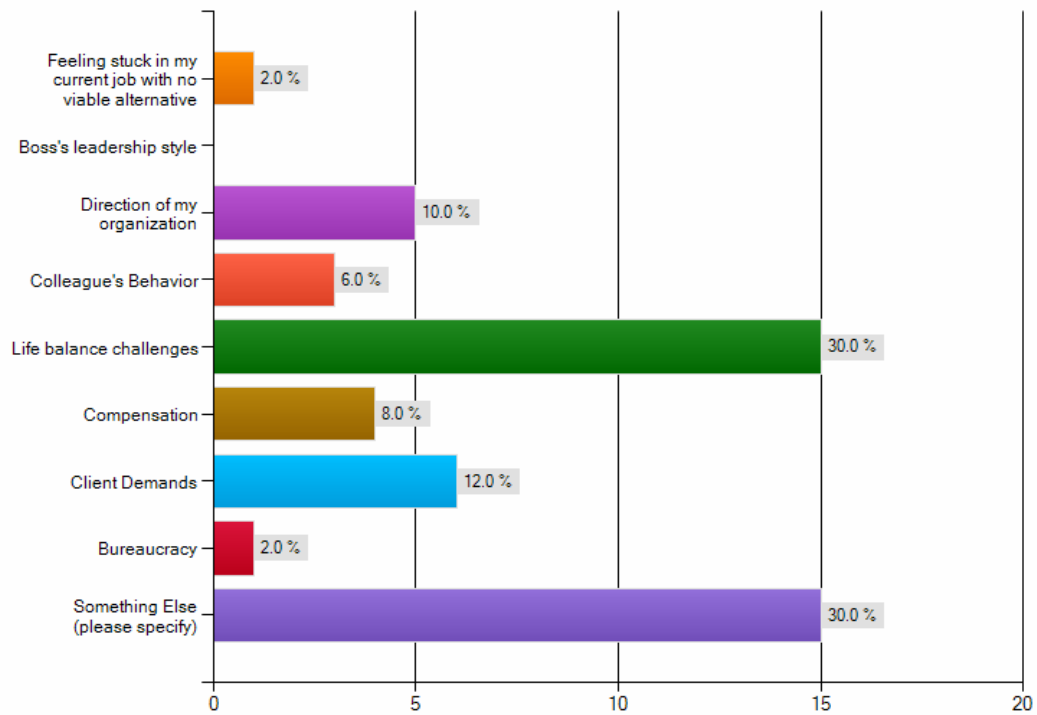


## EXHIBIT C – Frustration in self-employed roles

Self-Employed Respondents - My level of frustration at work over the past 6 months has -

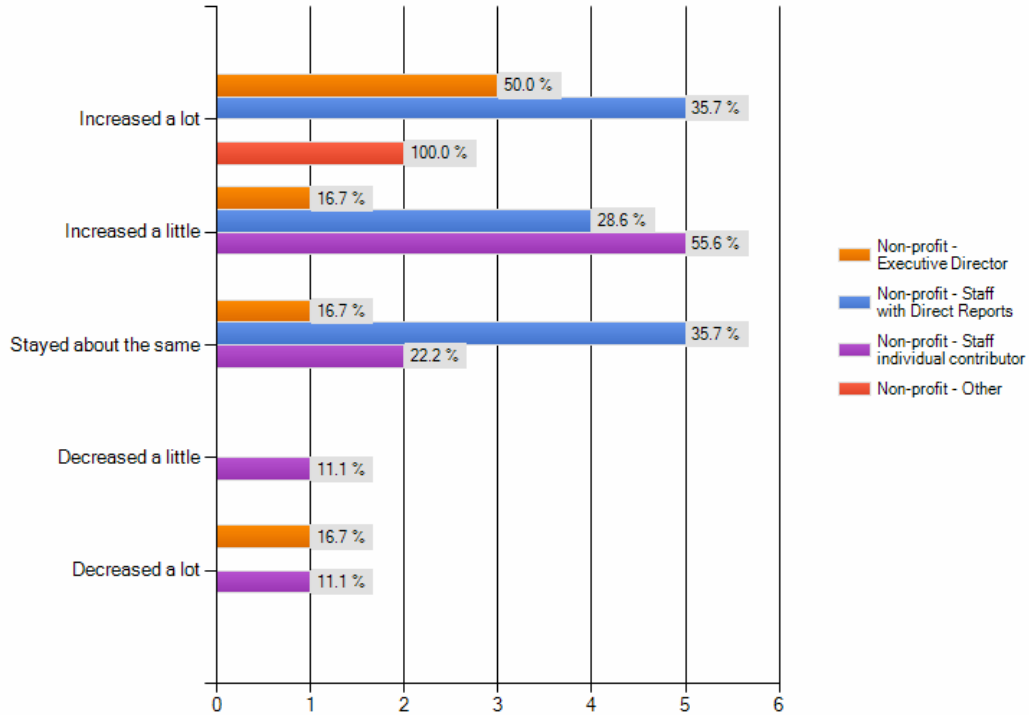


Self-Employed Respondents - The #1 source of frustration for me at work over the past 6 months is:

