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charity consulting

ThirdSector

Size Matters

Charity Pulse 2008
Sector-wide Report

July 2008

Frances Hurst & Sam Attenborough
Birdsong Charity Consulting

8 Sibthorpe Road
North Mymms
Hatfield
AL9 7PH

01707 882958
frances@bird-song.co.uk
www.bird-song.co.uk

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 5 March to 25 April 2008.

Charity Pulse is a new 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 choosing to actively promote the survey to their staff.

We had a record response this year, with over 1000 charity people taking part, representing 181 different charities.

This year our sector-wide report: *Size Matters* report focuses on the effect of a charity's size on staff satisfaction.

The happy medium

The findings in this report are clear: medium sized charities are the best ones to work for.

People working for medium-sized charities responded more favourably to virtually every one of the 42 questions we asked in the *Charity Pulse* survey.

When you think about it, this makes sense. Small can be beautiful, fleet of foot and full of passion - but poor systems and a lack of resources can increase workplace stress.

What about the large charities? With the brand reputation to attract plenty of funding and the ability to recruit and reward the best staff. But how do they avoid the bureaucracy and the politics that can drive staff crazy?

So, if your organisation has between 51 and 200 staff, this report should make happy reading. Medium-sized charities have the best of both worlds, combining good working relationships with effective policies and systems.

If your organisation is outside of this happy medium, all is not lost. We have set out some priority areas to help your charity improve staff satisfaction, motivation and retention and these are highlighted at the end of the report.

The next section provides the detailed results by charity size. The three size categories selected for analysis were:

- Small charities: with under 50 staff
- Medium-sized charities: with 51 - 200 staff
- Large charities: with over 201 staff

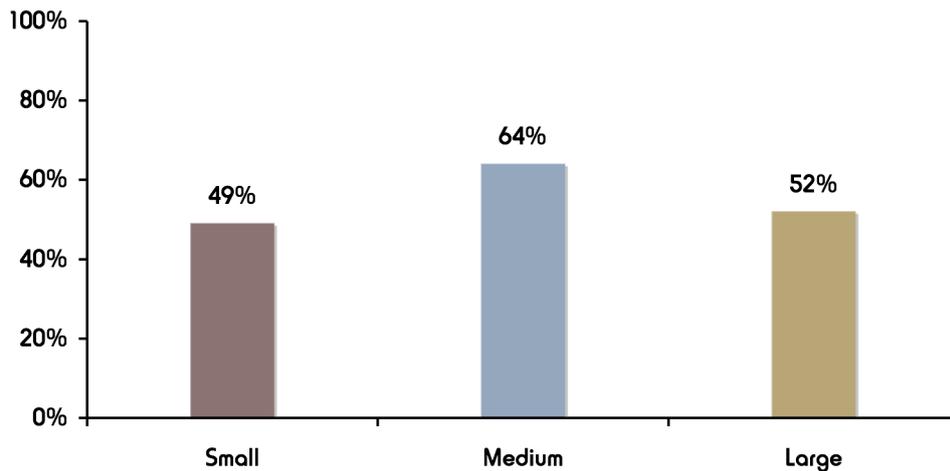
The key findings

In this section of the report we have set out the survey results with the most interesting variances between charities of different sizes. All of the graphs show combined *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* responses.

Work/life balance

Let's start with a common area of concern across the sector: workload.

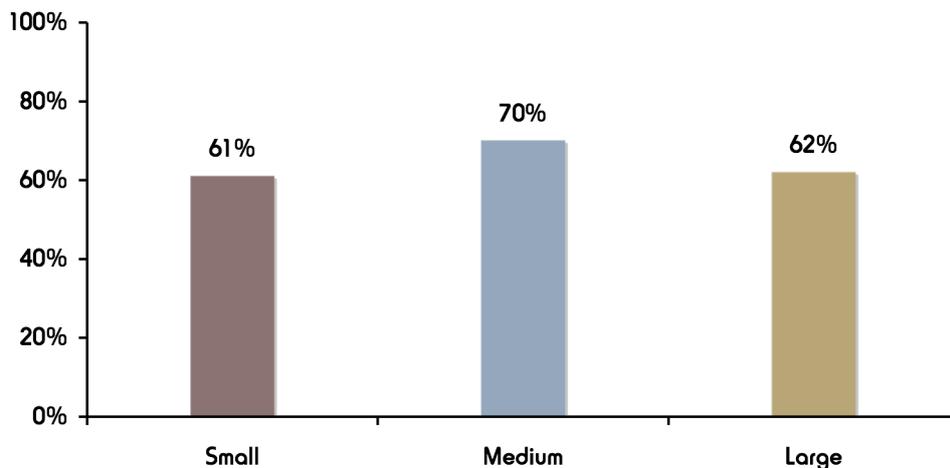
The workload in my job is reasonable



It comes as no surprise that small charity staff feel under the most pressure with their workload, but why should individuals in medium sized charities feel the least so?

