



The donor-centred baby and the community- centric bathwater

Is an accord between the two philosophies possible?

● ETHICS/RELATIONSHIP FUNDRAISING

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Foreword



Ian MacQuillin

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Four years ago, Rogare published a four-volume review of the theory underpinning relationship fundraising,¹ in which we looked at how relationship fundraising could be ‘refashioned’, or refashion itself. Now that refashioning is being taken out of donor-centred fundraisers’ hands and is being forced on them by a new movement on the block – community-centric fundraising.

Many donor-centred fundraisers have not taken too kindly to this. And that’s not surprising. Donor-centred fundraising is more than just professional best practice. It goes to the heart of how many fundraisers identify themselves professionally: they are not just fundraisers who do donor-centred fundraising; they *are* donor-centred fundraisers.

That’s why criticism of how they do fundraising is perceived as more than this; it is criticism of who they are and the choices they have made.

But there is plenty of common ground between the two philosophies. This paper looks at whether there is enough common ground for an accord to be struck between the two, for them to learn from each other, and what might emerge from such a dialectic.

This is a green paper. That means it’s a discussion paper. In this paper I am looking to open up some new ideas and avenues for discussion. But it is not a white paper, a policy paper. Little here represents hard and fast ideas over which I’d die on a hillside, and if it engenders the critical debate we need on this subject, many of the kites flown in this paper

may get ripped to shreds in that debate. But at least the kites are in the air.

Also, as this is a discussion paper that has been produced very quickly, I have not had time to comprehensively review all the literature, writing and ideas on this topic, and so it is possible I have left out some ideas and some authors I ought to have included, or that I have misrepresented some of the authors I have included, for which I apologise. Had this been a white paper, I’d have taken more time.

While I have tried my best to fairly, but robustly, represent both positions in this clash of philosophies, I am sure there will be people on both sides who will think I have failed in that, and if that is so, then I apologise in advance.

Thanks to Cherian Koshy, Ashley Scott, Heather Hill, Craig Linton and Neil Galliaford, who read drafts of this paper and gave me their thoughts and comments, many of which I have taken on board. Of course, any errors or omissions in this paper are mine and mine alone, as is the responsibility for ruffling feathers, if feathers are indeed ruffled (which is not my intention).

Oh, and one minor point of terminology: donor-centred fundraising has never been known by the initials DCF, but for editorial variation and to avoid writing out the term in full every time it is used (which is legion), I’ve employed that acronym in this paper. As they say, ask for forgiveness rather than permission. 🍷

¹ <https://www.rogare.net/relationship-fundraising>

Executive summary

Donor-centred fundraising (DCF) is the dominant philosophy of fundraising within the English-speaking profession (and beyond). But DCF is facing an existential challenge from the ideas of the new community-centric fundraising (CCF) movement (s1).

The defence of DCF has proceeded on the assumption that CCF is being proposed as a better form of fundraising (i.e. more effective at raising money from donors).

This defence rests of four planks (s2):

1. Donor-centred fundraising works
2. There are no better alternatives to it
3. There are no – or at least few – serious problems with donor-centred fundraising
4. People who promote alternatives therefore don't understand what donor-centred fundraising is.

However, there are inherent problems with DCF, such as the potential to facilitate donor dominance, mission creep and unbalanced regulation (2.3), even before we consider CCF's challenges. These include allegations that DCF(s3):

- Perpetuates white saviourism
- Marginalises, 'others' and crowds out the voices of the communities charities claim to serve
- Gets in the way of having honest conversations with donors and building "true" partnerships, and in so doing "short-changes" donors out of having the best and most authentic relationships they could have with charities
- Fuels systematic injustice.

These criticisms are not simply criticisms of how DCF works in practice, but a critique of the entire system of philanthropy, of which fundraising is a part.

Rather than put itself forward as a challenger to DCF in how best to engage donors, CCF wants to radically change this system, and thus fundraising's role within it, so that both philanthropy and fundraising become "co-grounded in racial and economic justice" (s3).

The clash of community-centric vs donor-centred approaches is therefore not so much a clash of alternative fundraising approaches that can be settled by presenting argument, evidence and theory in support of one or the other, but a clash of ideologies about the purpose of philanthropy, and fundraising's role within that (s3).

However, there is sufficient common ground between the two philosophies (ss4 and 6), to enable a dialectic that could result in new ethical (s5) and practical (s7) approaches to fundraising.

For example, CCF values the contribution that donors make, and wants to build meaningful and authentic relationships with them (s6). One example of this could be to develop shared identities between donors and the communities they support – Identity Theory already being promoted as the next step in the development of donor-centred fundraising.

Two possible new directions are integrated (or integrative) fundraising and total relationship fundraising (s7).

Integrated/integrative fundraising (IFR) would integrate donors into beneficiary-focused organisations by connecting beneficiaries with the donors who can help them. Such an approach could lead to more meaningful relationships with donors in which fundraisers could have the "tough conversations" with donors about their giving choices that CCF calls for.

Total relationship fundraising (TRF) would seek to build relationships with all stakeholders across the community who may be affected by fundraisers' actions and decisions, relationships that would be grounded in an ethical consciousness of those stakeholders: consciousness of their race, their gender, their economic circumstances.

So rather than view CCF as an assault on its core principles, DCF can use the CCF critique as a platform on which to reinvent itself, by incorporating some of CCF's more direct challenges and criticisms (s8). ●

1

Introduction

In July 2020, Tom Ahern – the champion of donor-centred copywriting – announced on Twitter² that he was dropping the term ‘donor-centred’ from his professional vocabulary (Ahern 2020). If someone like Tom Ahern has decided to make this change, you know he must have encountered a pretty serious and compelling challenge to its use.

That challenge has come from the ‘community-centric’ fundraising (CCF) movement,³ which has sprung up in Seattle, inspired by the thinking of nonprofit thought leader Vu Le, who has written a number of blogs that have challenged the very core contention of the whole donor-centred enterprise (Le 2015, 2017, 2017/20).

Donor-centred fundraising is the dominant philosophy of professional fundraising in anglophone culture (MacQuillin and Sargeant 2016; Linton and Stein 2017, pp36-37; Koshy 2019), and has been exported by British and American fundraising experts and gurus to many non-English speaking countries, such as Japan and China, via their national conferences.

In a nutshell, donor-centred fundraising means focusing on delivering donors’ needs and making them feel good about their giving, because by doing so, they will give more over a longer period of time.

Donor-centred fundraising (DCF) as originally conceived was a corrective to the type of fundraising

“In the 80s and 90s, too much fundraising was littered with impenetrable statistics, dull organisational objectives, and photos of the chief executive. It didn’t inspire. But focusing on how the donor could make a difference to identifiable beneficiaries does inspire them to give and makes them feel good about it too. It seems like a perfect win-win.”

that focused on what organisations did, and was thus organisation-centric.⁴ In the 80s and 90s, too much fundraising was littered with impenetrable statistics, dull organisational objectives, and photos of the chief executive. It didn’t inspire.

But focusing on how the donor could make a difference to identifiable beneficiaries does inspire them to give and makes them feel good about it too. It seems like a perfect win-win.

Donor-centred fundraising that focused on building enduring and sustainable relationships with donors was also seen as a corrective to ‘transactional’ fundraising that focused on getting single gifts before moving on to the next donor in a churn and burn technique, in both direct marketing (Burnett 2002, p38), and major gift fundraising (Grace and

2 <https://twitter.com/thattomahern/status/1286005896787693570> – accessed 29 July 2020.

3 <https://communitycentricfundraising.org> – accessed 29 July 2020.

4 There are many sources of the perils of organisation-centred fundraising, particularly the writings of Jeff Brooks on his *Future Fundraising Now* blog, while Adrian Sargeant’s presentations on relationship fundraising contain many examples. See also the Commission on the Donor Experience’s report on the use and misuse of language (Macrae and Washington-Sare 2017).



