

ESRC

ESRC Seminar Series

Mapping the public policy landscape

ESRC/National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

Charitable Giving and Donor Motivation





Foreword

Appeals for major disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami trigger a vast out-pouring of generosity from millions of people in the UK and around the world. More regularly, events such as the BBC's 'Children in Need', 'Red Nose' days and the London Marathon all produce amazing and heart-warming examples of people going to great lengths to raise money for others less fortunate than themselves.

But what about lower profile charitable fund-raising? How do we respond to the many requests from one good cause or another that come in newspapers and on TV, through the post, on our doorstep, or as we walk along the street?

This booklet, based on thought-provoking presentations by Dr Tom Farsides, of the University of Sussex, and Dr Sally Hibbert, of the University of Nottingham, addresses a range of issues around charitable giving. In particular, it examines donor motivations, why some people do not support charities, and how everyone might be persuaded to give – and to give more.

It has been produced to accompany a special seminar on Giving, organised by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in collaboration with the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NVCO), during our UK-wide Social Science Week in June 2005.

Charitable giving is just the latest topic to be looked at in the ESRC's Public Policy Seminar series, in which we present independent research in key policy areas to potential users in government, politics, the media, and the private and voluntary sectors. We see such events as an opportunity to further establish dialogue with the users of our research and welcome any subsequent contact.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Ian Diamond'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'I' and 'D'.

Professor Ian Diamond
Chief Executive
Economic and Social Research Council

Why do people give to charity –
and why don't others?

How do we encourage more giving?

The researchers

DR SALLY HIBBERT BA PhD is a senior lecturer in marketing at Nottingham University Business School, where she focuses on motivation and consumer choice/decision making in service sectors and in both non-profit and commercial areas. Along with donor behaviour (charity marketing), her particular research interests are consumer shopping behaviour (retailing), ethical consumption and disadvantaged/low-income consumer groups. At present, she is working on projects on young people's experiences of disadvantage in consumer society and consumer disposal of durable goods. (Co-authors: *Andreas Chatzidakis and Andrew Smith, Nottingham University Business School*).

DR TOM FARSIDES BA MSc PhD is a social psychology lecturer at the University of Sussex. His principal research interest is factors which facilitate or inhibit 'positive other-regard'. This includes activism, altruism, campaigning, charity, citizenship, consideration, courtesy, donating (e.g., blood, organs), helping, prejudice-reduction, volunteering, and a variety of other pro-social behaviours. Previous research he conducted on behalf of NCVO resulted in a 1999 report 'Attitudes towards charitable giving: Some focus group results.'



Executive Summary

Introduction


Recent years have brought a number of initiatives such as Gift Aid and the Giving Campaign, the aims of which were to contribute to a culture of giving (and giving tax effectively) in the UK. But why is it that whilst some people support charities, others do not? So far, there have been relatively few attempts to find out.

Certainly, the massive response to emergency appeals such as the Tsunami disaster suggest that there are many more people out there who do feel that they should help others. Yet survey data clearly demonstrates that a great deal of giving potential lays dormant much of the time. For the charity sector as a whole to tap into this vast resource, we need to build detailed understanding of the thought and emotional processes involved.

This booklet looks at what motivates people to make charitable donations and why some decide giving is not for them. It goes on to consider what else charities and policy makers might do to encourage more people to give, and to give more.

Key insights and implications

- Giving to charity is seen as a positive social or ethical thing to do. It is generally accepted that helping often has an element of reward as well as altruism. These rewards include economic, social and emotional benefits.
- A variety of psychological conditions and processes may underlie the decision *not* to give. Some non-givers may not hold the core value that we should help other people; some may feel that giving to charity is not the right way to help.
- There are sector-wide problems such as lack of trust in charities, and certain methods of fundraising may be putting off donors.
- Amongst those who express negative attitudes, there may be some who genuinely believe these arguments, but there may be others for whom it is a means of excusing their own lack of support.
- In contrast, whilst a large proportion of non-givers no doubt share the positive attitudes of donors, they do not behave accordingly.
- Charities may be able to tap into new and different sources of funds if they can understand how donors rationalise 'not giving' to their particular cause. Dr Sally Hibbert says the techniques of neutralisation may be used by non-donors to try to justify their attitudes, or to cope with feelings of guilt and threats to self-esteem when their actions appear at odds with their true attitudes and values. The big challenge for charities and policy makers is to find acceptable ways of countering these techniques, though research is needed first.
- Dr Tom Farsides says charities have a choice of offering to satisfy people's selfish or altruistic goals, or both, by fostering 'exchange' or 'communal' relationships with donors. Broadly, these appear to be mutually exclusive.
- Trying to meet selfish goals involves negotiating an exchange relationship, in which charities offer deals that satisfy potential donors' desires: "You give us what we want (your money, time, blood, etc.) and we'll give you what you want (a magazine, a trek to Peru, admiration, etc.)".