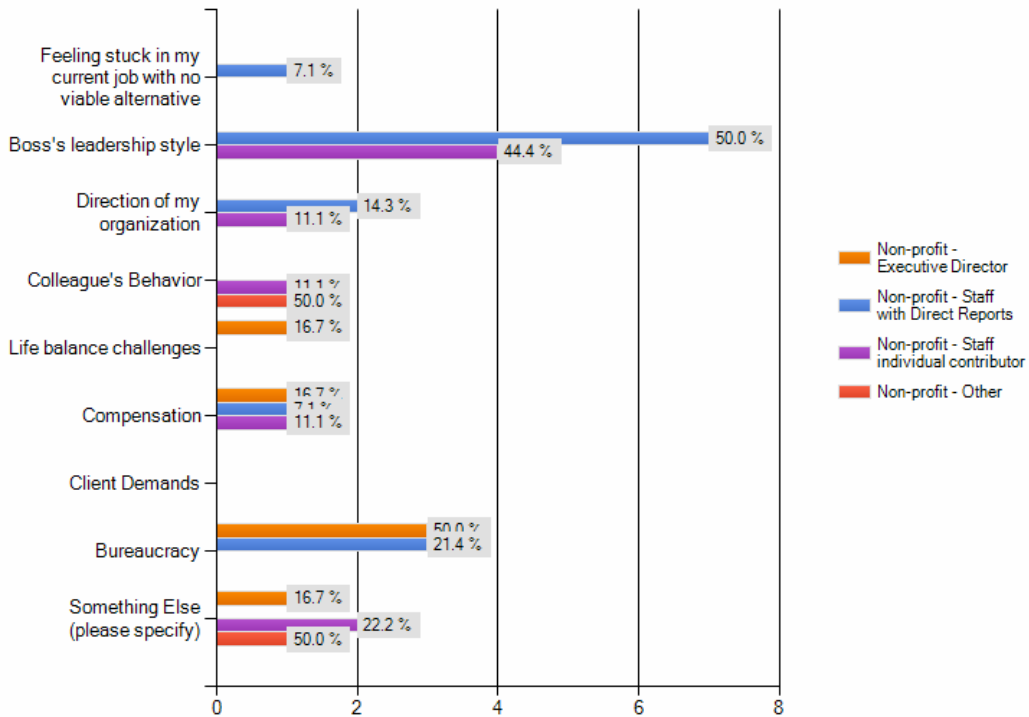


## EXHIBIT D – Frustration in non-profit roles

Non-Profit Respondents - My level of frustration at work over the past 6 months has -