Tom Ahern (left), champion of donor-centred copy-writing, has told the world he will drop the term from his professional vocabulary.

Wendroff 2001, p14). Which seems pretty sensible.⁵

This philosophy of fundraising is now so deeply embedded in professional practice that it has become the almost-unchallenged fundraising orthodoxy, and any attempt to challenge it is often – and perhaps usually – perceived as heresy, and we all know how orthodoxies react to heretics.

One might even call donorcentrism an ideology (MacQuillin 2017b).

Viewed from the perspective of this dominant professional philosophy/ideology, community-centric fundraising is just another heresy, and its proponents treated as heretics: they are “non-fundraisers” (an ad hominem argument, and in the case of CCF, most of them *are* fundraisers) who “don’t understand” what donorcentricity is, and are “triggered” by the term.⁶

There is a knee-jerk rejection of community-centric ideas, and little engagement with or critical reflection on its objections to DCF, though it must be said not every donor-centred fundraiser objects to the CCF challenges (e.g. Sargent 2015).

The defence of donor-centred fundraising seems to rest on four key planks:

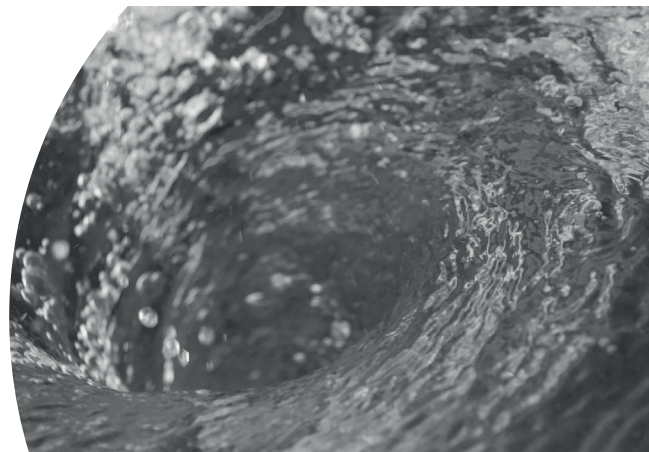
1. It works
2. There are no better alternatives
3. There are no – or at least few – serious problems with donor-centred fundraising
4. People who promote alternatives therefore don’t understand what donor-centred fundraising is.

So let’s examine this defence in a bit more depth (s2) before looking in more detail about what community-centric fundraising’s objections to it really are (s3). 6

“Viewed from the perspective of donorcentricity as the dominant professional philosophy/ideology, community-centric fundraising is just another heresy, and its proponents treated as heretics.”

5 But also, let’s not forget, donor-centred relationship fundraising was also viewed as an antidote to increased professionalism in fundraising (Burnett 2002, p2).

6 Arguments and phrases used on Twitter in July 2020.



2

The defence of donor-centred fundraising

2.1 It works

Yes it does. No-one seriously disputes this. The research shows this, especially the work done by Adrian Sargeant and Jen Shang (e.g. Sargeant 2018a, 2018b; Shang, Sargeant, Carpenter and Day 2018), even though the theory underpinning it may have been ill-defined for a good part of DCF's existence (Sargeant 2016; Sargeant, MacQuillin and Shang 2016), and fundraisers would like more robust tools and metrics by which to measure relationship fundraising's success (MacQuillin 2016a, p22-24).

The community-centric movement does not dispute the efficacy of donor-centred fundraising (Le 2017/2020). But that is not their objection to it, as we shall see in s3.

2.1 There are no better alternatives

None that we've yet found, if the purposes of fundraising are conceived as:

- a) Raising most money from donors to help beneficiaries
- b) Making donors feel good about themselves through their giving
- c) Both.

The donor-centred critique of the community-centric approach often proceeds on the basis that it is an alternative to donor-centred fundraising, but has

fundamental problems that mean it will be a less effective way of fundraising. Tom Ahern (2020) writes that since most people will never give to your charity, fundraising's core problem is "apathy, inertia, unwillingness to act at the moment when the ask is made". Ahern (ibid) adds: "'Community-centricity' does not address that problem. 'Community-centricity' will not cure that problem."

This is a critique that says CCF will not be able to do as effectively and efficiently what DCF currently does.

It seems obvious (at least it does to me) that the whole raison d'être of fundraising is to maximise voluntary income to help beneficiaries. As Ahern (ibid) says: "Donorcentricity has one goal: to maximise charity income." And yet a tenet of donor-centred fundraising that is promoted, even proselytised, by many donor-centred fundraisers is that 'fundraising is not about money'⁷ – one blog is even titled: "The secret of donor-centred fundraising: no money involved" – which points to a tension, and perhaps an insecurity, at the heart of donor-centred fundraising.

However, if the purpose of fundraising is not to raise as much money as possible, much less to make donors feel good, then there could well be

⁷ See this Google search, for example – <https://bit.ly/3iuapkj>

6

"Donor-centred fundraising finds itself in the curious position that while its proponents claim DCF is not just about raising money, but is equally about how you raise that money, its main defence against the CCF critique indicting DCF for how it raises money is that DCF raises more money than CCF practices would. It's inconsistent to say the least."

6 *“Donorcentricity should have stayed at the level of best practice (because it works in raising the most money) but has been elevated to the normative idea that centring donors needs is the ethically/morally correct way to do fundraising.”*

better alternatives. It seems literally inconceivable that the purpose of fundraising could/would not be to maximise income. Yet with the ‘not just about money’ tension inherent in DCF, and the way DCF criticises how the methods of transactional fundraising make donors feel (i.e. it makes them feel bad), DCF opens up the possibility that the way in which you raise money is more important than *how* much money is raised.

DCF finds itself in the curious position that while proponents claim DCF is not just about raising money, but is equally about *how* you raise that money, its main defence against the CCF critique indicting DCF for how it raises money (see s3) is that DCF raises more money than CCF practices would. It’s inconsistent to say the least.

So maybe we should try to conceive of a different system of fundraising and philanthropy in which how you raise money is as important, or more so, than how much money is raised, which is what the CCF movement is doing, as we shall see in s3. Donor-centred fundraising is the best approach under the current system of philanthropy, but if we changed the system, that might not be the case.

2.3 There are no/few serious problems with it

Some people may say that this is a straw man argument, but I have never read a serious critique of DCF by any of its prominent proponents or adherents. There is Roger Craver’s (2017) criticism that donor-centred fundraisers regularly fail to seek feedback from donors. And Lisa Sargent (2015) considered how DCF could respond to Vu Le’s initial criticisms. But in the general absence of reflective self-criticism from within its own camp, one is led to the inference that donor-centred fundraisers see few problems with their approach.

And yet there are problems with it. One of the biggest problems is that the term refers to different things, not just best practice, and at least four different concepts of ‘donor-centred’ can be identified (MacQuillin 2017a):

- **Fundraising communications best practice** – essentially the ‘playbook’ of practices described by Penelope Burk in 2003 and the practices employed by practitioners such as Tom Ahern and Lisa Sargent.
- **A communications process** – Fundraisers need to understand donors...so they can connect them to a cause...by focusing on the cause not the organisation...and build deeper relationships with them...by using two-way communications (MacQuillin 2016a, pp12-16)
- **A theory of donor choice**
- **An ethical theory.**

And this doesn’t even incorporate the new ideas of relationship fundraising/donorcentricity 3.0 being developed by Adrian Sargeant and his team (Sargeant 2018a, 2018b).

These are different concepts with different rationales and goals, but using the same term to describe each of them leads to a conflation of the different concepts and a number of unintended negative consequences in the name of being ‘donor-centred’ (MacQuillin 2017b).

