

birdsong
charity consulting

ThirdSector

Glimmers of recovery?

Charity Pulse 2013

Survey report

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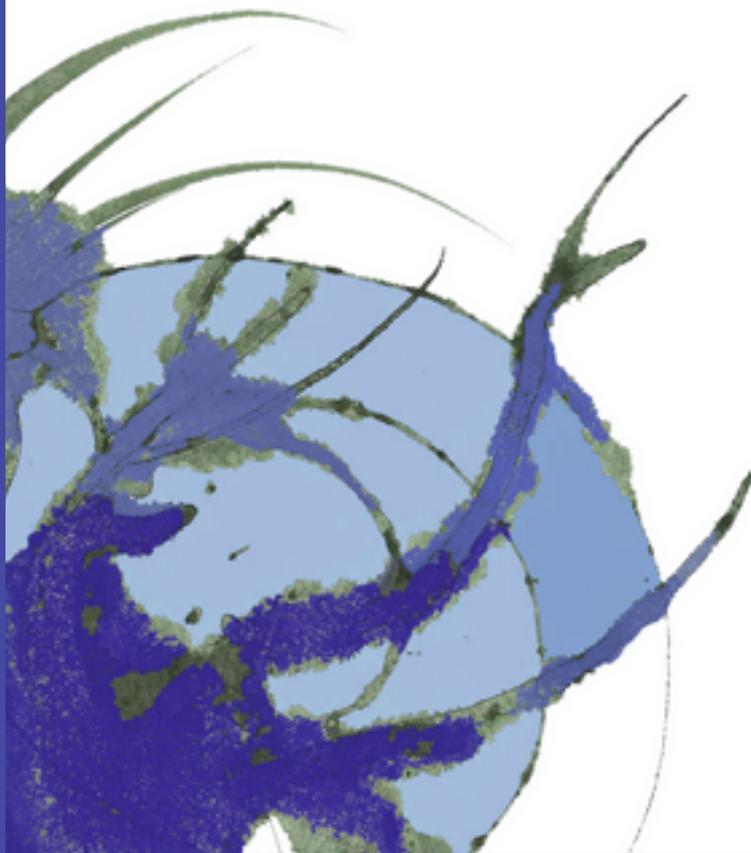
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Introduction

We approached the analysis of this year's *Charity Pulse* survey results with a degree of trepidation, as the 2012 results had revealed the lowest charity staff job satisfaction since the survey was launched in 2007.

We were right to be cautious. This *Charity Pulse 2013* report reveals only a marginal uplift in charity staff approval ratings, with morale, pride in their organisation and staff opinions of their charity as an employer all remaining low.

The main drivers of this stagnation appear to be:

- A lack of confidence in charity leadership
- Inadequate support to enable individuals do a good job
- Lack of training and development opportunities
- Continuing concerns over job security

There are some significant differences of opinion between people working in charities of different sizes, however, with small starting to look distinctly beautiful.

There has been a lot of change for staff across the sector to cope with in the workplace, with organisational restructures continuing apace. We may, however, be seeing a glimmer of hope in this area. Between 2010 and 2012 a consistent 62% of *Charity Pulse* survey respondents said that they had experienced redundancies at their charity during the past 12 months. In 2013, this proportion has reduced to 55%.

The other encouraging signs this year are in the areas of internal communications and reward. Charity people tell us that they are feeling better informed about what is going on in their organisations and are a little happier with the contents of their pay packets.

So overall, taking a glass half full view of the world, the best we really can say about the *Charity Pulse 2013* results is: At least things haven't got any worse...

The impact of working relationships

In this year's *Charity Pulse* survey, in addition to our regular staff satisfaction questions, we asked respondents about the state of working relationships in their organisations. We asked them about the impact that healthy and unhealthy working relationships have on their ability to do a good job.

The results were surprising. So if you are interested in improving your charity's performance, take a look at our special report: *Better together?*

You can download a free copy of this report from Birdsong's website: www.bird-song.co.uk.

Notes about the graphs

In the graphs that follow, the percentage figures refer to the sum of the *Agree* and *Strongly agree* responses to the questions.