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- Where they offer exchange relationships, charities are likely to treat themselves as businesses, hire expensive staff if 'the bottom line' justifies it, and design marketing strategies for attracting revenue on much the same basis.
 - There are, however, several limitations. Both sides know it is a buyers' market, so charities are under pressure to invest in customer loyalty, while donors can walk away at any time. Even when they stay, donors are likely to remain suspicious and constantly on the alert for evidence that charities are 'taking advantage' or 'neglecting' their needs.
 - The alternative – a communal relationship – is where people's motives tend to be more altruistic. Where people *want* to help others, they tend to seek such relationships with charities that share their aims and make it possible to achieve their common goals.
 - Because they care, committed donors may be critical of apparent mistakes and transgressions by charities and their officials, especially when they impact negatively on those everyone is trying to help. But, also because they care, they are relatively unlikely to abandon their support of an organisation 'doing its best'.
 - Whereas donors in exchange relationships worry about 'getting a raw deal', those in communal ones are more likely to be concerned about aggressive techniques. They may see these methods as a warning that the relationship or goals are not as communal as they thought.
 - Charities would do well to foster altruism as well as communal relations among their supporters, acknowledging that people have many reasons for doing what they do and that these change over time, place, and situation, etc. They can also point out to their donors the many benefits of giving.
 - Nevertheless, fundraisers should take every opportunity they can to indicate that at least part of the reason their supporters do what they do is that they genuinely want to help others.
 - Organisations do not have to stop giving things of value to their supporters, such as free parachute jumps or even praise and esteem. All that is needed is to make clear that these are not bribes but expressions of thanks and acknowledgements of selflessness on the part of donors.
 - Organisations must be clear that helping their intended beneficiaries is their primary goal, and that everything they do is intended to further this aim. Where charities' actions might be seen in another light, they need to convey the truth as they see it to all interested parties.
 - Appearing to coerce donors and treat people solely as a means to an end – however worthy that end – could be perceived as neither altruistic nor communal. Aggressively competing with other charities for support is likely to be seen in a similar way.
 - When charities present themselves as communal and altruistic, but then appear selfish and duplicitous, they are likely seriously to undermine altruism and commitment to giving generally. Most people want to help others, and charities might do well to offer them that opportunity – and present it as such.
 - Unless ways can be found to open new 'markets', recruiting and holding onto donors is likely to be a zero-sum game, in that one charity can increase support only by another losing an equivalent amount. This may lead to competition for 'business' between 'rival' charities which, along with doing nothing to extend the pool of donors, is again likely to be self-defeating in undermining the appeal of the whole charity sector.

Giving today – the facts

According to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), two-thirds of adults in the UK give to charity, contributing to a total in 2003 alone of £7.1 billion.

Since 1994, the NCVO, recently in partnership with the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), has been monitoring charitable giving through a quarterly survey.

The 2003 survey showed the first recorded fall in charitable giving since 1997. As the NCVO points out, however, it is probably too early to talk about a long-term decline.

In 2003, the 'participation rate' stood at 65.8 per cent, slightly less than the 67.3 per cent of the previous year, suggesting that the proportion of people giving remained relatively stable. The average monthly donation was £12.32 – down from £13.89 in 2002.

Women give more than men. Their average monthly donation in 2003 was £13.55 compared with £10.81 for men. Women are also more likely to give in the first place (70.7 per cent compared with 60.1 per cent). People in the 16-24 age group are less likely to give, and when they do, the amount is smaller than that donated by their elders. The size of average donations and inclination to give decrease in order of socio-economic groups.