It opens the door to mission creep and donors directing how services should be done (Clohesy 2003, pp133-134) because it fulfils some kind of need in them but doesn’t necessarily meet beneficiaries’ needs (if a nonprofit hasn’t already thought about delivering the project/services the

6 *“In the general absence of reflective self-criticism from within its own camp, one is led to the inference that donor-centred fundraisers see few problems with their approach.”*

donor wants to bankroll, there’s probably a good reason for that).

It opens the door to other forms of donor dominance, whereby some donors abuse the power they hold in their relationships with fundraisers to further their own needs and ends, many of which have been explored by Heather Hill in Rogare’s work on this subject.⁸

It also opens the door to restrictive regulation – such as limiting the proportion of a donation that can be reinvested in securing future donations, or restricting how charities may contact donors and potential donors – because regulators consider it is not in the donors’ interest for fundraising be done in particular ways, irrespective of the effect this might have on beneficiaries (for example, see MacQuillin, Sargeant and Day 2019, p56-60, and MacQuillin 2019).

But more than this, it elevates what should have stayed at the level of best practice (because it works at raising the most money) to the normative idea that centring donors’ needs is the ethically/morally correct way to do fundraising (Koshy 2019).

Although fundraisers argue differently, this serves to insulate donor-centred fundraising from a continued need to demonstrate that it remains best practice: it’s not raising more money that’s important; what’s more important is how you treat your donors – this is the argument deployed against ‘transactional’ fundraising. Being donor-centred becomes an end in itself (normative ethics) rather than a descriptive means to an end of raising more money (ethical best practice, or applied ethics).

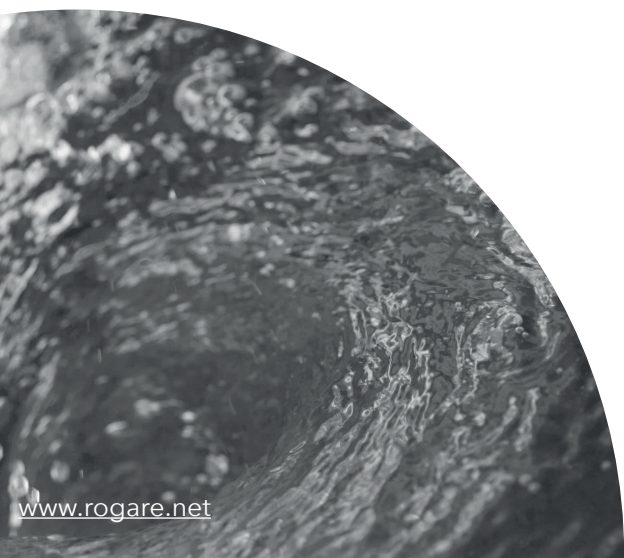
And these challenges to Donorcentrism (normative ethical theory)/donorcentricity (best practice) are evident even before we start to factor in the criticisms from community-centric fundraising, such as that it perpetuates white saviourism (of which more in s3).

2.4 Critics don’t understand it

This is a lazy and frankly unworthy ad hominem attack against people who have a different viewpoint. Those community-centric critics of donor-centred fundraising know exactly what it is and why they are making the criticisms they do.⁹ So what are they actually saying? 6

8 <https://www.rogare.net/donor-dominance> – accessed 29 July 2020.

9 As indeed do critics of donor-centred fundraising within the mainstream fundraising community.



3

The community-centric critique of donor-centred fundraising

Community-centric fundraising's founding principles (CCF 2020), along with some of Vu Le's (2017, 2017/2020) original blogs on the subject, set out some specific criticisms of donor-centred fundraising:

- Perpetuates white saviourism
- Marginalises, 'others' and crowds out the voices of the communities charities claim to serve
- Gets in the way of having honest conversations with donors and building "true" partnerships, and in so doing "short-changes" donors out of having the best and most authentic relationships they could have with charities
- Fuels systematic injustice – "By fueling our donors' egos, we unconsciously tell them it's OK, that they don't have to think about the hard stuff, about privilege, about disparities, about racism in the education and criminal justice system contributing to the wealth gap that they may be benefiting from." (Le 2017/2020.)

In defence of the donor-centred approach to fundraising, one could go through CCF's criticisms and offer a point-by-point rebuttal: you say we don't have honest conversations with donors, but here are reasons A, B and C why we do; you say we crowd out the voices of beneficiaries, but here are examples X, Y and Z where we've given them voice and agency.

Responding this way assumes that community-centric fundraising is being presented as an alternative to donor-centred fundraising as it operates in the current system of philanthropy – and calling it 'community-centric' as a deliberate analogue of donor-centric certainly does fuel such an assumption.

But that misses the whole context and foundation of the community-centric approach, because its criticisms of donorcentricity are not made in isolation from the current system of philanthropy but are embedded in it. Community-centric fundraising is not an alternative practical approach to doing fundraising as it is currently done, but a movement to fundamentally change the whole system of philanthropy.

This is how Chrissy Shimizu, director of individual giving at Seattle's Wing Luke Museum and one of the CCF movement's leaders, describes the situation in a video¹⁰ on the CCF website.

"We need to transform philanthropy in order to transform change in our communities. Fundraising and philanthropy practices are rooted in a history of exploitation and of racism and colonisation, and in order for us to actually solve the root causes of poverty and other oppressions in our country we need to completely rethink what philanthropy means and how we participate in it."

Like many social movements, such as anti-globalisation, CCF's goal is to dismantle and replace a system that it believes is illegitimate because it concentrates power in a few hands and perpetuates power imbalances and inequity (Morgan-Montoya 2020). CCF's Principle 10 in particular signals the root cause of the problem that must be addressed – the "destructive effects" caused by the entire capitalist system (CCF 2020).

It is the whole system that is to blame, and CCF's beef with donor-centred fundraising is that it is a tool of the existing system and helps to prop it up and fuel it (cf Principle 10). In a system in which, it

¹⁰ <https://communitycentricfundraising.org/ccf-movement/> - accessed 29 July 2020.

6

“CCF’s beef with donor-centred fundraising is that it is a tool of the existing system and helps to prop it up and fuel it. In a system in which philanthropists hold power from ill-gotten gains and distribute a fraction of this to make marginal corrections to the inequality the system they are part of has caused, how could a process of fundraising that sees itself as the “servant” of philanthropists be anything but such a tool?”

is claimed, philanthropists hold power from ill-gotten gains and distribute a fraction of this to make marginal corrections to the inequality the system they are part of has caused, how could a process of fundraising that not only praises donors and aims to make them feel good for doing this, but also sees its role as being the “servant” of philanthropists, whose professional practice is “justified” when it brings meaning to donors’ giving – as Hank Rosso proselytised) (Tempel 2003) – be anything but such a tool? As the American feminist activist Audre Lorde (1979/2018) said in her most well-known work, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Morgan-Montoya 2020).

And so what we have in the community-centric vs donor-centred debate is not so much a clash of alternative fundraising approaches that can be settled by presenting argument, evidence and theory in support of one or the other (the approaches laid out in s2.1 and s2.2), but a clash of ideologies about the purpose of philanthropy, and fundraising’s role within that, and ideologies are rarely amenable to factual rebuttal, let alone refutation.

CCF’s goal is to transform fundraising and philanthropy so they are “co-grounded in racial and economic justice”.¹¹

The question is which of these do they aim to transform first? Is the goal to transform philanthropy so that fundraising can then be changed to its most appropriate role within the new system? Or is the aim to first transform fundraising so that a transformed fundraising can be used as a tool to effect change in philanthropy?

If the first, and we are waiting for the whole system

to be dismantled and replaced, then there will be little common ground over which CCF and DCF can meet. They belong to two mutually-exclusive paradigms, and when the current role of philanthropy is replaced, there will be no role for its fundraising servant. Any defence of DCF then has to be made in the context of the system of which it is a part: successfully defend the current system of philanthropy and you have the basis for a defence of donor-centred fundraising within that paradigm.