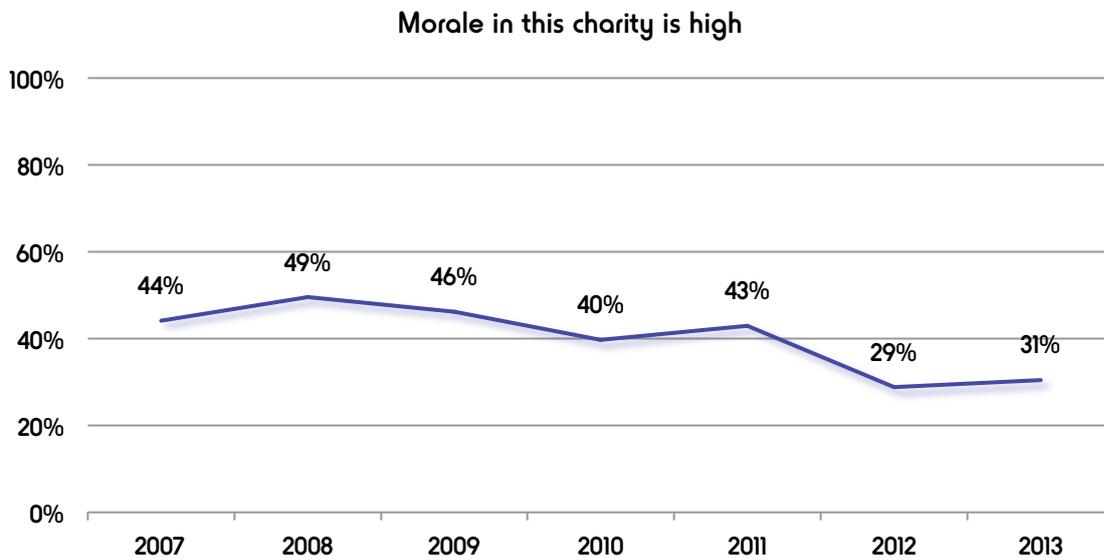
In the bar charts, small, medium and large charities are referred to. Small charities are those with fewer than 50 staff, medium-sized charities 50 – 200 staff and large charities over 200.

Sector trends

We have seen very little in the way of uplift in the *Charity Pulse 2013* survey results, with the majority of areas revealing little or no change from the low ebb of the 2012 responses.

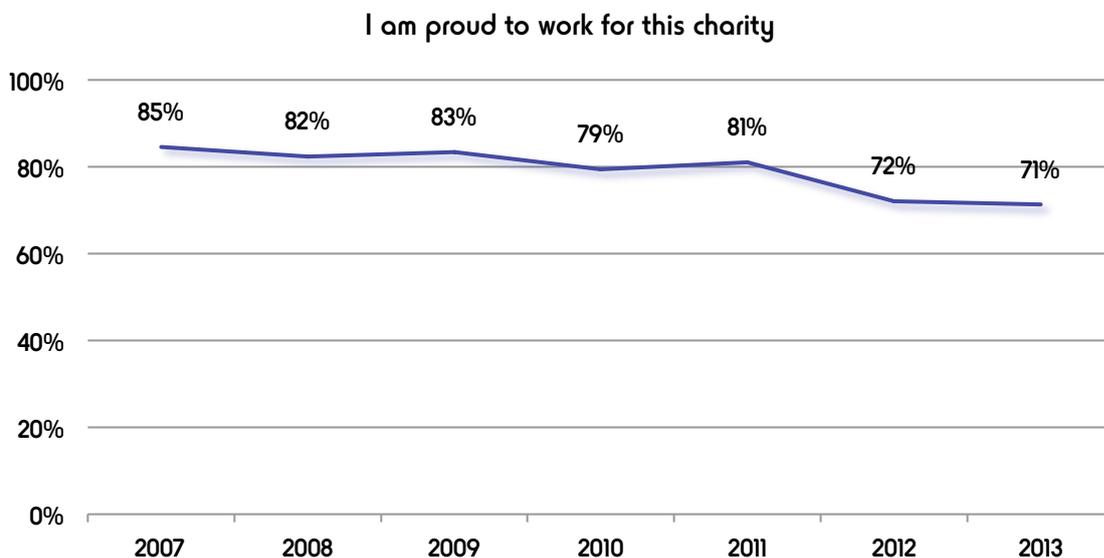
Morale

Following a big drop in the morale of charity people in 2012, there is little sign of any improvement.