When asked about work/life balance generally, the variances were less pronounced, but medium-sized charity workers still fared the best.

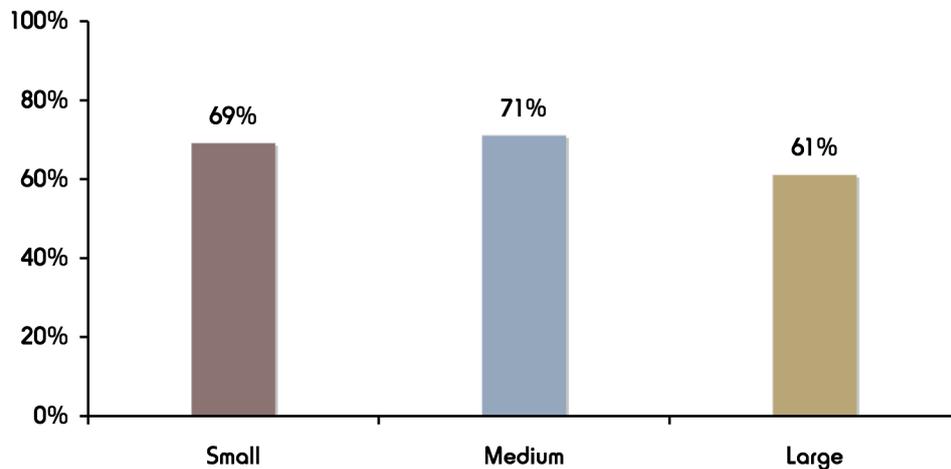
I have a good work / life balance



The ability to work from home was identified as a key factor in staff satisfaction in last year's *Charity Pulse* survey, so have charities taken this on board?

Well, it appears that despite having greater HR resources to apply to the problem, the larger charities are not keeping pace with their smaller counterparts when it comes to meeting the flexible working requirements of staff.

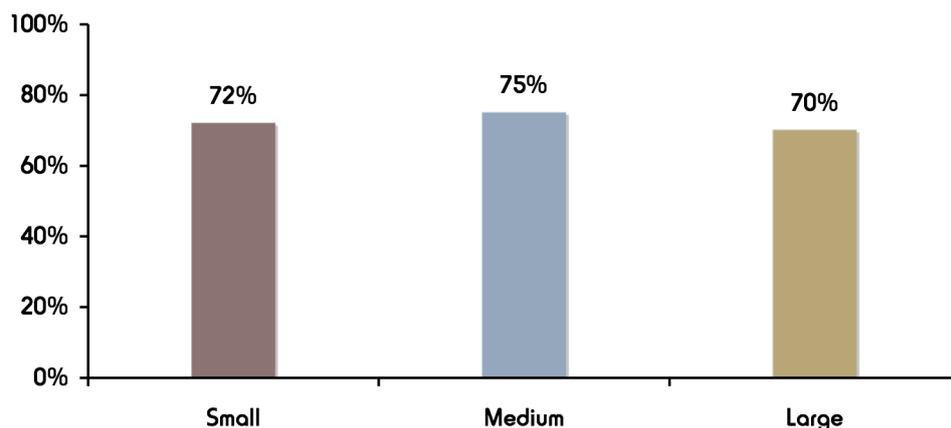
I am happy with the flexible working practices here



Internal Communication

Internal communication is an area where we might expect smaller charities to perform well, but is this the case?