However it seems more likely that CCF will attempt to transform fundraising concurrently as it seeks to transform philanthropy. In this case, community-centric fundraising will need to engage with donor-centred fundraising, to win over DCF proponents to its cause.

Also, until (and if) the current system of philanthropy is replaced, there will still be people in need of charities’ services and support, and there will still be donors and philanthropists who can help alleviate that suffering. Even though the current system of helping may be wrong (according to the CCF perspective), the problems that the system is set up to address exist all the same, and solving them can’t simply be put on hold until the new paradigm is ready to be rolled out.

So can donor-centred and community-centric fundraising work together in current philanthropic paradigm? 6

6

“Community-centric fundraising is not an alternative practical approach to doing fundraising as it is currently done, but a movement to fundamentally change the whole system of philanthropy.”

¹¹ For a paper detailing racial inequity in philanthropy, see Dorsey, Bradach and Kim (2020).

4

Can there be common ground between the two approaches?

The question we now face is whether donor-centred and community-centric fundraising can work together under the current paradigm until – and if – it is replaced by the new paradigm CCF is striving for?

Will DCF and CCF find enough mutual common ground? Will proponents of each approach be able to listen to the other, understand their perspectives, and adapt, and possibly compromise, as appropriate? This goes both ways. It doesn't necessarily mean only that donor-centred fundraisers must change what they do to accommodate criticism from CCF. CCF is a new movement and it says its principles are likely to change as it learns (CCF 2020). Perhaps some of that learning will come from engaging with donor-centred fundraising. Perhaps we could see something like a dialectical approach whereby DCF and CCF come at the issues from their own perspectives, but what emerges is a new amalgam of the two.

However, if there is to be some common ground, then it will require some compromise from the CCF side. If CCF maintains that donor-centred fundraising has no moral force or validity because it is part of an illegitimate system, then no coming together can be achieved.

But, as the previous section concluded, there is a system of philanthropy currently in place that is designed to address problems that will still exist if this system disappears. Even though one might disagree with the system, one still wants it to operate as fairly, equitably and ethically as it possibly can, within its own terms.

Take law enforcement as an example. One might argue that the criminal justice system props up a regime that perpetuates inequality and concentrates power with a privileged few. Yet given that this system does actually exist, we don't want the police running riot (metaphorically or literally) as result of us failing to establish rules that constrain their actions within the system's own terms, and encourage them to behave as well as they can.

The same consideration applies to philanthropy and fundraising. Given that this is how they are currently done, can community-centric fundraising help us to do both better unless and until (and if) this system is replaced?

Let's start by looking at whether community-centric fundraising can slot into the pantheon of theories that make up fundraising's professional ethics. ⑥

5

The ethics of community-centric fundraising

As a quick recap, these are the main theories of normative fundraising ethics (normative ethics being the types of ethics that delineate the general ethical system on which applied practical ethics are based):

Trustism

Fundraising is ethical when it maintains public trust in fundraising, and unethical when it does not.

Donorcentrism

Fundraising is ethical when it meets the needs and wishes of donors (and doing so raises more money), and unethical when it does not.

Service of Philanthropy

Fundraising is ethical when it brings meaning to donors' philanthropy, and unethical when it does not.

Relationship Management

Fundraising is ethical when it builds a particular, technical type (deriving from academic public relations theory) of 'symmetrical' two-way relationships with donors, and unethical when it does not.

Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics

Fundraising is ethical when it balances fundraisers' duties to raise money on behalf of their beneficiaries with the relevant rights of donors (e.g. not to be subjected to undue pressure to donate), such that a mutually optimal outcome is obtained and neither stakeholder is significantly harmed, and unethical when it does not.¹²

See the Rogare white paper on fundraising ethics for a fuller exposition of each of these theories (MacQuillin 2016c).

Can we formulate community-centric fundraising as an ethical theory along these lines?

There are two caveats to bear in mind before we even attempt this. The first is that it has not been conceived in this way, and therefore doing so takes it way beyond what its originators intended for it (though Donorcentrism was never conceived as an ethical theory either). Second, these ethical theories are developed for the existing paradigm of philanthropy, and since CCF heralds the coming paradigm (which of course may never actually arrive), even if we did fashion it into an ethical theory, it is not meant to complement the existing raft of theories. In fact CCF ethics is (probably) not compatible with any of these.

Donorcentrism, Service of Philanthropy and Relationship Management all foreground donors and in the case of the last two *require* fundraisers to do what's right for donors, even if this is at the expense of the community members they are (supposedly) striving to help, something that CCF stands foursquare against. Since under the CCF approach, donors ought not be accorded any special privilege, they have no rights to balance against the needs of beneficiaries or communities, which take absolute priority. And because fundraising is a tool of the existing paradigm, which needs to be replaced, whether particular actions maintain or harm public trust in that paradigm is neither here nor there.

But let's bite the bullet and see if we can formulate CCF as an ethical theory, which, following this convention of naming ethical theories, would

¹² This is the theory developed at Rogare as a corrective to other theories of fundraising ethics that foreground donors, by explicitly bringing beneficiaries into the ethical decision-making process.

Rogare's previous white paper on fundraising ethics identified four normative theories of professional ethics for fundraising. Can the concepts underpinning community-centric fundraising be formulated into a similar ethical theory?



be called Communitycentrism, which is a bit of a mouthful, so I'll use Community-centric Fundraising Ethics (CCF Ethics) instead.

The most appropriate formulation of such a professional ethics is probably:

Community-centric Fundraising Ethics (CCF Ethics)

Fundraising is ethical when it prioritises the needs of the communities that fundraisers serve, and unethical when it does not.

This doesn't restrictively stipulate what those needs are, but allows different communities in different cultures to decide what their needs are, and then ethical fundraising ensures those needs are prioritised. This is similar to how Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics works. Unlike codes of ethics that prescribe and proscribe various actions, Rights Balancing allows different cultures or countries to identify what duties they have to beneficiaries and donors and then ensure they are in balance. But those specific duties can vary from and between cultures and countries, meaning what's considered unethical in one culture could be ethical in another.

An alternative formulation for CCF Ethics would be that fundraising is ethical when it is grounded in racial and economic justice, and unethical when it is not. This is a perfectly plausible ethical position for CCF to take. But it seems more suited to the ethical position for the coming paradigm rather than one that is compatible with the existing one. Using this conception of CCF Ethics at a stroke makes

vast swathes of contemporary fundraising practice unethical¹³ because it is not (as the CCF movement perceives it) grounded in racial and economic justice: if it were, there would be no need for the CCF movement. So adopting this ethical formulation doesn't represent the compromise we need to allow CCF and DCF to come together to find common ground out of which new ideas, ethics and practices might emerge – assuming that proponents of CCF wish to make such a compromise, which they may not wish to.

So let's stick with the first conception: fundraising is ethical when it prioritises the needs of the communities that fundraisers serve, and unethical when it does not.

This looks a lot like Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics but without the balancing of duties to beneficiaries with duties to donors. But it is not. Under Rights Balancing, duties are first and foremost to the beneficiaries of the charity/NPO the fundraiser works for. Sure, as it becomes more nuanced, the theory requires that fundraisers also balance the needs of the beneficiaries of their charities with the needs of the beneficiaries of

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“Because fundraising is a tool of the existing paradigm, which needs to be replaced, whether particular actions maintain or harm public trust in that paradigm is neither here nor there.”

¹³ The Relationship Management approach to ethics also does something similar, making all direct marketing fundraising 'unethical', because direct marketing cannot build the specific 'symmetrical two-way relationships' with donors this formulation of fundraising ethics requires (MacQuillin 2016c, p13.).