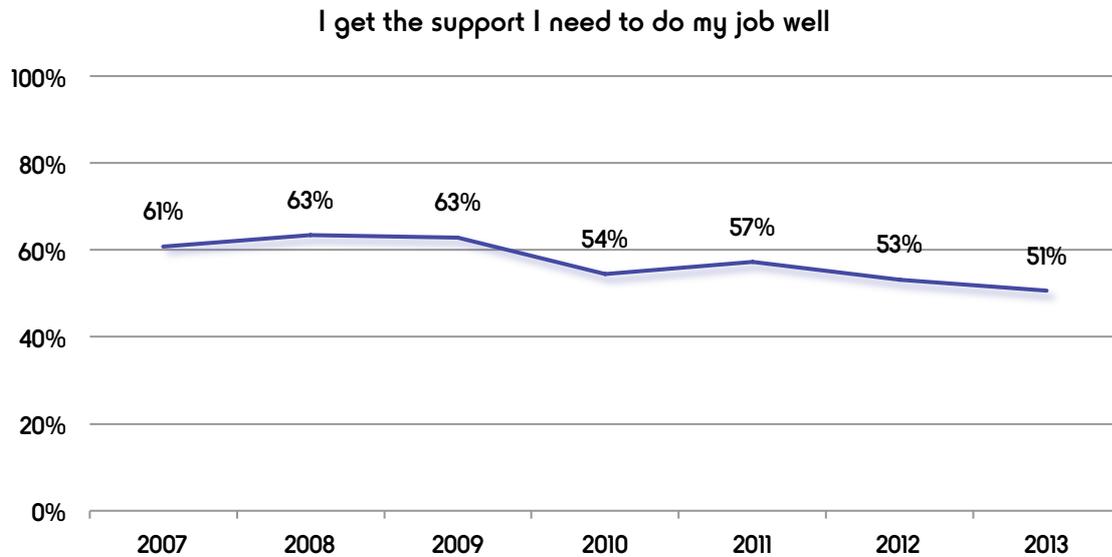
Pride

Charity people come to work to make a difference in the world, but pride in their organisations has taken a knock and there is no sign of recovery here either.



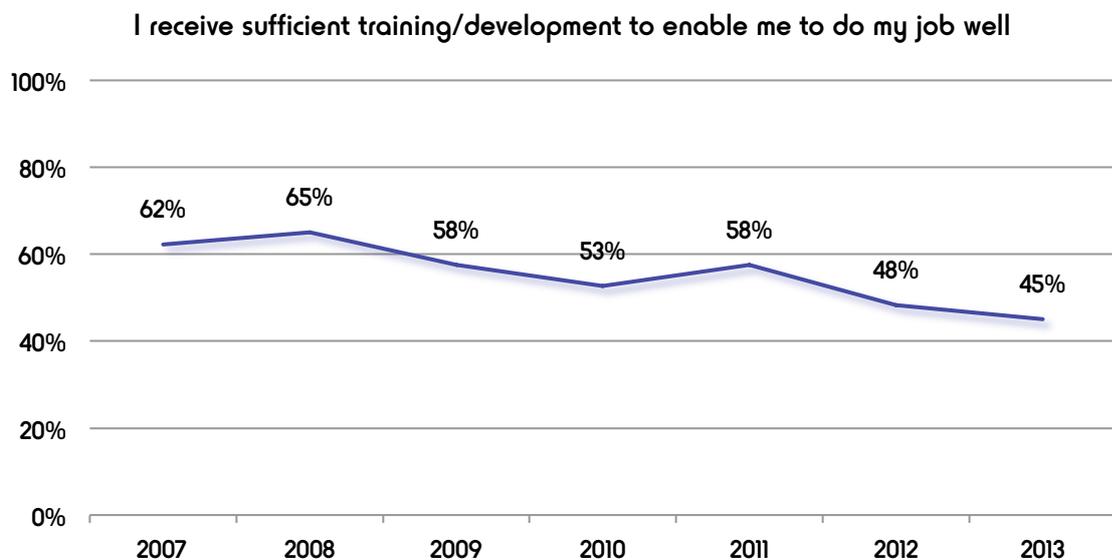
Support

Many charity people are not getting the support they need to deliver what is expected of them. This is another aspect of working life in charities where we have seen a significant decline over the past five years.



