Introduction

When we consider the relationship of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and civil society, we tend to consider how the social capital created by such associations promotes interaction, or shared work toward a common good. Within this understanding of the NPO sector the practice of fundraising, in contrast to the phenomenon of giving, has been seen primarily instrumentally - a necessary means by which organizations secure the financial resources to “keep the lights on.” Whilst recent studies have increased our knowledge and understanding of fundraisers as skilled facilitators of the philanthropic gift (e.g. Breeze, 2017) little is understood about the ways in which fundraising practice impacts NPO’s ability to build, sustain and activate social capital. As a result, we argue, fundraising remains underexplored and undertheorized, particularly within the social sciences. To address this oversight, this paper draws specifically on Portes’ (1998) understandings of social capital – further drawing on Bourdieu (1985), Siisiäinen (2000), Coleman (1988), and Harvey et al. (2011) – to analyze fundraiser’s accounts of their practice and role within NPOs. Whilst a number of existing studies emphasize the importance of social capital in attracting philanthropic gifts (King, 2004; Eikenberry & Kulver, 2004; Lindahl, 2010; Schneider, 2009), none explores in detail how this process works, nor considers the implications of such processes on wider NPO practices and outcomes for beneficiaries.

This paper argues the appropriateness of social capital as a lens to help us understand fundraising dynamics. In doing so, it calls for a consideration for whom and where the social capital activated within fundraising practices is enhanced and/ or diminished; and the impact this
may have on the NPO sector and civil society’s overall purpose. Given how dependent the sector is on the skill and experience of fundraisers and the income that they generate, this study is relevant to a wider context in which fundraising and philanthropy takes place, in the UK, US and internationally.

This working paper is primarily conceptual. We draw on qualitative evidence to support the concept. We offer a theoretical extension that contributes to international scholarly discussion of both social capital and fundraising processes (Snow, 2003). However, more robust analysis to test the concept is still in process.

**Literature Review**

**The Fundraising Process**

Being asked is one of the primary reasons people give to charity (Neumayr & Handy, 2019). A great deal of research has been done on effectiveness of different forms of asking for donations, particularly by mail or in split interest events such as auctions and lotteries. There is also some empirical research supporting a great deal of professional advice on what instrumentally ought to be done, and how frequently – number of mailings, number of events, number of visits. In practice, fundraisers are often evaluated on a combination of results (how much money is raised, how many gifts are made) and on activities (how many visits).

But it is important to note that fundraising is much more than asking. It is estimated that once a potential major donor is identified, approximately 24 months will pass before the gift is completed, with only the last three of those months in active solicitation (Worth, 2015, citing Scarpucci & Lange, 2007). Yet overwhelmingly the research literature deals with solicitation in isolation, despite clear indications that the activities of fundraising are relational (Alborough, 2017; Breeze, 2017).


There is little to none on cultivation, and this is our primary contribution. We theorize that the process of fundraising is one that directly builds social capital – and that this is then transmuted into economic capital.
Theory and Fundraising

Most often, research on fundraising draws on theory about giving, rather than about fundraising. Drawing on Hansen (2022, in press), four main theoretical frameworks have been applied to understand fundraising, differentiated from giving.

The first theoretical approach uses macro theories to explain why fundraising happens, and what is required for it. Systems theory explains that charities operate within an open system, interacting with others in their environment (Scott & Davis, 2006; Tempel, 1991). Resource dependence theory examines the dynamics of seeking necessary resources for the organization and its impact on organizational decision making (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Kelly, 1998).

A second theoretical approach relies on identification in giving, and social identities applied to asking and giving. Schervish & Havens’ Identification Theory of Care (1997, 2002) emphasizes the role of communities of participation in defining those with whom we identify, and who we are likely to help. Social identity theory (Turner & Oakes, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) similarly attends to which groups we feel part of, casting in-groups and out-groups and examining the ways in which we act differently according to those designations. This has been applied to fundraising by examining efforts to activate identities congruent to other donors (Shang, Reed, & Croson, 2008), or to beneficiaries (Drezner, 2009).

A third approach draws on the symbolic interactionist tradition and dramaturgy (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959) to examine the importance of social and individual meaning-making in the process of fundraising. This approach emphasizes the importance of fundraising communications being perceived as legitimate and worthy of support by the prospective donors, and of fundraisers’ taking the perspective of donors in order to evaluate their efforts (Hansen, 2018; 2022).

The fourth theoretical approach focuses on aspects of social exchange, building on gift theory (Mauss, 1990) and reciprocity (e.g. Gouldner, 1960). This approach emphasizes that giving is rarely one-way, but is part of a web of mutual interest and obligations (Gouldner, 1960; Mauss, 1990). In application to fundraising, we see fundraisers stepping in to fulfill the social norm of reciprocity in the gift relationship (Alborough, 2017; 2019).

Both the third and fourth approach logically lead one to focus on the relationships in fundraising, and converge to indicate the likely importance of social capital as a relevant theoretical lens for understanding fundraising activities and processes. Therefore, this paper also
contributes to developing and refining theory that is specific to the fundraising process, contextualized within philanthropy.