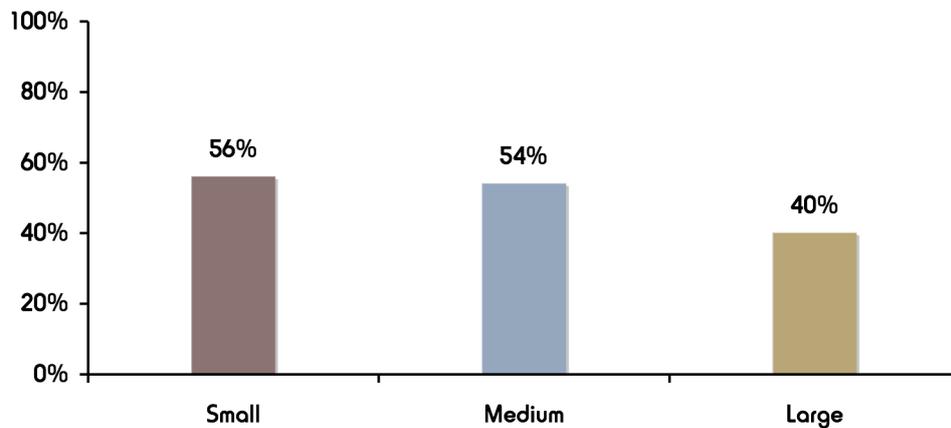
I feel well informed about what is happening within the charity



The survey results reveal little difference between organisations of different sizes in response to this question. This indicates that the large charities are working hard at communicating with their staff. Effective information flow in big organisations does not happen by osmosis.

When it comes to relationships between staff and senior managers, however, the next graph shows that there is more work to be done. The percentage of favourable responses to this question is not high across the board, but the lowest levels of satisfaction are found in the biggest charities.

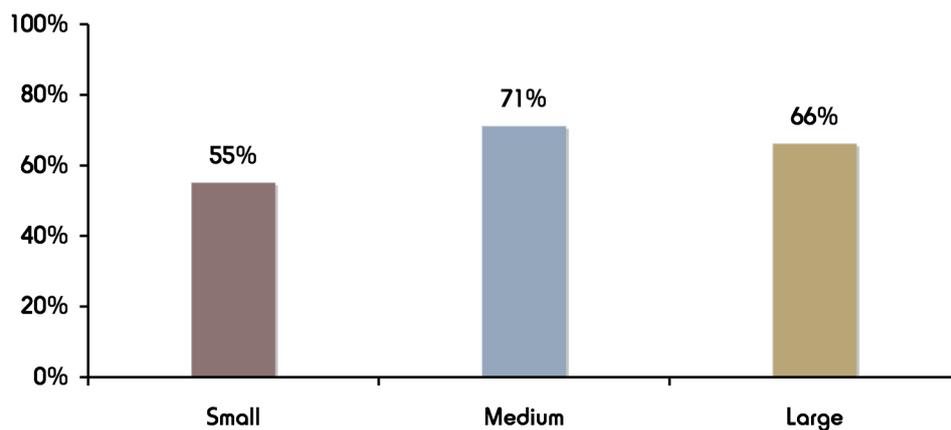
The senior management team is well informed about what other staff think and do



Development and reward

So the medium-sized organisations are leading the way so far, but when it comes to training, development and pay, surely the large charities must come out on top?

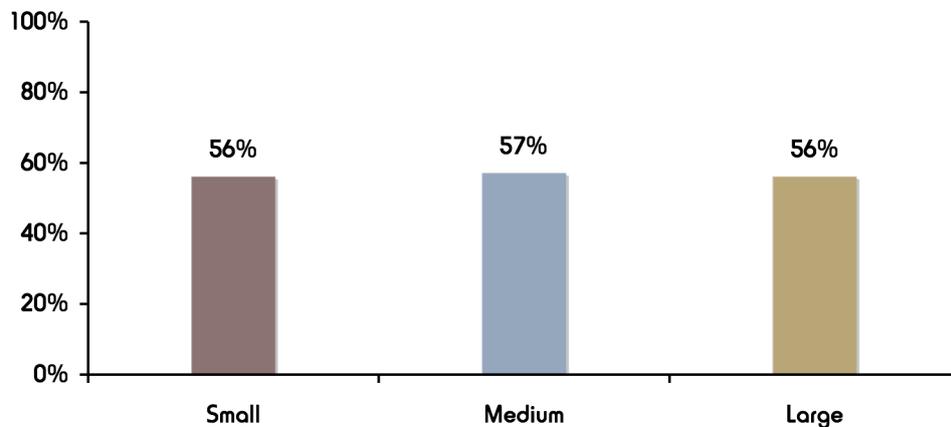
I receive sufficient training/development to enable me to do my job well



Well no, this is not the case. In the area of training and development, the medium-sized charities are still ahead of the pack.