Training and development

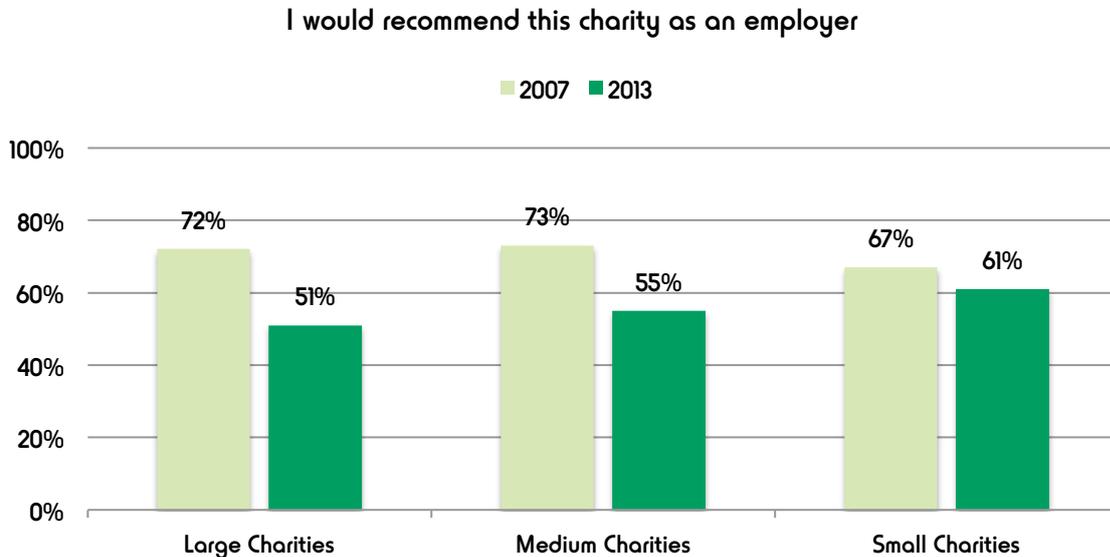
Following successive rounds of expenditure cuts, it is little surprise that training and development opportunities for charity people are still constrained.



While individuals working for large charities are still happier with their training provision than those working for smaller organisations, the gap between the two has been closing in recent years.

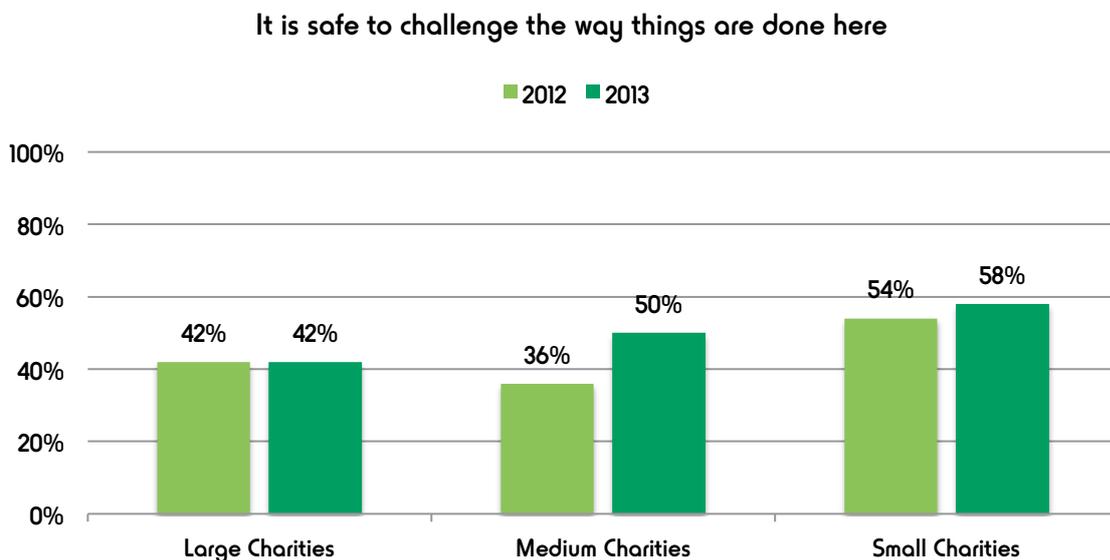
Which are the best charities to work for?