A small proportion of the population gives more than £50 per month, although this proportion fell from 5.1 per cent in 2002 to 4.7 per cent in 2003. Even so, they contributed well over half of the total amount donated (55.9 per cent).

“Help! Who?... Me?”:

Sally Hibbert on understanding why people do not give to charity

First, why do we give?

At the broadest level, giving is a positive social or ethical thing to do. However, most research into why people do it looks at helping in its widest sense, and supporting charitable organisations in particular:

Perhaps the key debate centres on whether giving is driven by altruism or self-centred motives.

Understanding and sharing the feelings of others, which comes from being altruistic, makes us want to lessen the distress of the victim. In contrast, selfish motives drive people into helping reduce their own pain rather than the suffering of others.

However, it is generally accepted that helping often has an element of reward as well as altruism.

Rewards

According to research, the rewards people seek include economic, social and emotional benefits.

Economic reasons, notably in the United States, are: tax advantages and enhancing career prospects. Social and emotional rewards include public recognition, expecting a return gesture, the satisfaction of showing gratitude for one’s own well-being, self-esteem, feeling good about oneself and relief from a sense of guilt and obligation. Whilst many of these motives are positive, not giving brings feelings of guilt and threats to self-esteem, highlighted in what is called the theory of ‘negative state relief’.



So why do some decide *not* to give?

Could it be that, for some, motives for helping others are absent or at least very weak? Or do people find other ways of helping more rewarding?

It is likely that both explanations apply in some cases.

Theories developed for charity marketing, provide insights into who gives and why, and how they decide which charity to support and how much to offer. But there is little understanding of people who fail to donate.

Studies which include a look at non-donors, identify several barriers to giving, but nothing to suggest any lack of informed, systematic decision-making on their part.

Making a decision

So let us explore how non-donors decide whether it is 'right' to give, the way they rationalise not doing so, and how they cope with feeling guilty and threats to their self-esteem when attitudes and intentions are not matched by deeds.

It is often assumed that they go through the same process as donors, but simply decide against in the end.

There may, indeed, be some who consider requests individually, and every time find a reason not to contribute. However, with the rate at which requests come, it is fair to speculate that most have simply settled into a habit of not giving.

People differ on whether the duty of care for 'good causes' lies with charities, the Government or individuals.

The pattern is likely to resemble what we find in other areas of ethical consumer behaviour, such as recycling and honesty in the marketplace.

People who are keener on helping others in general, give to a wider range of charities. Those with a favourable view of charities not only support a wide range – but also give more money overall.


Attitudes to helping are strongly grounded in personal values and norms. When it comes to charities, however, views are more specific, based on how well people know the organisation, and any experiences of them.

People differ on whether the duty of care for 'good causes' lies with charities, the Government or individuals. Some are not sure whether charities are the right intermediaries between donors and beneficiaries, and effective in raising awareness of the recipients and improving their lot.

People also have opinions on charity 'business models', such as whether they offer 'a hand-up or a hand-out'.

Trust

Increasingly important in recent years is the issue of 'trust'. Media stories of charity scandals have taken their toll in the UK and abroad, and there is widespread concern about ineffectiveness, inefficiency and mismanagement by administrators and trustees.



Sadly, concerns are exacerbated by misconceptions and inaccurate judgements, and they are difficult to deal with as it is unclear where people gather their information. A study by the CAF found that donors thought the split between funding and administration was around 50:50 when, in fact, the average figure for administration costs amongst the top 500 UK charities is around seven per cent.

Steps have been taken to boost trust in charities through greater transparency and accountability, but challenges remain due to the intangibility of their services and difficulty in quantifying both inputs, such as voluntary labour, and outputs, such as what things are like for the beneficiaries.

Fundraising methods

Research in 1997 found that attitudes to ways of fundraising affect giving. People did not like intrusive methods such as telefundraising or the use of for-profit enterprises, such as when outside agencies are contracted to do door-to-door collections.

Similarly, it has been discovered that a reason why donations from face-to-face fundraising lapsed was that people felt pressured into giving.