And when it comes to staff views on pay competitiveness, surprisingly perhaps, size of organisation has no significant impact at all.

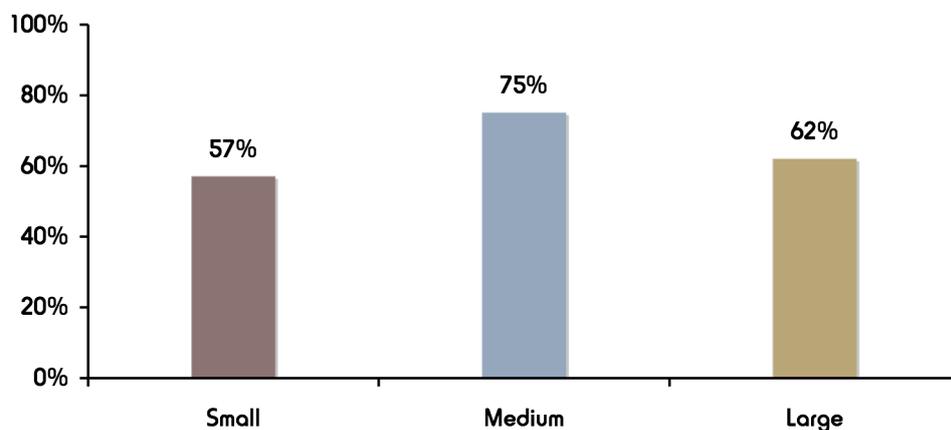
My pay is competitive in comparison to people doing similar work in the charity sector



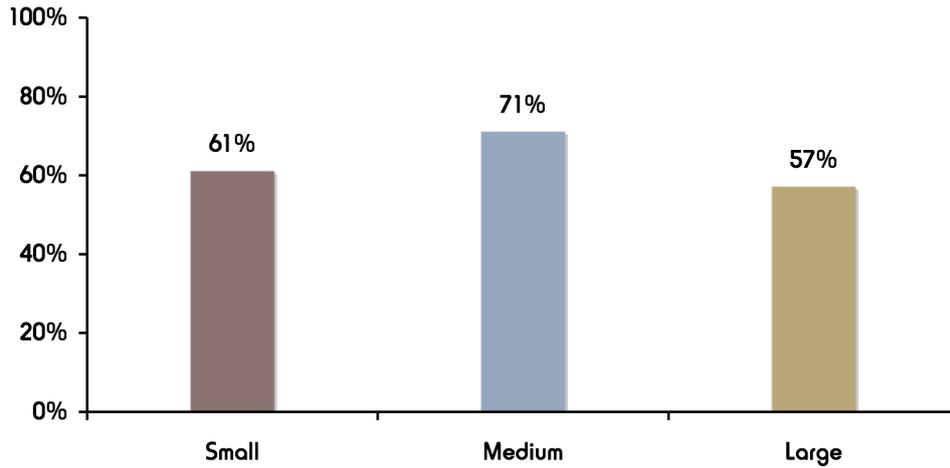
Effectiveness and pride

Examining staff opinions of their charity's effectiveness, it seems that that the medium-sized charities are again setting the standard. Whether it's about the way their organisation uses resources or the role of their senior management team.

This charity makes best possible use of supporters' time and money

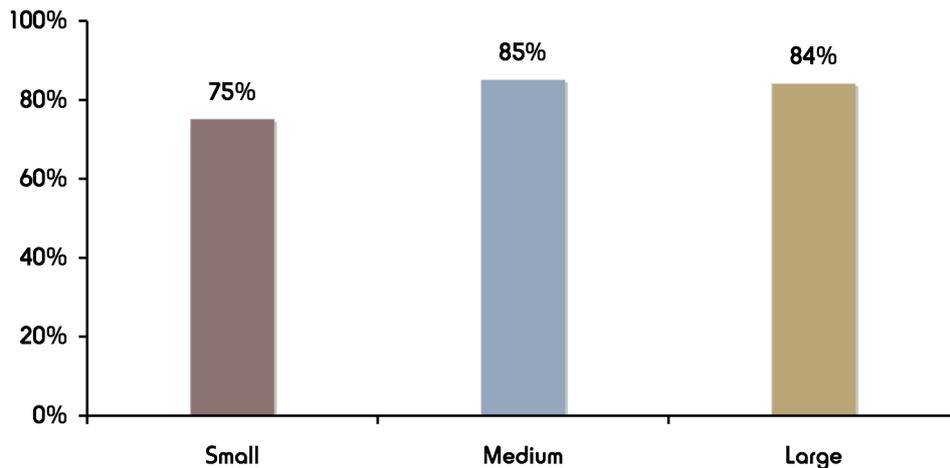


The senior management team is effective



And the medium-sized organisations are neck-and-neck with the ‘big brand’ charities when it comes to staff pride in their organisation.