This year, only 56% of charity people would recommend their organisation as an employer – the same proportion as in 2012. This is disappointing because, until last year, percentages of around 70% were the norm. Interestingly, despite their greater resource challenges, small charities are performing better in this area than their larger cousins. This was not the case in 2007, before recession hit. As the downturn has taken hold, smaller charities have become more attractive places to work.

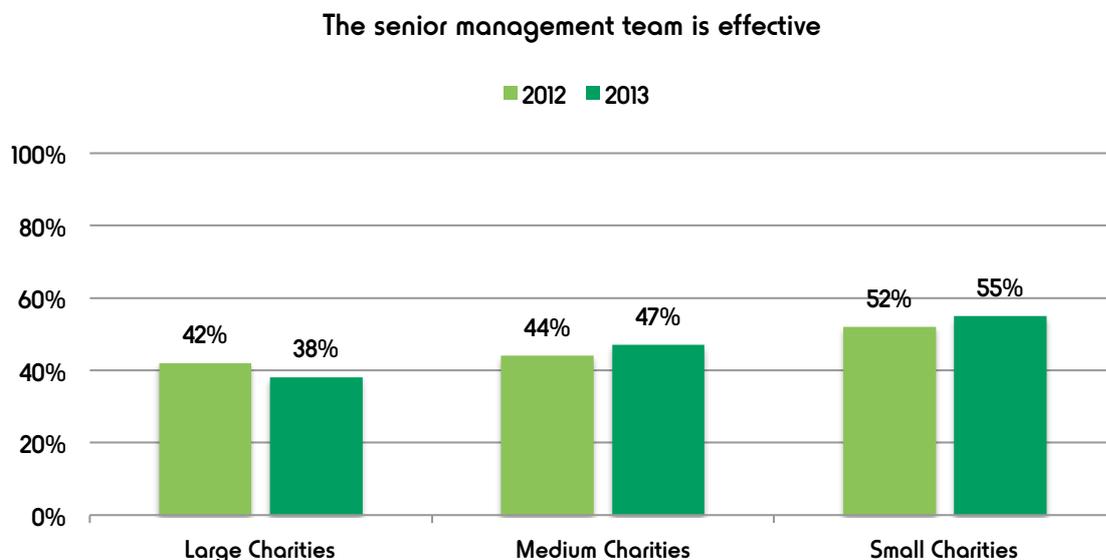


Leadership and culture

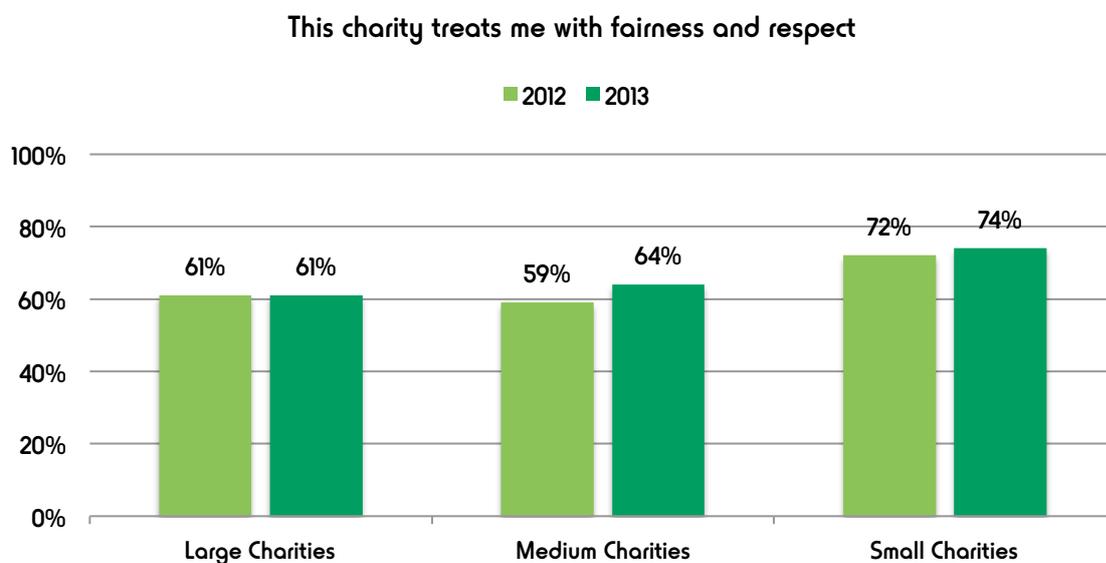
As we observed last year, employees working for small charities are more comfortable about challenging the status quo than other charity staff. However, in 2013, it is with the medium-sized charities where we see the greatest uplift in response. 50% of those staff now feel safe to challenge the way things are done at their charity, compared to just 36% last year.