Competitive pressures on charities and reports on effective fundraising have driven them towards ever-stronger forms of persuasion. We have seen huge growth in advertising, direct marketing and face-to-face requests – and a perception that there is a Big Issue seller on every corner.

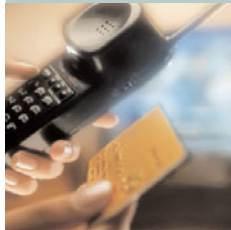
These methods may have helped individual charities meet targets, but this constant bombardment may actually have led potential donors to resist.

In 1998, it was found that when consumers have difficult choices they sometimes avoid making a decision at all because of the stress of the challenge. It may be that people faced with a wide range of charity appeals similarly find it too difficult to make the choice, so they decide not to give.

Perhaps this is why people give so readily to disaster appeals and events such as Children in Need – it is an easy decision.

All this suggests that non-giving may be partly down to negative attitudes towards helping others generally, and to charities. But really, it is hard to imagine that the values and attitudes of most non-donors are totally opposite from those who give, and that they think giving is wrong.

We would expect potential donors to worry about their self-esteem, and to want to avoid feeling guilty. But most theories fail to explain how they cope with acting contrary to their natural feelings and values.



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Understanding non-giving through 'neutralisation'

Though it sounds like something from science fiction or warfare, neutralisation is actually a theory which helps us understand how people soften or eliminate the effects on self-esteem and relationships with others when they act differently from expected.

It is particularly useful where the main aim is maintaining confidence in one's own worth rather than making a valid moral or ethical judgement.

In 1957, Sykes and Matza published their seminal article on juvenile delinquency. They suggested that rather than learning moral imperatives, values or attitudes completely contrary to those of society, delinquents discover techniques which can insulate them from self-blame and the condemnation of others.

The five techniques, as adapted by Strutton et al. (1994) in a consumer context, are:

- 1) **DENIAL OF RESPONSIBILITY:** Someone argues that they are not personally accountable for their behaviour because factors beyond their control were operating; e.g. "I don't have enough money to give to charity".
- 2) **DENIAL OF INJURY:** The contention that personal misconduct is not really serious because no party directly suffered because of it. In the case of positive ethical behaviour such as recycling or charitable giving, this device appears as Denial of Benefit; e.g. "All the charity work that has been done in Africa hasn't made any difference, there are still millions of people starving".
- 3) **DENIAL OF VICTIM:** The blame for personal actions is countered by arguing that the violated party deserved whatever happened; e.g. "There is no need for anyone to be homeless, there are plenty of jobs around".
- 4) **CONDEMNING THE CONDEMNERS:** Accusations of misconduct are deflected by pointing out that those who would condemn engage in similarly disapproved activities; e.g. "What right do pop stars have to ask us to give? They should give some of their millions".
- 5) **APPEAL TO HIGHER LOYALTIES:** The argument that not following the normal pattern is acting out some higher order ideal or value; e.g. "My priority is to look after my family... charity begins at home".

This theory has been applied to the marketplace, but research remains very limited. Its usefulness is recognised, but there have been few attempts to examine it carefully alongside theories on ethical consumer behaviour, covering things such as recycling, buying Fair Trade or charitable giving.

How neutralisation works

Using neutralisation, people can ease potential conflicts and feelings of guilt at any point in the decision-making process.

At the outset, they will see the moral dimension involved in giving to charity. But in making a moral judgement, how far they think it acceptable, if not right, to go against what is expected, will be influenced by their ability to use the techniques.

Examples

- Arguments about whether it is an individual's responsibility to help, rather than the Government, older people or others with more money, might well come into play – a technique known as 'denial of responsibility'.
- Other devices used might involve the image and trust of charities – their inefficiency, ineffectiveness and mismanagement, or the methods they use for fundraising.
- Someone may feel it is good to give to charity, but be unwilling to sacrifice the money to make a donation. By arguing that "the amount that I can afford to give won't make any difference" they can avoid awkwardness or feelings of guilt.
- Another may intend to arrange an event for, say, Children in Need, but no one else in their organisation is doing anything, and they might feel embarrassed or lack the confidence that colleagues will lend support. By attributing responsibility to others and claiming that "no one else is doing it" they can guard against remorse or shame, and make it easier not to act on their previous intentions.