6 *“Defining what the community is, and who is a member of it, is obviously important if a fundraiser needs to make an ethical decision not to take a donation that will help some members of the community so that other members who need that help more can receive it.”*

other charities, or to balance different types of needs of the same beneficiary group, for example balancing the need for dignity in their portrayal in marketing materials with the need to raise money to fund services (Crombie 2020, p24). But for reasons of legality, contract employment, and because Rights Balancing was conceived under the current paradigm, it is the beneficiaries of the charity the fundraiser works for who are foregrounded.

CCF Ethics conceives of ‘community’ much more widely than the community of the beneficiaries of a single charity. But what is the ‘community’ in community-centric fundraising?

CCF’s second principle states that, since charities’ missions are all interrelated with the community, the “community is best served if we see ourselves as part of a larger ecosystem working collectively to build a just society” (CCF 2020). It then says that community-centric fundraisers should sometimes “decline funding opportunities so that other organisations that do critical work in the *community* have a better chance if it best serves the *community*”. [Emphasis added.] This goes against the grain of raising money for the mission of a single charity (or for the mission’s beneficiaries – the core of Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics), and Principle 2 very clearly states: “Individual organisational missions are not as important as the collective community.”

So again, the question is, what is the ‘community’ (which CCF has so far only loosely defined)? Working outwards from a narrow conception to a wider one, is it:

- Beneficiaries of all charities within the same cause, e.g. cancer, hospices?
- Beneficiaries of charities within the same cause group, e.g. medical/healthcare?
- Beneficiaries of all charities?
- Those who are experiencing racial/economic injustice?
- Society in general, or rather, the just society we hope to build?

The CCF website does not talk about charity beneficiaries, nor would one expect the movement to use such a term. However, the website rarely refers to individual members of the community – just in Principle 7, about creating a sense of belonging and avoiding ‘othering’ community members – instead talking about the ‘community’ as an entity in its own right.

The status of individual members within the community is unclear. But defining what the community is, and who is a member of it, is obviously important if a fundraiser needs to make an ethical decision not to take a donation that will help some members of the community so that other members who need that help more can receive it.

That is a pretty big decision for a fundraiser to make, and so CCF will need to develop its foundational normative ethics to enable applied ethics that will provide help and guidance for fundraisers about how to make such decisions.

This sounds like the type of ethical dilemma that Effective Altruism wrestles with. Effective Altruism is an ethical theory of philanthropy – a version of Utilitarianism – that says people ought to help those in greatest need, the converse being they ought not help those who are not in greatest need until those in greatest need are no longer in greatest need.

And so for Effective Altruism, the question is how to define greatest need. Effective Altruism does this using a statistical measure called the Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY), which quantifies how much the life of someone in need can be improved to allow comparisons with how the lives of other people, say at a different charity or cause, can also be improved. Effective Altruism recommends donating to those charities where the donation will lead to the greatest increase in QALYs for the greatest number of people (MacAskill 2015, pp39-45.)

A community-centric fundraiser will need to wrestle with similar decisions. For example, should a community-centric fundraiser working for, say, a cystic fibrosis charity (as there are relatively few people with cystic fibrosis, charities tackling this vicious condition have relatively few beneficiaries) decline a donation if they think this donation could better help the 'community' if it were given to, say, a charity dealing with homelessness?¹⁴

On what basis would they make such a decision? Would they have to use a statistical measure such as QALY. Or would CCF need to adopt a similar metric that measures improvements to racial/economic justice, or develop their own.¹⁵

In using such statistical measures, some causes, particularly those with few beneficiaries such as

cystic fibrosis, could be perpetual losers. If this were to be the case, who would be speaking up and advocating for the beneficiaries of these charities so that they did receive the help they needed? Under CCF, who will represent the voice of charity beneficiaries? Will they have agency, or will they in fact have people claiming to speak on their behalf, as they mostly do in the current system (see Crombie 2020).

One of the leaders of the CCF movement – Chrissy Shimizu, who was quoted in s3 – fundraises for an arts organisation. It's a genuine question whether a community-centric arts fundraiser should ever accept a gift because, almost certainly, there are much more pressing needs facing the community than the beneficial effects of experiencing art.

These are challenges for CCF Ethics under the current paradigm of philanthropy/fundraising, yet it is very important to bear in mind that CCF is not designed to necessarily work within this paradigm, as CCF's whole rationale is to replace it.

Nonetheless, these are likely to be ethical issues that community-centric fundraisers will face in the new paradigm, and CCF Ethics will need to find ways to deal with these: it's unfair to tell fundraisers they'll sometime have to turn down donations if those donations could be better used elsewhere in the community, without providing the help and guidance that will enable them to do so in an ethically coherent and consistent way.

But of course, these challenges may not actually exist – or exist to such a degree – in the new system of philanthropy grounded in economic and racial justice that CCF wants to establish. That whole system may well deliver more equitable outcomes across the board, obviating the need for many of these ethical dilemmas, particularly if donors are encouraged to give to a community fund, rather than to discrete organisations within the community, which the community would then disperse to those organisations that would best be able to serve the community as a whole.

But this is looking ahead to what the new paradigm might be and is no more than idle speculation. We're more concerned in this paper in whether community-centric fundraising and its ethics can be incorporated into the current paradigm. ●

14 Service of Philanthropy ethics also requires fundraisers to make similar decisions but for a different reason. Some adherents of the idea that fundraising is the servant of philanthropy require that fundraisers should turn down gifts if they feel that accepting the gift would not be in the best interest of the giver, because it doesn't bring them sufficient meaning. They should instead direct the donor to give to a charity that would have greater meaning to the donor (Gunderman 2010, pp591-592). That could result in the gift being directed away from beneficiaries who need it most to those who need it less, for example from a poverty charity to an arts organisation.

15 For example, DALY (disability-adjusted life year) is a tool that is in use (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability-adjusted_life_year – accessed 9 August 2020) and similar tools for racial/economic justice may well already exist. There is some concern about the racial equity of employing QALYs (Harris 1987).

6

A community-centric/ donor-centred dialectic

The first thing to note is that there is a lot in the CCF manifesto that sits comfortably with donor-centred fundraising and many of the current ideas about practice and ethics of fundraising as it is currently done.

For example, CCF Principle 3 is about developing a collaborative rather than competitive nonprofit sector; and one of the defining characteristics of the nonprofit sector is that it already is collaborative (Sargeant and MacQuillin 2016, pp546-547). There is certainly competition, but as a report from nfpSynergy once styled it, it's competition, but not as we know it (Saxton and Guild 2010). So there is common ground to build a more collaborative sector.

Principle 4 is about recognising the roles played by boards and volunteers and investing in staff and compensating them fairly. This is also something the current fundraising system values, particularly remunerating fundraisers fairly.

Principle 5 talks about time (i.e. volunteering) being as much a valuable and valued resource as money that donors/supporters can give. This is nothing new to donor-centred fundraisers, who have long championed that donors should also be asked for 'time, talent and treasure' (for example, Elischer 2004) and have constructed supporter journeys to allow them to do that in a structured and strategic way (Michie 2007, pp12-13; Fleming 2015), even though not everyone buys into the idea (Clifton 2013; Waldy 2015; Linton and Stein 2017, p187).

Principle 9 is about something many donor-centred fundraisers can readily agree with – the need to put an end to the 'starvation cycle', the 'nonprofit hunger games' and the overhead myth (O'Reilly 2019).

But by far the most common ground shared between DCF and CCF is the need to build

partnerships and relationships with donors. In the blog that kicked off this whole movement, Vu Le (2017) wrote: "I want to reaffirm how much I appreciate donors, and that my critique of donorcentrism in no way precludes respect for donors."

Principle 6 very clearly states: "We respect our donors' integrity and treat donors as partners." This is a sentiment straight out of the donor-centred fundraising playbook.