Overall, 47% of respondents think their senior management team is effective, on a par with 2012 figure. Charity people working for small organisations, however, appear to have greater faith in their leadership. 55% of them agree that their senior management team is effective, compared 47% of those working in medium-sized charities and just 38% of those working in organisations with over 200 employees.

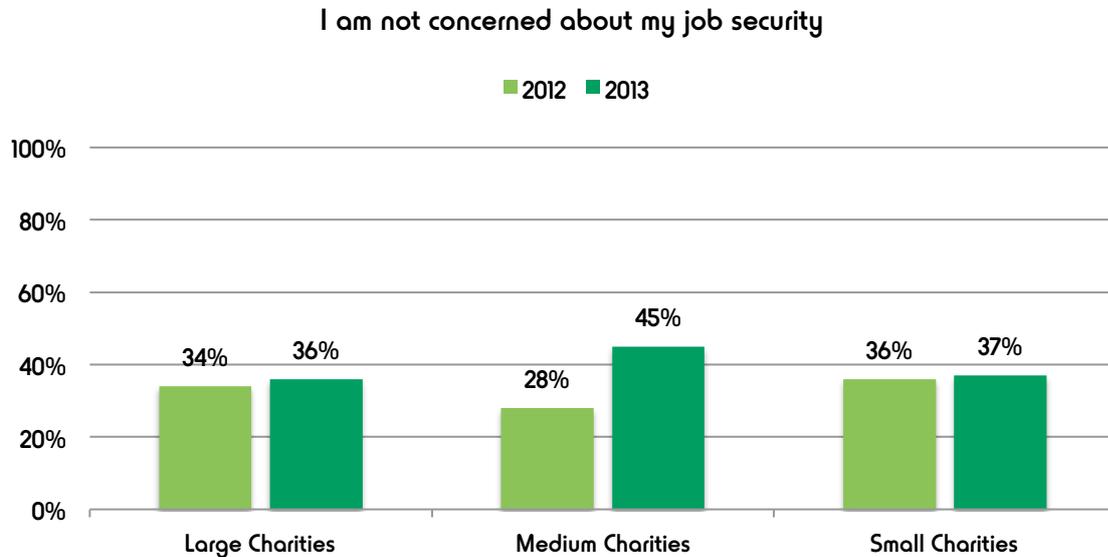


With an overall approval rating of 67%, there has been no uplift in the proportion of respondents who feel that their charity treats them with fairness and respect. As we found in 2012, people working for small charities feel that they are better treated than individuals working for large or medium-sized charities.

