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“SUSPICION & DISRESPECT” DRIVE WEDGE BETWEEN CHARITY HQs & THEIR REGIONS

Over a third (35%) of charities surveyed say there is a “culture of mutual suspicion and disrespect” between their HQs and regional offices, and half (50%) say their HQs “frequently lack an understanding of what regions are dealing with on a day-to-day basis”, according to research released today.

HQ Imperialism or Regional Barons? - from leading not for profit sector think tank and research consultancy's nfpSynergy - surveyed almost 350 charity professionals at all levels about their charity's HQ-regional relationship: if it works and how it could be better.

Other findings are that staff outside HQ are over twice as likely as those inside it (35% vs 16%) to disagree that “the structure of their organisation has achieved a good balance between the respective needs of HQ and regions”; staff in smaller organisations are significantly less likely to feel the “right culture has been fostered between the HQ and regions”; only a third (34%) of organisations feel the “perspectives and opinions of volunteers feed into decision making back at HQ”, a particular issue for larger charities; and only half (48%) feel “political devolution has made it increasingly important for HQ to give a voice to regional offices at senior levels”. All this – despite over half (56%) charities feeling that their organisation has “taken positive steps to foster a culture of understanding between UK HQ and the regions” – attempts that seem therefore not to have always been terribly successful!

KEY REPORT FINDINGS

Considerable evidence of disharmony

- Over a third (35%) of charities surveyed say there is a “culture of mutual suspicion and disrespect between HQs and regional offices”
- Less than 1 in 3 (31%) think their organisation has “achieved a good balance between the needs of the HQ and those of the regions”
- Barely 1 in 3 (33%) agree that their organisation is “good at managing the balance between being consultative/inclusive amongst the regions and getting the job done”
- Less than 2 in 5 (39%) feel their organisation has “generally good communications between HQ and regions”
- Half (50%) say “HQs frequently lack understanding of what regions are dealing with on a day-to-day basis”
- Only 3 in 10 (28%) say regional offices have “full control over their own budget and human resource functions”
- Only 2 in 5 (41%) say their organisation's UK HQs “understand that regions differ from one another and tailor their communications and working practices accordingly”

Dissatisfaction especially evident for staff outside HQ – perception of HQ “ivory tower” syndrome with regions feeling like 2nd class citizens!

- Staff *outside* HQ are over twice as likely (35%) as staff *inside* HQ (16%) to disagree that “the structure of their organisation has achieved a good balance between the respective needs of HQ and regions”
- The further you move out from the HQ, the higher proportion (32% HQ; national 39%; regional 47%; local 51%) disagreeing that their “HQ is excellent at understanding regional needs”

You can go through the motions without getting good results

- Over half (54%) feel their organisation has a “formalized system through which HQ and regions can communicate”

- 6 in 10 (60%) say “staff in both HQs and regions all feel they are working towards one common goal”
- Over half (56%) feel that their organisation has “taken positive steps to foster a culture of understanding between UK HQ and the regions”

Smaller organisations may be having an even tougher time

- Staff in smaller organisations are less likely to agree that the “right culture has been fostered between the HQ and regions” (orgs. with less than £5m income = 24% disagree; between £5m and £50m income = 15% disagree; more than £50m income = 15% disagree)
- And they are less likely to agree that “staff in both HQ and the regions all feel they are working towards one common goal” (orgs. with less than £5m income = 32% disagree; between £5m and £50m income = 20%; more than £50m income = 18%)

Political autonomy may actually have made things more complex

- Only half (48%) feel that “political devolution has made it increasingly important for HQ to give a voice to regional offices at senior levels”
- However, well over half (56%) say “regional offices are often places of innovation where new ideas are piloted”

The battle for volunteers is on!

- Only a third (34%) of organisations surveyed feel the “perspectives and opinions of volunteers feed into decision-making at HQs”
- Smaller organisations claim to be more actively involving volunteers in their HQ’s decision-making (46% for orgs. with less than £5m income; 33% for those between £5m and £50m income, 40% for those with more than £50m income)

Brian Garvey, nfpSynergy’s Head of Projects & Service Development, said:

“Some kind of ‘healthy tension’ between an organisation’s HQ and its regions is probably no bad thing. But for it to reach the fractured level of ‘them versus us’ – as this research shows it often does - is clearly counterproductive, and may impact adversely on a range of areas: brand, volunteers, fundraising, morale and general cohesion. Moreover, merely having internal systems *in place* does not necessarily mean they are working. In many cases, a thorough review of organisational culture and team perceptions is probably essential – for the good of staff and of those they seek to serve.”

DIRTY DOZEN: HOW TO ENSURE STRUCTURAL DISHARMONY!

1. Generate “UK-wide strategies” without consulting anyone outside HQ!
2. View national/regional/local offices as merely there to implement the decisions taken in the HQ’s “Ivory Tower”!
3. Have all training/inductions at HQ!
4. Have 50+ offices outside HQ but never dare to visit even *one*!
5. Produce comms materials that are inconsistent with regional/local contexts!
6. Be ignorant of geography!
7. Pay mere “lip service” to being consultative!
8. Allow HQ staff to engage with local media or other organisations in a region - without first consulting the relevant regional office!
9. Be rude!
10. Be silent about what works well, instead of sharing best practice!
11. Always view things through the lens of “them and us”!
12. Be part of the problem, not part of any solution!

nfpSynergy conducts a whole raft of syndicated, cost-effective monitors, delivering subscribers with regular insights into key stakeholders including politicians, business leaders, health professionals, journalists, young people and the wider public.

For more information about nfpSynergy: www.nfpsynergy.net

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MEDIA INTERVIEWS: To interview nfpSynergy's Brian Garvey about the report and how charities can function most harmoniously across regions, please contact:
Adrian Gillan, T: 0207 6 22 99 11; M: 0774 086 7215; E: adrian@gillanmedia.com