CCF neither eschews nor derogates the role of donors, nor the impact they can bring. CCF doesn't not want to build relationships with donors. It just wants to build different types of relationships and different types of partnerships with them than does DCF. When Vu Le first wrote Principle 6 in his 2017 blog, he said that doing so would occasionally mean "pushing back". Principle 1 says that fundraisers must be prepared to have "uncomfortable discussions [with donors] regarding race and wealth disparities, etc." Donor-centred fundraisers, with their focus on making the donor feel good through eliciting positive emotions, would almost certainly never countenance making donors feel 'uncomfortable'.

Principle 6 also says that fundraisers should be prepared to have 'strong disagreements' with donors. Again, it's unlikely that many donor-centred fundraisers would willingly engage in arguments with donors over how best to use their donation, while the whole rationale of Service of Philanthropy ethics is that the fundraiser does everything they can to avoid having such disagreements (their role is to bring meaning to donors' philanthropy, which they probably won't be able to do if they have to argue them into it – though from another perspective, it could be that this is precisely what would bring them greater meaning).

The Relationship Management approach to fundraising ethics would in fact foster such strong disagreements, since the two-way 'symmetry' in the relationship it calls for requires that both stakeholders in the relationship genuinely listen to and learn from the other. Kathleen Kelly, who adapted this PR theory to fundraising, considered 'asymmetrical' relationships in a fundraising context to be unethical because charities did not listen to and adapt their behaviour in response to information from donors, but not the other way round (Kelly 1998, p157) – and recall from s2.3 Roger Craver's criticism that fundraisers rarely seek feedback from donors (Craver 2017). However, neither do fundraisers give critical feedback to donors about their giving.

So there is definitely common ground between the donor-centred and community-centric approach regarding building relationships with donors. The question is whether donor-centred fundraisers are prepared to genuinely think about the different types of relationships they could have with donors, or whether some of them retrench into the defence of DCF outlined in s2, retreating into the straw man argument that those promoting a community-centric approach don't understand what donor-centred fundraising is.

The above discussion is about the overarching principles or ethos of the two approaches. While there are differences, there are also commonalities. But CCF also has criticisms of the way DCF implements these principles in practice.

Donor-centred fundraising is built around the second person pronoun 'you', with the paradigmatic examples of donor-centred fundraising beginning with or containing a variation of: "Because of you, this beneficiary was helped in this way." (e.g. Sargeant 210; Axelrad 2013, Sargeant 2019).

Principle 7 asks whether this language contributes to 'othering' beneficiaries. It says that fundraising

instead should "ensure everyone feels a sense of belonging", and while the movement says it it's "not against" the use of the word 'you', its use can nonetheless be excessive and needs to be "balanced out...with the collective 'we'".

This opens a possible whole new field of study on how the use of language in fundraising communications and the (possibly unintended) effects it has – a field in which little research has been done.¹⁶ For when CCF says the use of the word 'you' is excessive, it needs to justify that statement and provide the context for it, by demonstrating what is an 'acceptable' benchmark for its use and the harms that exceeding that benchmark are likely to cause – i.e. demonstrate with theory and evidence, not just assert. At the moment and in the current context of Principle 7, the phrase "sometimes the use of the word 'you' is excessive" is pretty meaningless.¹⁷

Nonetheless, this challenge to use a collective 'we' is something that donor-centred fundraisers can certainly engage with. Adrian Sargeant has long-championed Identity Theory as the next development of relationship/donor-centred fundraising (Sargeant et al 2016 pp23-25; Sargeant 2019). Sargeant is arguing for the creation of a joint identity between the donor and the organisation, so that the donor's identity is fused with that of the mission or organisation, and the donor sees their needs as intertwined with the needs of the mission/organisation. Although he doesn't say so in the Rogare paper (Sargeant et al 2016), this donor-organisation/mission fused identity would allow for language using the third person plural – 'we'.

Even so, since the fused identity is only between donor and organisation/mission, this could still

¹⁶ Though check out the work of Andrea Macrae (2015).

¹⁷ Having said that, arch-fundraising copywriter Lisa Sargeant (2010) has said that fundraisers can sometimes go "over the top", particularly in America.

"CCF says fundraisers must be prepared to have 'uncomfortable discussions [with donors] regarding race and wealth disparities, etc.'"

⑥ *Donor-centred fundraisers, with their focus on making the donor feel good through eliciting positive emotions, would almost certainly never countenance making donors feel 'uncomfortable'."*



Two champions of donor-centred fundraising have long been using ideas that fit with the CCF agenda. Lisa Sargent has been copywriting using the third person pronoun ('we'), while Adrian Sargeant's work looks at how charities can create 'fused' identities with donors.

serve to 'other' the service users/beneficiaries of the organisation/mission. Nonetheless, we do at least have thinking and frameworks in place through Identity Theory in its various forms to bring donors into the community and fuse their identity with that of the services users/beneficiaries/community members they want to help. And doing so would not fly in the face of current donorcentric thinking

Donor-centred orthodoxy says that using the word 'you' raises more money than using 'we'. But recall that donor-centred fundraising was originally conceived as a corrective to organisation-centric fundraising, in which the word 'we' refers to the organisation. The fundraising efficacy of communications in which 'we' refers to the community and all its stakeholders – donors and beneficiaries – have never, to the best of my knowledge, been empirically tested.

However, Lisa Sargent (2015) says she has been letting the words 'we' and 'us' creep (her word) into her fundraising copywriting – "I'm talking about the we're-in-this-together, you-and-me 'we'" – in an approach she calls 'donor realism'. And what's more, this approach has been paying off: "Double-digit response rates to newsletters. Sixty-five percent retention rates. Lapsed donors returning. Increased feedback. Plus signs, big and small, that we'd struck a chord."

The issue of how we use pronouns in fundraising has not been settled. The second person 'you' has not definitively won the day, and donor-centred fundraisers could fruitfully explore the research on pronoun use, such as Macrae (2015).¹⁸

If donors' identities are to be fused with those of the community, it comes back again to showing how important it is that CCF can define what it means by 'community'.

One of CCF's biggest challenges to DCF is the allegation that it perpetuates saviour complex, or white saviourism.¹⁹ That is too big a conversation to have in this paper. However, it is a conversation that must be had, and donor-centred fundraisers need to have honest conversations and critically reflect on the practices they have used and are considering using in the future.

I'm not for a moment saying that all, or even most, donor-centred communications perpetuate white saviourism. But I've revisited some old fundraising copy from the noughties, and though these were brilliant examples of donor-centred fundraising at the time, some haven't stood the test of time very well. One tells donors that they are "deserving" of the "adoration" of the African child they have helped, complete with cute photo of the child making eye contact. That's more than a bit cringeworthy.

Donor-centred fundraisers have to bite the bullet and engage in this conversation. CCF's allegations of white saviourism can't simply be dismissed out of hand, such as by claiming that the idea of acting in the donor's interest has been "weaponised" in order to argue against the whole concept, which some donor-centred fundraisers have done (and which in the current climate is quite a brave thing to be saying so publicly on social media). ❹

¹⁸ This search on Google Scholar returns results for 'pronoun use in marketing' – <https://bit.ly/31LS0sy> – accessed 11 August 2020.

¹⁹ And not just from the CCF movement, as similar challenges have come from elsewhere in the charity sector (Cooney 2020).

7

Two possible new directions

We have a problem with the word ‘centric’. When you put some stakeholder at the centre, other stakeholders almost inevitably have to move to the margins or periphery. If they don’t, you either have two stakeholders at the centre or two separate centres. With a single centre, it is the stakeholder at the centre whose needs are prioritised. With more than one stakeholder at the centre, their potentially competing needs must be carefully balanced, which is what Rights Balancing Ethics aims to do, and such balancing acts are key to most ethical issues and dilemmas way beyond fundraising (Koshy 2019).

