

Summary

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The mediated gift: a three-fold tactical approach

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Summary:

Recent years have seen a significant growth in the technical literature exploring charitable gift giving and the fundraising mechanisms through which to trigger such giving. However, there is little empirical research on the actual workings of the fundraising process within nonprofit organisations. In this paper the day-to-day practice of fundraising is analysed from a sociological perspective that draws on the theories of the gift proposed by Mauss (1954), Titmuss (1971) and colleagues to propose an alternative giving model to strangers – that of the mediated gift. Using qualitative data drawn from 47 interviews with fundraisers and their colleagues across 14 organisations, this study examines the ways in which fundraisers build and maintain long-term giving relationships with the individuals who provide financial support to nonprofit organisations. This is complemented with a secondary analysis of donors’ descriptions of their gift giving from various sources.

Findings suggest that the primary gift giving relationship exists not between the giver and beneficiary, but rather the giver and fundraiser. The fundraiser, in this instance, actively employs tactics of reciprocity to both secure new gifts, as well as ensure that givers continue to support their organisation. In doing so fundraisers construct a narrative of the donor’s imagined direct connection to the beneficiary and their ‘good gift’. Simultaneously, the fundraiser works with organisational colleagues to construct the idea of the caring, connected and sacrificial donor as a means to solicit their ongoing support in maintaining the continued gifting from these supporters. The paper concludes with an analysis of the ways in which these narrative constructions are incorporated into fundraising and organisational strategies. It goes on to consider three

implications that these may have on our perceptions of the role of philanthropy and charity now and into the future.

Most important references:

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Mauss, M (1954/2011) The Gift, Martino Publishing, Mansfield Centre.

Titmuss, R. M. (1973) The Gift Relationship:From Human Blood to Social Policy, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.