I am proud to work for this charity

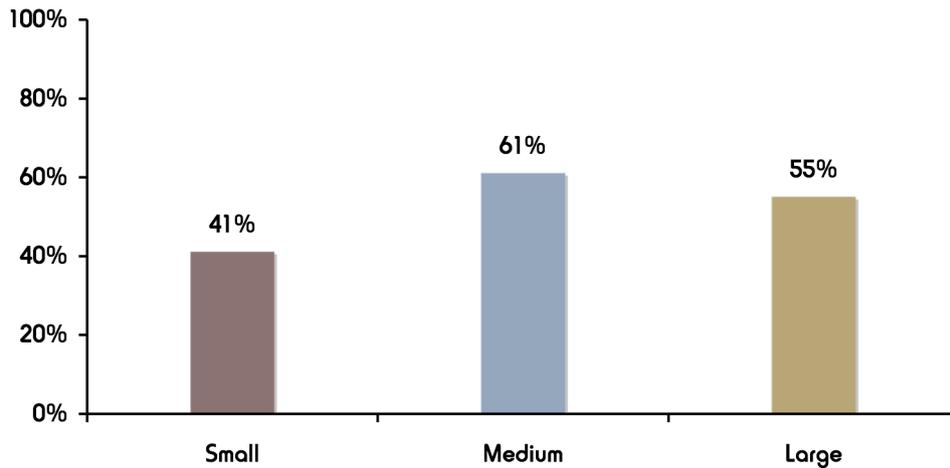


Staff retention

At the end of the survey, we asked respondents whether they intended to still be working for their current employer in a year’s time.

With the most positive staff satisfaction responses throughout the survey, unsurprisingly the medium-sized charities scored best on this question as well.

I plan to be working for this charity in a year's time



We then asked staff who are planning to move on to give us their *main reason* for wanting to do so. The three most common reasons given were:

- The attraction of a new job/career opportunity
- Salary
- Management/organisational issues

Again there were some marked variances in response, depending on the size of the charity.

Employees' main reason for considering leaving	Small charities	Medium-sized charities	Large charities
Job/career opportunity	24%	30%	26%
Salary	12%	20%	20%
Management/organisational issues	28%	15%	29%

Workers in small charities are the least likely to be looking to leave to improve their salary. Staff in medium sized charities are the most likely to be looking for a career move.

Employees in the small and the large organisations alike are more likely to be leaving because of dissatisfaction with their management or other organisational issues. Staff in the medium-sized organisations are far less likely to have problems in this regard.

Whatever the size of the charity, there appear to be management and organisational issues that are hastening staff departures. Unlike the lure of a new job or a bigger salary, management and organisational problems are within a charity's power to resolve. With the potential to save up to 29% of their staff turnover, that's worth some serious senior level deliberation.

What can charities learn from these findings?

With this new data to hand, where should charity leaders be focussing their attention to improve their staff satisfaction, motivation and retention?

Small charities

Small charities have the most pressure on resources, but also have the opportunity to capitalise on close and effective working relationships.

Priorities for action:

- Ensure that work objectives are not achieved at the expense of manager-staff relationships
- Explore cost-effective ways to support staff training and development
- Review the effectiveness of the senior management team (or equivalent)
- Uncover any management or organisational issues that are hastening staff departures

Medium-sized charities

Medium sized charities have the best of both worlds - the challenge is to maintain effective working practices as their organisations grow.

Priorities for action:

- Ensure that managers are rewarded for good people management
- Establish - or reinforce - good internal communication systems
- Monitor staff satisfaction to pick up any early signs of discontent

Large charities

Large charities have the most complex organisational issues, but also have more options for how they use their resources.

Priorities for action:

- Be open to new ideas on flexible working
- Explore new ways of helping senior managers keep in touch with staff views and work
- Review the effectiveness of the senior management team
- Uncover any management or organisational issues that are hastening staff departures

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.

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