Donor-centred fundraising pushed beneficiaries towards the periphery of ethical decision making (beneficiaries have historically almost never featured in ethical decision making in fundraising). That community-centric fundraising is now pushing donors out of the centre and to towards the periphery is something that irks donor-centred fundraisers. But the very fact they are riled by this should highlight to them the inherent problem of having placed donors at the centre in the first place.

A system that privileges one stakeholder whose needs are prioritised at the centre is bound to cause distress and upset to stakeholders (or those representing them) whose needs are literally marginalised.

One part of the solution is to dispense with the words ‘centred’ or ‘centric’. In the Twitter conversation²⁰ that followed Tom Ahern’s announcement that he was going to stop using the term ‘donor-centred’, several other suggestions were mooted to replace the word ‘donor’ in ‘donor-centred fundraising’, including mission (if your fundraising isn’t focused on delivering the mission, then just what is it focused on?), audience, emotion, heart, people, story and human. Other suggestions included ‘grassroots fundraising’ and ‘people-first fundraising’.

This belies what looks like a compulsion to make fundraising ‘something’-centric. But it is this desire to have something at the centre of fundraising that is causing tensions and problems. And yet the inescapable fact is that beneficiaries *are* at the centre of what charities do. The charity ethical principles developed by NCVO (2019, p3) in the UK say: “The interests of their beneficiaries and the causes they work for should be at the heart of everything charities and those who work and volunteer in and with them do.” Those who work in charities, of course, include fundraisers.

This section explores two potential new approaches to this challenge. ⑥

²⁰ <https://twitter.com/ahatommahern/status/1286005896787693570> – accessed 28 July 2020.

7.1 Integrated (or integrative) fundraising

How can we keep beneficiaries at the centre of an organisation while still engaging donors and encouraging what one contributor to the Critical Fundraising Forum on Facebook called 'donor-participatory fundraising'. What would the organogram of an organisation that is able to do this look like? I developed a model (Fig 1) for this a couple years ago by adapting commercial marketing models to show that fundraising is the 'integrative' function at a charity that connects donors with the activities of charities and through those to the beneficiaries at the centre (MacQuillin 2018).²¹

In this model, donors are not at the centre, but they surround the organisation and enable it to exist: donors are part of the beneficiary-centric organisation. Fundraisers do not need to worry about putting donors at the centre, because they are looking both outward to donors and inward to beneficiaries. Their role is to 'integrate' donor needs with the needs of their beneficiaries, or 'connect donors with cause', one of the central tenets of the donor-centred communications process (MacQuillin 2016a, pp12-13).

But even that phrasing is heavily influenced by a donorcentric mindset. The integrative role of fundraising is actually to integrate the beneficiaries' needs (as mediated via the organisation) with those of the donors' and not the other way round. Instead of connecting donors to a cause, fundraisers are connecting the beneficiaries of a cause to donors. The primary direction of integration is inward towards beneficiaries, not outward towards donors, and any outwards integration is a means to the end of better inward integration (see Fig 1).

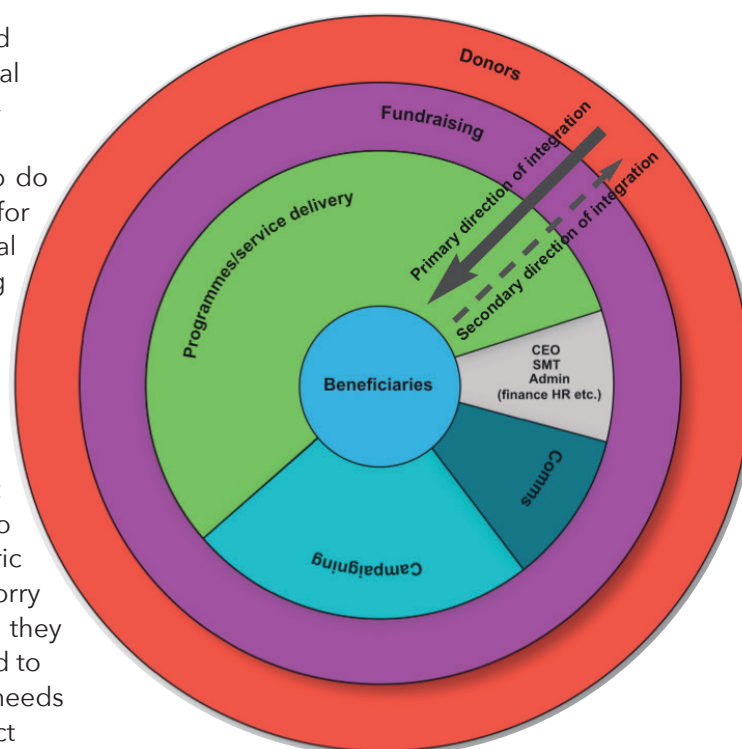


Fig 1: Under integrated or integrative fundraising, it is the role of fundraisers to integrate donors into a beneficiary-centred organisation, by building symmetrical two-way relationships with them that are grounded in Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics.

Donors' rights (and needs) therefore must be balanced against the rights and needs of beneficiaries. Doing this requires the two-way symmetrical relationships that the Relationship Management theory of ethics demands, and also enables fundraisers to have 'tough conversations' with their donors if these are necessary to get them to best understand, and do, what is in the interests of their beneficiaries, as CCF Ethics calls for. It may also mitigate some of the worst excesses of donor dominance, and reduce marginalisation and othering of beneficiaries by giving them more voice

²¹ I suggest readers of this paper check out this blog in full.

6

"We have a problem with the word 'centric'. When you put some stakeholder at the centre, other stakeholders almost inevitably have to move to the margins or periphery. If they don't, you either have two stakeholders at the centre or two separate centres."

6 “Even if using negatively-framed messages and images may be beneficial in the short-term to the beneficiary community of a specific charity, can this ever outweigh the harm caused to the wider community (in the long term and maybe short term too, and assuming it does cause such harm)?”

and agency. And it may also make it easier to foster a sense of shared or ‘fused’ identity between donors and the people they are helping.

If we desperately wanted a phrase to describe this, we could call it ‘donor integrated fundraising’, though even having ‘donor’ in the name could imply too much privilege and power (language is important), and so ‘beneficiary-donor integrated fundraising’ may be more appropriate, while rolling off the tongue far less easily. So how about just ‘integrated fundraising’ (or maybe ‘integrative fundraising’) – which resolves into the nice three-letter acronym of IFR?

Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics is predicated on fundraisers having duties to beneficiaries. American fundraiser and thought leader Cherian Koshy (2019) has explored from where these duties might derive, grounding them in three sources, law, promise and moral principle, the last of which confers on a fundraisers their duty as an advocate:

“The fundraiser is appointed by the organisation to advocate with the donor on behalf of the beneficiary. The beneficiary has agreed to permit the fundraiser to share their stories, their likeness, and most importantly, their needs with those who are potentially willing to support them. By...serving as an advocate, the fundraiser has accepted the responsibility to care for the beneficiary.”

Integrative fundraising – symmetrical two-way relationships with donors that are grounded in Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics – is the mechanism by which fundraisers can discharge this duty of care.

However, it is important to realise that the foregoing discussion refers to beneficiaries being at the centre of the mission of the specific organisation set up to help them, and so is also embedded within the current philanthropic system. It doesn’t show how

donors can be integrated by fundraisers with the needs of the wider ‘community’, as envisioned by the CCF paradigm.

Would a model of integrative fundraising be able to respond to the wider criticisms CCF throws at DCF, such as allegations of saviourism?