Where people are morally in favour of giving, being able to 'neutralise' makes it more likely that they will give in to ways of avoiding it.

Actually not giving might lead them to use these techniques after the event. And if using them works, this will affect future decisions on whether or not to support charities, and make people less likely to acknowledge the moral dimension.

These arguments are based on previous research into charitable giving and ethical consumer behaviour, but remain to be substantiated through research. We need to find out:

Do people have ways of thinking things through which excuse them from any giving, or do they use different techniques each time?

How elaborate and accurate are their arguments?

Do young people use different reasoning from middle-aged people, or women use different techniques from men? Do those with more commitment to helping others use neutralisation to rationalise their failure to give. And do those with less commitment use it to rationalise why they do not establish any intention of giving?



Tom Farsides on the psychological factors at play

“How we can help” rather than “Give us your money.”:

An alternative perspective on increasing charitable giving.

Understanding motivations

Just as various people may have different reasons for acting in a certain way, an individual may behave in the same way for a variety of reasons on separate occasions. Therefore, attempts to identify the key reasons for giving are unlikely to succeed.

To the extent it is thought desirable for a charitable organisation to know what motivates people to give, it will be in its interests to look at its own donors – actual and potential – recognising that they are likely to differ from person to person, between situations, and across time.

If the charity can identify relatively stable and widespread motives among existing donors, the benefits of giving may be tailored to those needs in the hope of enhancing people's motivation to keep up or increase their support.

Similarly, where relatively common motives for giving can be picked out among potential donors, the charity can design recruitment and induction packages aimed at attracting and retaining new benefactors.

Finally, where it can be seen that reasons for giving alter in particular ways over time or experience, potentially, procedures can be introduced to track those changes and keep donors satisfied throughout.

What satisfies donors?

To try to answer to this question, it will help to reduce the huge number of possibilities to just two. Taking a deep breath, let us call these ‘altruistic’ and ‘selfish’.


Two women may want to buy a copy of *The Big Issue*. One is altruistically motivated to give money to improve the welfare of homeless people. The other is selfishly motivated by a desire to read an article headlining the front-page. At this stage, each needs to give money to a *Big Issue* vendor. However, each comes across a copy of the latest edition discarded on the bus. The motive of the first woman is not satisfied; the motive of the latter woman is. Giving money to help the homeless was *necessary* to satisfy the first woman's motive, but only a means to an end for the other.

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What can charities offer?

Charities can offer to satisfy people's selfish or altruistic goals, or both.

Trying to meet selfish ones involves negotiating an ‘exchange relationship’: “You give us what we want (your money, time, blood, etc.) and we'll give you what you want (a magazine, a trek to Peru, admiration, etc.)”.



Here, charities treat potential benefactors as consumers or customers. Each side tries to 'make a profit' by 'buying low and selling high', especially when dealing with commodities valued by both parties – money or material goods.

Charities offering exchange relationships are likely to treat themselves as businesses, hire expensive staff if 'the bottom line' justifies it, and design strategies for attracting revenue on much the same basis. They adopt marketing strategies such as:

- Consumer research (“What can we sell to whom at what profit?”);
- Market segmentation (“How can we best sell to different groups of customers?”);
- Balancing the costs of keeping existing donors with those of attracting new donors (“Should we focus on fostering client loyalty or extending our client base?”);
- Measures to improve the distinctive character and attraction of the charity, and what it does relative to the nature and activities of others (“How can we brand our products to increase our visibility and take some of the market share from our main competitors?”).

It is possible to try to satisfy donors' altruistic goals via exchange relationships.

Here, what is on offer is a particular result – improving the welfare of those the donors wish to see helped.

Importantly, organisations offering such 'deals' may be perceived as not sharing the donors' altruistic goals. Donors may suspect that charities' professional fundraisers are more concerned with meeting targets, and their CEOs with getting on the Honours List, than trying to improve the welfare of the supposed intended beneficiaries.

In some cases, altruistic donors will exchange resources with charities that seem to offer the best 'deal' for the *beneficiaries*, but they will tend to prefer communal relationships with the organisations they support.