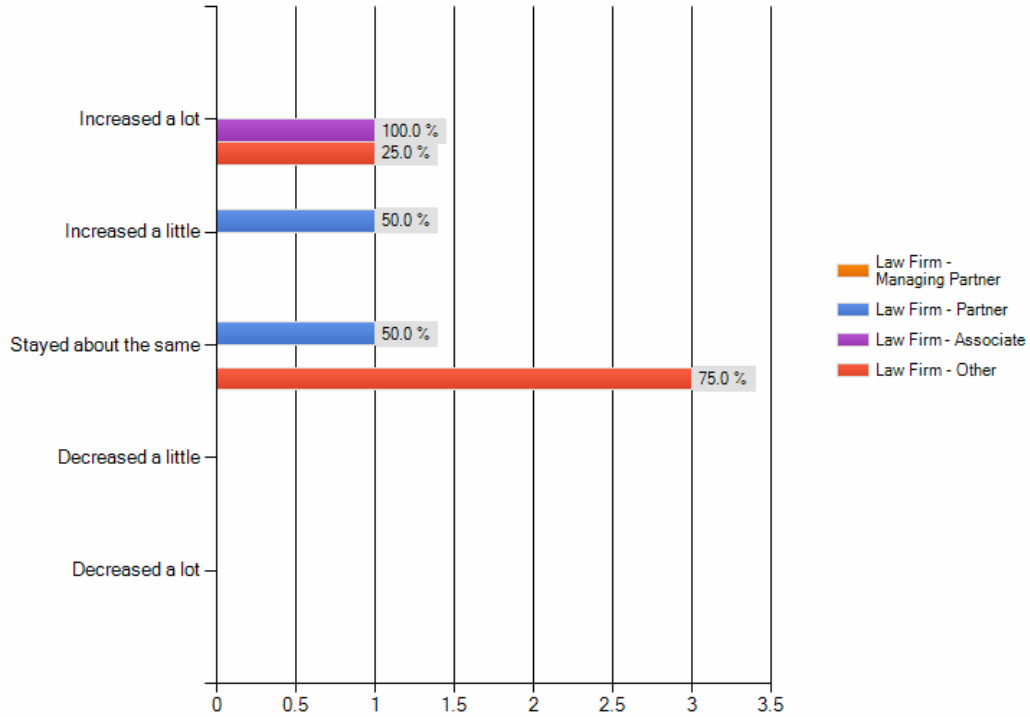


Non-Profit Respondents - The #1 source of frustration for me at work over the past 6 months is:

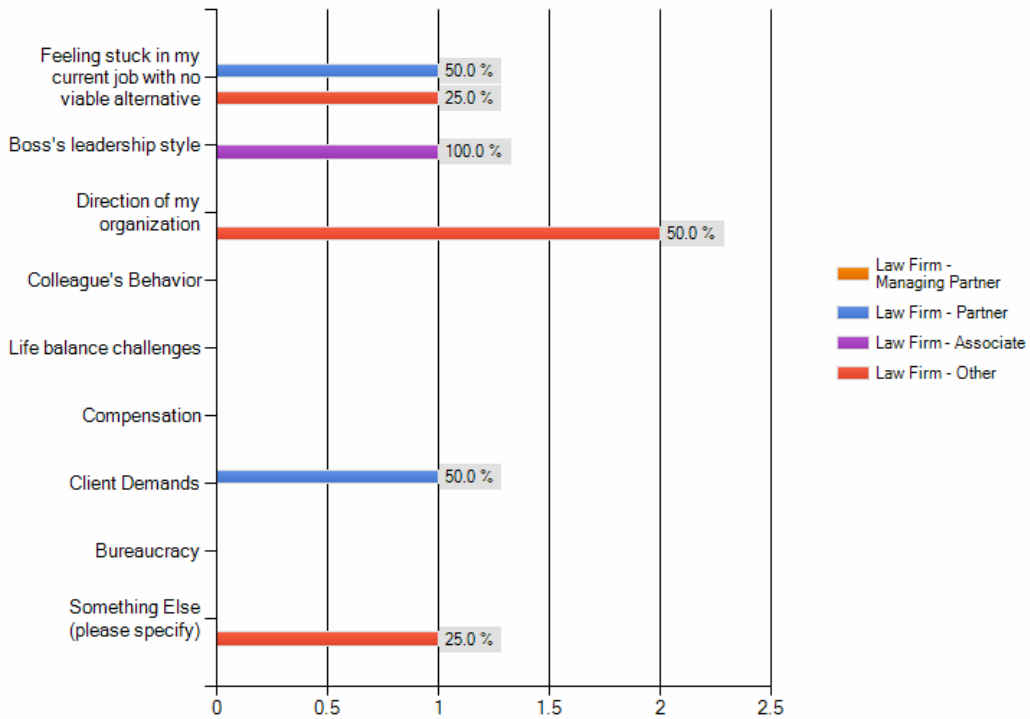


## EXHIBIT E – Frustration in law firm roles

Law Firm Respondents - My level of frustration at work over the past 6 months has -

