

December 15 2009 | Last updated 2 minutes ago

gulfnews.com

Business | Opinion

Smaller business equals less stress

The global survey by Regus has found that a startling 58% of companies, worldwide, report an increase in stress-levels over the past two years

By Carol Spiers, Special to Gulf News

Published: 00:00 December 15, 2009



Share this article

Among the mass of research data on stress that constantly arrives on my desk, two recent reports seem to suggest a new-found link relating to company size.

The global survey by Regus has found that a startling 58% of companies, worldwide, report an increase in stress-levels over the past two years. And in the UK and USA, the bigger the company, the greater the stress — with the threat of job-loss/business failure as one of the top two stressor-elements quoted.

In firms with over 1,000 employees, 65% report more stress, whereas in smaller firms, it is only 54%. This is echoed in another survey by O2 Ireland, where 74% of senior executives in Irish SME's said they felt more secure than they would in a large corporation.

Well, my own client-list reflects a wide spectrum of large corporations, so I am highly experienced at servicing this sector. But until recently, I have not generally linked stress with organisational size, as a factor in itself — certainly not where job-security is concerned.

It always seemed safe to generalise about company size — that the corporate 'big ship' would give you a smooth, dull voyage, while the tiny catamaran of the small firm would be the high-risk experience.

But the current recession appears to have reversed this picture. Big corporations are fearful of the changes forced on them by the economy (as I know from the steep rise in demand for my presentations on Change Management), while in smaller firms, the recession seems to have brought out a defiant spirit, tapping new reserves of dynamism and resourcefulness.

There was one day last week which perhaps symbolised this sea-change in corporate life.

In the morning, I conducted a course in redundancy interviewing at a big firm that manufactured spare parts for dishwashers. The company had just been sold and morale was at rock-bottom.

From there, I went straight on to a small software development group, only twelve strong, to instruct the young executives in sales presentation technique. They were about to launch an incredible new package that could authenticate oil paintings by the world's top 1,000 artists.

The difference in the atmosphere between the two organisational groups was so staggering that I almost had to acclimatise.

Up to now, on principle, I have always advised school-leavers or new graduates to try to start their careers within a big team, in a large company. Well I'm now starting to wonder whether that might be yesterday's advice, and whether the best start for someone's career, today, might be in a small selective team, working in the creative and entrepreneurial spirit in which they mean to go on — where change is an accepted element built into the culture, not something to be resisted and resented.

Adapting to change

New research indicates a steep rise in stress throughout world industry
The trends suggest that big firms suffer more stress than SME's
Modern SMEs are geared to accepting change, not resisting it