Each party in a communal relationship wants for the other what they want for themselves. Where people *want* to help others, they tend to seek communal relationships with charities which share their aims and make it possible to achieve their common goals. For charities in these relationships, the goals of their supporters are of paramount importance. The charities' *raison d'être* are identical with those goals.

Where people want to help others, they tend to seek communal relationships with charities which share their aims and make it possible to achieve their common goals.

'Supporters' is a much better word than 'customers' for donors in these relationships. They believe that the charities they favour share their ambitions and they want to support them in furthering their common aims.

Rather than providing market goods, charities in these cases facilitate common ventures. They treat donors as colleagues rather than as customers: as a resource to be nurtured rather than 'exploited'.

Fundraisers have a choice. Where the type of charity and the field they operate in make exchange relationships sustainable, they can offer and accept them.

Where such arrangements are not supported, or cannot be kept up, charities can offer and accept communal relationships.

Limitations of exchange relationships

There are several limitations to exchange relationships.

IT'S A BUYERS' MARKET. There is a finite pool of potential donors, but there are many, many places for them to 'shop'. Whether a charity offers a T-shirt, a place in the New York marathon, an outside chance of winning a lottery, or a way of feeling good about oneself for 'doing one's bit', it is likely there are at least several others with very similar – or even more attractive – deals. Donors hold all the 'purchasing power.' They can stop 'buying' from a particular source at will, for any reason and at any time. When they do so, they also have almost complete freedom to 'buy' from a different charitable 'supplier' or simply to stop 'shopping' altogether.

DONORS' MOTIVES CAN BE FICKLE. People who donate only when it is in their own perceived best interest may get bored of their current 'shopping' patterns. Their desires may change. They may take offence at the attitude or conduct of the charity they are 'buying' from. Or they may get carried away with a new fashion encouraging 'shopping' elsewhere or on something else.

EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS ARE OFTEN COLD AND COMPETITIVE. If charities can get the same 'return' on lower investments, or a better return for the same resources used elsewhere, customers expecting the same 'good deals' to continue had better watch out. Will charities care about how any changes will affect the costs of existing 'regular customers'? Only insofar as they worry about long-term or unpredicted effects on their 'profit' margin.

Fair's fair, though. If donors can improve their own yield-to-investment ratio, they will be similarly tempted to care little about the effects on their former "business partners".

Both sides know it is a buyers' market, so charities are under pressure to invest in customer loyalty, while donors can walk away at any time. Even when they stay, donors are likely to remain suspicious and constantly on the alert for evidence that charities are 'taking advantage' or 'neglecting' their needs.

DONORS CAN BE INTOLERANT. Donors can afford to have high expectations of the charities they 'trade' with. Any sign that they are 'buying' a shoddy 'product' – perhaps from a 'disreputable dealer' – and they can terminate the agreement in an instant.

AGGRESSIVE SALES TECHNIQUES CAN BACKFIRE. Buyers not only want freedom to make their own choice of 'purchases,' they demand it. High-pressure 'sales' techniques may be effective for as long as it is in the buyers' interests to pay to be left alone, but often not much longer. Donors may pay 'protection money' to escape from the street-collector and the doorstep campaigner, just as they may buy temporary release from the sense of guilt or duty elicited by poignant begging letters or posters. However, they are unlikely to do so graciously or happily. Once the immediate pressure is off, they are likely to try to escape from such distressing situations.

DONORS CAN BE EVASIVE. Donors wanting exchange relationships are happy so long as they work in their favour. But if the cost of 'giving' appears too high, they have a range of effective ways of avoiding them or disengaging.

Pros and cons of communal relationships

While the motives of people in exchange relationships tend to be selfish, those in communal arrangements are more likely to be altruistic. So long as these relationships and motives stay strong, donors are considerably less susceptible to market forces. They are committed to the goals of the charities they support, and tend to remain loyal as long as satisfactory progress continues, even at some cost to themselves.

Because they care, however, committed donors may be critical of apparent mistakes and transgressions by charities and their officials, especially when they impact negatively on those everyone is trying to help. However, also because they care, they will be relatively unlikely to abandon their support of an organisation 'doing its best'. Whereas a 'hard sell' will cause donors in exchange relationships to worry about 'getting a raw deal', for communal donors such methods may warn that their relationships or goals may not be as communal as they had hoped.