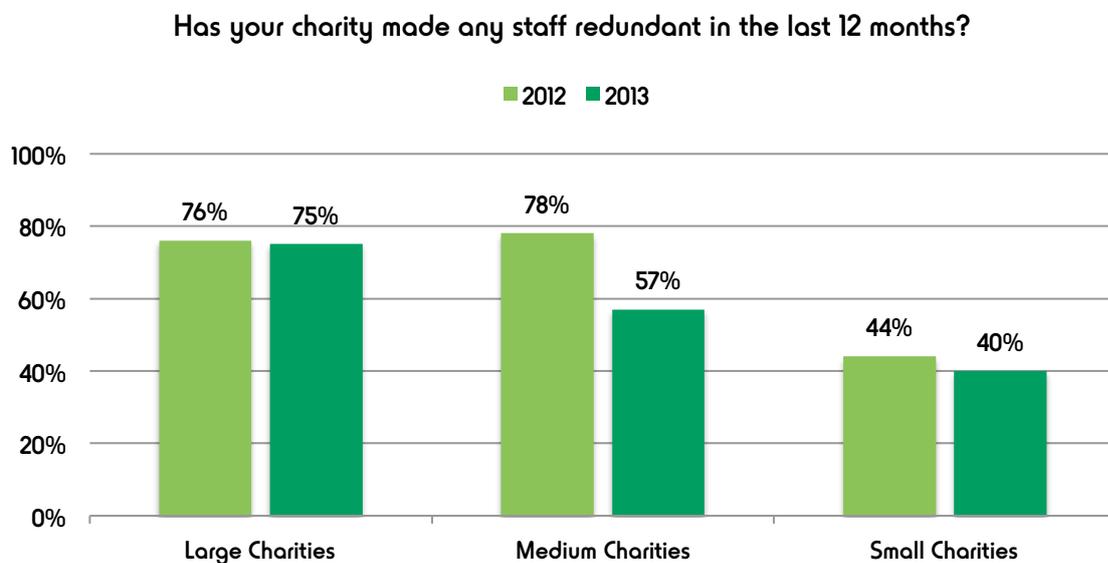


Job security

When it comes to job security, people working for medium-sized charities are feeling considerably happier than they were twelve months ago. Interestingly in this area, however, there has been very little change in opinion for those working in either small or large organisations.



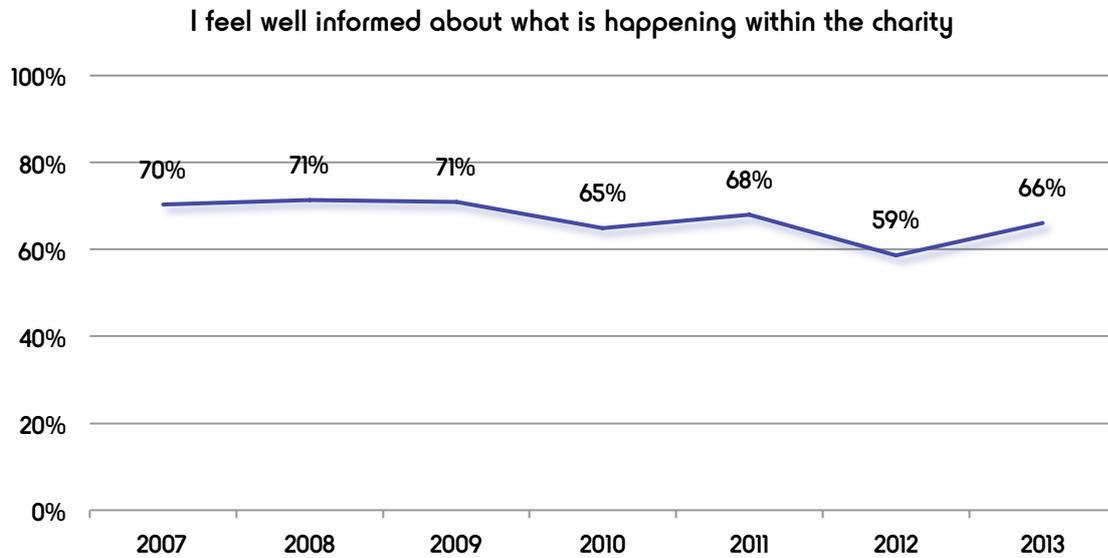
A major determining factor behind these statistics is the relative level of exposure people have had to redundancies. Individuals working for small charities are considerably less likely to have witnessed redundancies in their organisation over the last 12 months than colleagues working in bigger organisations. However, when comparing 2013 and 2012 figures, the biggest shift by far this year is for individuals working in medium-sized charities.