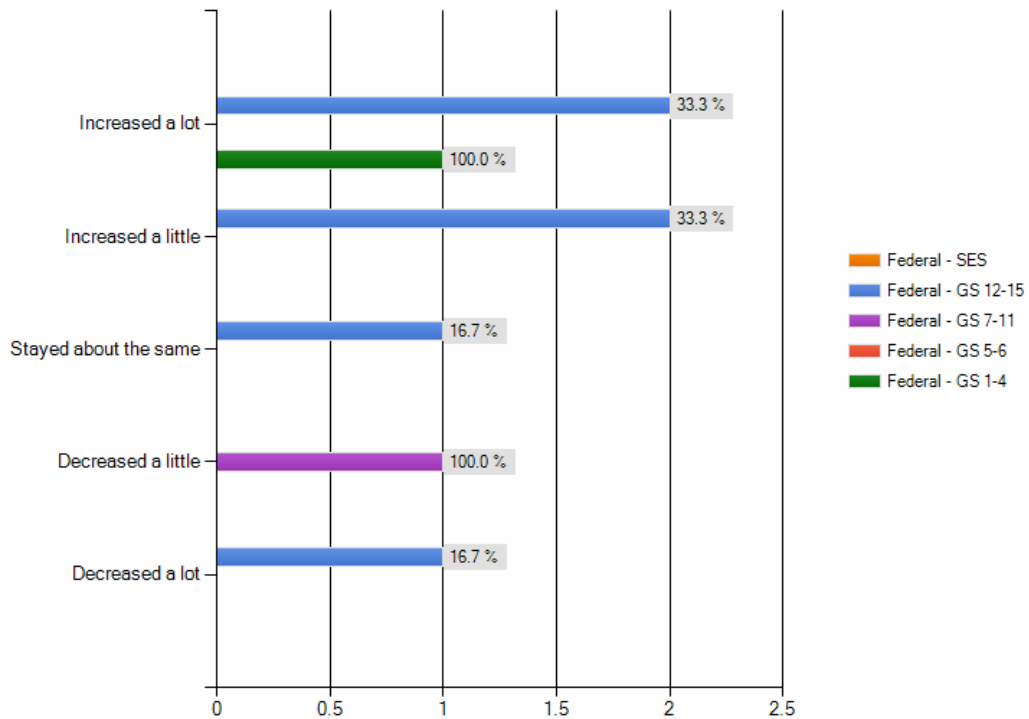


Law Firm Respondents- The #1 source of frustration for me at work over the past 6 months is:

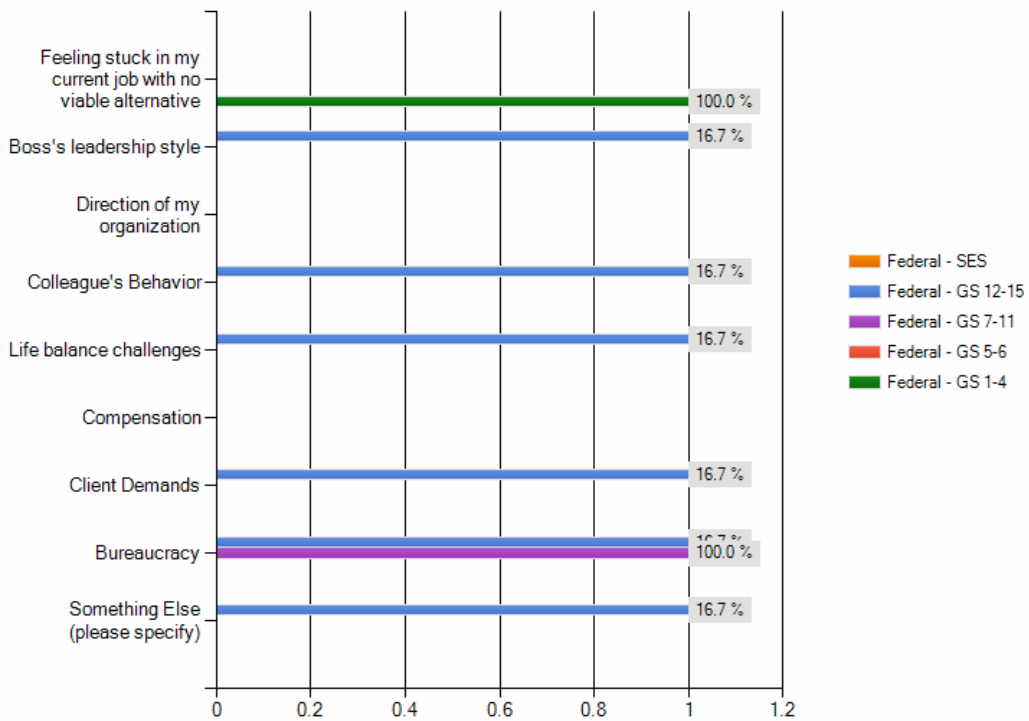


## EXHIBIT F – Frustration in federal roles

Federal Respondents - My level of frustration at work over the past 6 months has -



Federal Respondents - The #1 source of frustration for me at work over the past 6 months is:



## **ABOUT THE FLOURISHING COMPANY**

The Flourishing Company (TFC) is a workplace coaching and consulting firm. TFC's cadre of world-class professionals help executives committed to aligning their people with the strategic plan.

Solutions are customized to meet specific client needs and include team coaching, executive & professional coaching, outplacement and the development of enterprise systems and processes to support each.

Website      [www.TheFlourishingCompany.com](http://www.TheFlourishingCompany.com)

Phone:        419-309-4252

E-mail:        heather@TheFlourishingCompany.com

President & CEO – Heather L. Bradley



Heather leads a cadre of experienced, diverse, world-class professional coaches and consultants who are matched with TFC clients based on their background and engagement objectives.

A former Fortune 500 Vice-President of Human Resources, Heather helps you and your organization grow your people and drive results. With her coaching expertise and real-world experience, TFC is uniquely positioned as your top resource for alignment, change, transition and transformation.