Communal donors may fear that the charity is in fact offering an exchange relationship, and is trying to exploit its supporters to its own ends, perhaps *not* focused on improving the welfare of those in need. However, if charities can 'justify' such strategies as compatible with both communal relationships and goals, fears will be allayed and support will continue unabated.

Perils of using the wrong approach

Broadly, exchange and communal relationships appear to be mutually exclusive.

So using the communal approach on someone with an exchange mentality will probably be met with suspicion and potentially offence. "What's in it for me?" is the most likely response.

Equally, offering an exchange deal to someone who has a communal view of giving will probably be met by offence and potentially suspicion. Here, the most likely response is "I thought we were working together on this."

Using the wrong language makes people worry about hidden agendas and fear that the other party is trying to take advantage of them.



Fostering altruism

Arguably, individual charities and the charitable sector as a whole would benefit from fostering both altruistic motives and communal relationships. Not only would this promote more committed donors, but the sector as a whole would be less likely to be thought of as full of self-interested, rather grubby, businesses, operating in the interests of their 'shareholders' rather than the supposed beneficiaries.

Empathy, commonality, and responsibility can each help connect donors' own psychological well-being with their perceptions about the welfare of others.

Empathy

There are several ways of creating or enhancing empathy. One of the most reliable is known as 'perspective taking'.

In 1991, Warren and Walker failed in their attempts to increase charitable giving by encouraging empathy with needy people. This may well have been in part because they encouraged potential donors to picture themselves in the others' situation, rather than imagining how they felt. Even so, if someone can be encouraged to see things from the point of view of a person in need, and he or she is in a position to help, they are likely to do so even at considerable costs to themselves. This is one of the most robust findings in experimental social psychology.

Commonality

Fostering commonality between people can lead each to want to improve the welfare of the others. Leaving aside intense debates and complicating factors, the idea here is that people can come to think of themselves as members of a common group and care about each other *because* they all care about the group.

Perhaps the best way to foster enduring and broad altruism is to encourage people to think of themselves as 'the sort of people who care about the welfare of others and who will help them in given circumstances'.

Responsibility

One individual may feel directly responsible for another because of, say, a relationship between them. But this can also happen indirectly, when people feel psychologically devoted to groups, organisations or moral, political or religious ideals which steer them towards certain other people.

Fostering altruistic donors

Everyone feels altruistic sometimes. However, the occasional reaction to a major appeal such as for the recent tsunami, is of limited use. Charities benefit in direct proportion to how often donors feel altruistic towards them or those they serve, how strongly they feel it, and how effectively they turn inclinations into actions.

Perhaps the best way to foster enduring and broad altruism is to encourage people to think of themselves as 'the sort of people who care about the welfare of others and who will help them in given circumstances'.

Certain charities might think it in their own best interest to encourage caring about themselves or those they serve. However, an altruistic personality usually develops best when people help an increasing number of others and are less and less discriminatory.

Some people, however unknowingly and unintentionally, are simply hypocrites: preaching the virtues of altruism but helping others only when they perceive it to be in their own best interest to do so.

For others, selfless attitudes are genuinely there, but not yet part of how they see themselves. This altruism can be strengthened by encouraging them to examine and think about the reasons for their attitudes, particularly when there is lots of evidence that they have not been helping others merely due to strong outside pressure. Done successfully, this will help 'protect' people against future accusations of selfishness, or pressures to act in a non-altruistic way.



Further Information

The full papers presented at the Giving seminar held at the NCVO in London on June 24, 2005, including full details of academic references, are available on the ESRC Society Today website at: www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk or from the authors:

Building Understanding of Non-Donors: An Application of Neutralisation

Sally.Hibbert@nottingham.ac.uk

“How can we help?” rather than “Give us your money.”

An Alternative Perspective on Increasing Charitable Giving

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It represents the views of the voluntary sector to policy makers and government and consults with the sector to inform our policy positions on issues generic to the sector. It also carries out in-depth research to promote a better understanding of the sector and its activities.

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