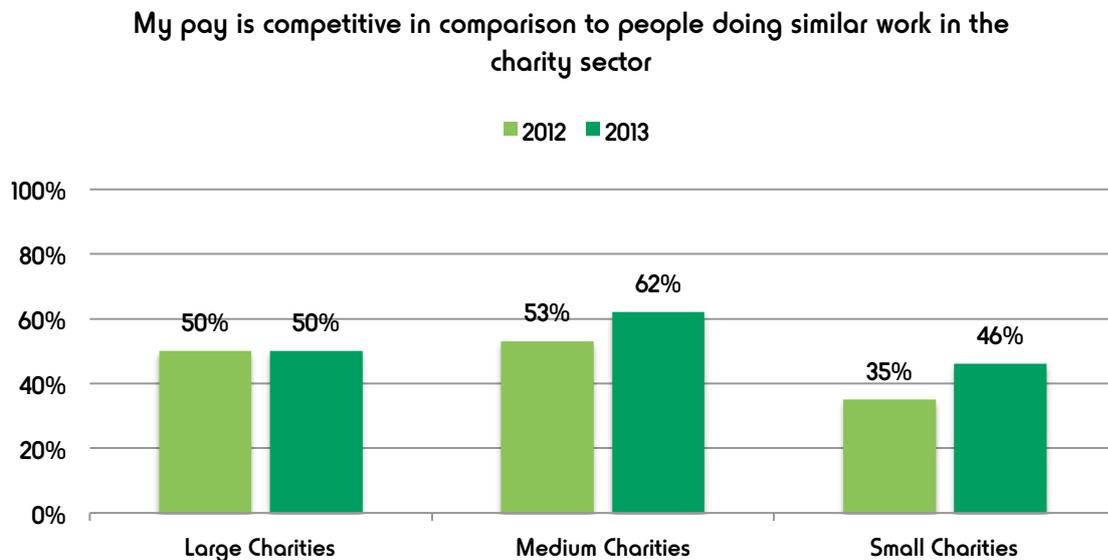
Areas of uplift

But enough of the doom and gloom – are any glimmers of recovery in this year’s results?

There are very few, unfortunately, but one aspect of working life that has shown an uplift is internal communications. 66% of respondents say that they feel well informed about what is happening in their charity – up from 59% last year.



The other main area of good news is reward. 50% of staff now think that their pay is competitive, compared to just 43% in 2012. This uplift is only observed, however, among those working in small and medium-sized charities.



Areas for improvement

To sum up how charity people are feeling in 2013, we have provided some typical responses to the *Charity Pulse 2013* survey - in response to the question:

If you could change one thing about working for this charity what would it be?

While there were some differences of emphasis between charities of different sizes, the most prevalent theme, across the board, was leadership and how it could be improved.

Here are some indicative comments – from people working in small, medium and large charities:

Small charities

While the charity's leadership was cited most often as an area for improvement for small charities, respondents working in organisations with fewer than 50 people are also looking for more resources, better pay and improved job security.

Clear strategy which is jointly understood by trustees and senior management team.

Leadership that concentrated on providing excellent services for our target audience instead of bickering about politics and 'survival of the charity'... In short it needs to move a lot faster. Trustee board lives in the dark ages. Leadership is in Medieval. I'd like to work in the Renaissance!

Being appreciated by the senior management team...

More staff or a decreased workload. We do so much with so little but it means I never feel I've finished a job well.

I love the job but find it difficult to 'switch off' - my job takes over my life and I get burnt out... I feel there could be better systems and procedures in place for the smaller/reactive work we do so it takes the pressure off in these areas.

Better pay.

Longer term job security.

Medium-sized charities

Comments about leadership and the senior team were by far the most prominent among employees working for medium-sized charities. Clarity about priorities and the need for better internal communication were also concerns.

Effectiveness of Directors, CEO and Trustees, who all feel like they work at cross-purposes to each other as well as to the rest of the staff.

More strategic leadership and vision from CEO. For trustee roles to be clearly defined.

Stronger more passionate leadership.

Create a relationship of trust between management and staff. Have leaders lead and praise those who take the charity in that direction.

More transparency and effective communication about recruitment decisions, future strategy etc.

Large charities

In addition to their leadership, people working in large charities were most concerned about improving organisational processes and procedures, better internal communications and improving their organisational culture.

Much stronger leadership to bring together the diverse activities of our organisation and lead us to a common mission. Able to share that mission and inspire us all to work towards it. Being generally more joined up as sometimes it feels like we're all competing.

I would try to make the management structure more open to innovation, staff development, communication.

Communication between teams, divisions and senior management. Relations between Areas and Head Office.

Large charities, like this one, are riddled with old-fashioned processes and procedures which hamper effective working. This charity needs to free its employees from needless bureaucracy so we can do what we do even better.

Change the corporate culture; it is conservative (i.e. change-averse/resistant), command-and-control, consensus-driven (resulting in no/few difficult executive decisions), personality-driven (who speaks loudest wins), and is dominated by administrators promoted above their capability.

That employees were encouraged to develop entrepreneurial skills and were given the chance to innovate.

Some team building amongst the staff, everyone works in 'silos' and the difficult economic circumstances have left everyone working against each other rather than pulling together.

My organisation is under going a great deal of change, which takes time, but it would be good if some changes happened quicker.

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**

For innovative thinking on leadership, management and organisational development follow us on Twitter: **[@birdsongtweets](https://twitter.com/birdsongtweets)**