Using so called ‘poverty porn’ images could sit perfectly well within an IFR approach to fundraising, particularly if the beneficiaries so represented had been given agency and voice in how they were presented, and had consented to that (Crombie 2020). Using such images could connect beneficiaries and donors. There is evidence (though not overwhelming evidence) that negatively-framed images and messages raise more money than more positively framed-marketing (Smyth and MacQuillin 2018). Negatively-framed messages and images might therefore be in the short-term interest of a charity’s beneficiaries by raising urgently-needed income. They may even be in their medium-term interest. But they may not be so much in their longer-term interest if – and this is a conditional argument for which evidence needs to be adduced, and not something that can be merely asserted – there is longer-term harm to beneficiaries by using these images, such as caused by the emotions it engenders in donors, or the consequences of using stereotyped depictions of beneficiary communities.

More to the CCF’s point, even if using negatively-framed messages and images may be beneficial in the short-term to the beneficiary community of a specific charity, can this ever outweigh the harm caused to the wider community in the long term and maybe short term too (and assuming it does cause such harm)?

What frameworks can we use to address such issues? Refashioning something that we already have may give us a start.

7.2 Total relationship fundraising

One of the central tenets of CCF is that fundraisers need to build different types of relationships with donors, relationships that don't necessarily put donors at the centre, nor are built for the purpose of fulfilling their needs. Instead, these new-style relationships should seek to challenge donors about their philanthropy and their privilege, where and when appropriate, by having tough conversations with them.

Professional practice and scholarship of both marketing and public relations are founded on building relationships with stakeholders. One variant of relationship marketing, styled as 'total relationship marketing' – developed by Swedish marketing academic Evert Gummesson (1999) – argues that marketers should build relationships with all stakeholders, not just the "classic" market relationships centring customers. Gummesson (ibid pp19-24) identified 30 such relationships, such as those with regulators, media, and trade and umbrella bodies, as well as intangible factors such as environmental friendliness, employee recruitment market etc.

These 30 relationships are grouped in four categories in a concentric Russian doll model known as the 'relationship doll' (Fig 2):

Classic market relationships – the three 'classic' networks of supplier-customer dyad, supplier-customer-competitor triad, and distribution channels.

Special market relationships – aspects of the classic relationships, such as dissatisfied customers, digital relationships etc.

Mega relationships – which exist above market relationships and establish the conditions the market relationships exist in, focusing on the domains of public opinion, lobbying, and political power.

Nano relationships – operate below market relationships within the organization (intra-organisational relationships), for example, internal markets, relationships between departments, etc.

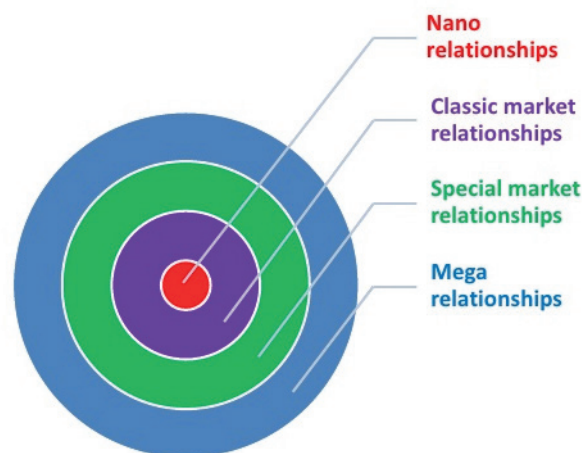


Fig 2: The 'relationship doll', showing the four categories of the 30 discrete relationships marketers need to build with stakeholders. What types of relationships do fundraisers need to build to be 'conscious' of all their stakeholders?

When Rogare conducted our review of relationship fundraising, which we published in four volumes in 2016, we suggested that relationship fundraising could adapt this model to refashion itself as 'total relationship fundraising' (MacQuillin 2016a, pp20-21, 2016b; Sargeant 2016, p22). This was very much donorcentric thinking: the purpose of building relationships with suppliers and regulators was in order to build better relationships with donors that delivered "enhanced value" to them (Sargeant 2016, p22); and "fundraisers cannot maintain a narrow focus on the donor if the relationships they neglect (such as with their agencies, or colleagues who hold the 'necessary evil' mindset about fundraising) result in, or contribute to, a diminished donor experience" (MacQuillin 2016a p20).

However, total relationship fundraising (TRF) doesn't have to be so donorcentric: there is no reason why in principle it need necessarily be focused on enhancing donor value.

The relationships that concern CCF, such as the power that philanthropists have, are encompassed within Gummesson's 'mega-relationship' category, as would be the interests of wider community members: whether to use negatively-framed messages would be a matter for a fundraiser-donor-

6 *“In building relationships with different stakeholders at different levels, fundraisers need to be ‘conscious’ of those stakeholders: consciousness of their race, their gender, their economic circumstances.”*

beneficiary triad in the ‘classic market relationships’ category, but whether a fundraiser ought to use such framing at all might be of interest and relevance to other members of the community sitting in the ‘mega relationships’ category.

TRF could be used as a base concept on which to incorporate CCF’s critique of DCF into the current philanthropic paradigm. The first stage in such a project would be to identify appropriate categories of relationship (clearly Gummesson’s terminology is redundant to a charity setting: we don’t have ‘classic market relationships’ with donors); and then to identify the various stakeholders and the types of relationships we need to build with them, which could include the various duties we have to each relationship stakeholder.

In building relationships with different stakeholders at different levels, fundraisers need to be ‘conscious’ of the needs of those stakeholders in a way that goes beyond having an awareness of what they perceive to be the interests of a privileged class of stakeholder (such as deriving meaning from their giving). They then need to move beyond “mindless organisational routines” (Nielsen and Bartunek 1996, p515) that serve those stakeholders – is it possible that the go-to ‘because of you’ thankyou letter is an example of such an organisational routine? – towards an ethical consciousness of all stakeholders: consciousness of their race (Dorsey et al 2020, pp8-11), their gender, their economic circumstances. And then ensuring the needs of all stakeholders are ethically balanced.²²

This is by no means a simple task. But at least in total relationship fundraising, we have a conceptual framework on which we can build. 6

22 I’m indebted to British fundraising consultant Ashley Scott for introducing me to the concept of stakeholder consciousness.



8

An opportunity for donor-centred fundraising to reinvent itself

Community-centric fundraising looks like it is a direct challenger to the current donorcentric orthodoxy – a pretender to the throne. At one level this is true. The CCF movement wants to replace the entire philanthropic paradigm, of which donor-centred fundraising is a tool (some donor-centred fundraisers, who see themselves as the ‘servants’ of philanthropists, would readily agree that they were such instruments of the system). From this perspective, the clash between CCF and DCF is a zero sum game: if CCF wins, then DCF loses.

For many fundraisers, being donor-centred is more than just the communications practice they use; it is their professional identity – they *are* donor-centred fundraisers. So the challenges presented by CCF are not a technical discussion about professional procedure; they are perceived as an assault on the core principles of the people who use those procedures, and go directly to the heart of how they see and define themselves. No wonder so many have reacted so defensively to the CCF movement.

And yet CCF doesn’t have to be such a challenge. While CCF wants to change the paradigm, much of what it proposes about how fundraising would work in the new paradigm can be applied in the current paradigm; and moreover, applied in a way that is consistent with and compatible with much current donor-centred thinking and practice. The foregoing discussion has highlighted much common ground on which a dialectic between CCF and DCF could produce new ways of fundraising that satisfied both camps, and how the criticisms and challenges raised by CCF could be at least mitigated and possibly solved, by adopting integrated/ive fundraising or total relationship fundraising approaches and practices.

To do this would require compromise from both sides.

CCF may need to accept that they may not succeed in replacing the paradigm but can succeed in changing and adapting it.

DCF may need to relinquish a conception of donor-centred that it holds dear.

But if they could reach such a compromise, we would avoid throwing the donor-centred baby out with the community-centric bathwater. Rather than being an existential challenge to donor-centred fundraising that is sounding its death-knell, community-centric fundraising may actually provide the impetus and incentive for donor-centred fundraising to reinvent itself. 🍷

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