

Abstract for review

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Identity tensions in professional fundraising

High art organisations in Britain and Canada

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Abstract:

Arts fundraisers operate in hybrid organizations working with stakeholders from the public, corporate and civic sector. This diversity of engagements and remits means that they must navigate identities depending on the need and context of interactions with stakeholders and organizational logics. Such interactions, we argue, can lead to identity tensions that fundraisers are called upon to solve. They work across differing logics embedded within such phenomena as artistically connoisseur donors, professional accreditation in philanthropy, organizational missions, artistic leaders' vision and taste, and budgetary constraints and timelines (Ostrower, 2002). As well, they are often called upon to absorb organizational adjustments resulting from regular and dynamically changing government funding policies and munificence within relatively small organizations. This provides a potentially rich and 'extreme' (Bechky, 2006) context to study.

Our research aligns with that on the social dynamics in which professional fundraisers have been operating in the US, (Ostrander and Schervish, 1990; Ostrander, 2007; Schervish 2007), and with current research on the necessary social skills required for success by fundraisers in Britain and other national contexts (Breeze, 2016; Breeze and Jollymore, 2015). The strategic value of fundraising executives in the non-profit sector in the US has recently been identified as a significant concern for organizational sustainability and leadership (Bell and Cornelius, 2013).

Drawing on our analysis of interview data collected from 23 arts fundraisers in the UK and 26 in Canada, we offer an understanding of the micro-processes and mechanisms through which arts fundraisers potentially solve identity tensions. Our research suggests that identity negotiation is a key process in building the trust and commitment of individual donors towards their organization as well as in helping diminish the pressures of organizational budgets and deadlines. This understanding explores identity work across levels (Oliver, 2015) and within a variety of identity tensions through the resolution of contradictions in institutional pluralism and hybridity. The study also enriches the understanding of practitioner needs in the field.

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