Social Capital, Philanthropic Giving and Fundraising
Several studies emphasize the importance of the presence of social capital in attracting philanthropic gifts, both within the philanthropic literature, as well as some fundraising studies (e.g. King, 2004; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Lindahl, 2010; Schneider, 2009, Ostrower, 2002). These studies primarily adopt a Putnamian approach to understanding how social capital is possessed and utilized. Within this approach it is “networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.” (Putnam, 1995). In this assessment, social capital is seen to be accumulated and developed through engagement in groups, societies, and voluntary associations (Schneider, 2009). Studies within the Putnamian tradition tend to focus on the types of capital that may exist within and as a result of these associative groupings (i.e. bonding, bridging or linking); to what extent these exist (i.e. measuring social capital); and the ways in which agents and groups draw on social capital within their activities. The studies also broadly assume that the accumulation, development and activation of social capital has largely positive outcomes for individuals and groups, in that it serves to create a sense of association or community or working together. This leaves little space for critical engagement of the processes and individual agents’ practices within any given field associated with the accumulation, development and utilization of social capital, particularly those of more hidden and under-researched agents such as fundraisers. What are the impacts of fundraisers’ accumulation, development and use of social capital within the philanthropic gift field, rather than the outputs or results?

To this end this paper proposes the adoption of a Bourdieusian approach to the analysis of social capital accumulation as adopted by Portes (1998), Siisiäinen (2000) and Harvey et. al. (2011). Bourdieu (1985) conceives of social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). In other words, the accumulation of social capital is not perceived as a natural outcome of association, but rather requires sustained effort and the sustained adoption of what Portes (1985) terms as “strategies oriented to the institutionalization of group relations, usable as a reliable source of benefits” (p.3) These
strategies are not necessarily in and of themselves dis-interested nor do they have wholly neutral or positive outcomes. In the case of fundraisers, we argue that this can be seen within fundraisers’ efforts to create and maintain social relations with donors in order to establish reciprocal gift or resource-based relationships between givers and non-profit organizations (see Alborough, 2019). Empirical studies of practice within the Bourdieusian paradigm focus on the forms of capital present within a particular field (i.e social, cultural, economic and symbolic); the fungibility of capital (i.e. transmutation from one form of capital into another); the mechanisms that generate social capital; and the consequences of producing, managing, and possessing social capital. Within these contexts social capital can be described as consisting of the relationships, personal and professional connections that enable access to other forms of capital; cultural capital consists of abilities and competencies such as personal dispositions, tacit knowledge, know-how and skills; symbolic capital are the “signifiers” of trust, status and position; and economic capital both financial and non-financial, yet tangible assets of possessed and/ controlled by any one individual, group or organization (after Harvey et al, 2011).

This paper argues that the Bourdieusian approach to social capital offers a rich lens for considering how fundraisers build, transmute, and use different kinds of capital within the fundraising process. Drawing on previous studies that understand fundraisers to be multi-positional agents within the philanthropic field (Alborough, 2019; Herrero & Kraemer, 2020; Daly, 2013), the adoption of an adapted Bourdieusian approach offers a framework within which to analyze how fundraisers’ activities serve to boost and subsequently ultilize or transmute the social capital of themselves and others within the philanthropic field to produce the resources necessary for non-profit organizations to function (Harvey, et al, 2011).

Moreover, the adoption of a Bourdieusian lens allows for a further analysis of fundraisers as organizational actors in which social capital is conceived by Siisiäinen (2000) as the resources “produced”, utilized and shared to greater or lesser degrees with its members by a specific collective or group (p. 12). The focus is on the accumulative and relational processes within fundraisers’ narratives of their practice, where fundraising is recognized as a relational, identity- and meaning-making process in which fundraisers actively seek to build reciprocal gift relationships with donors using the capital resources within the field or organization at their disposal and the wider impact and hidden consequences that make derive from the adoption of such strategies (Harvey et al, 2011; Alborough, 2019; Barman, 2007).
Methods

To demonstrate how social capital can help us understand broader fundraising practices and processes, we develop and apply the above theoretical approaches to social capital to a comparative analysis of data collected from two recent studies. In one, interviews with participating fundraisers in the US (N = 15) as to their fundraising process followed an exercise in which they wrote an appeal letter to potential first-time donors in response to a prompt describing a fictional social services charity. In the second study, participating fundraisers in the UK (N = 27) were interviewed about their fundraising process. The inductive analysis of transcripts from both studies suggested that the activities of fundraisers can be understood as intentionally building and fostering social capital both within and outside of their organizations for the purpose of securing the economic, symbolic and human capital required by these organizations in order to function. These findings reveal a far wider remit for fundraising than anticipated within technical and instrumental perceptions of the practice. The current study reexamines both sets of transcripts, recoding to test for the presence and the process of social capital building on a Bourdieusian sense of the concept.

Proposed Theoretical Model

Drawing on models of the process of fundraising, we expect a linear model of how social capital in the Bourdieusian sense maps on to fundraising processes. We expect that building social capital starts at the beginning of the organization’s relationship with a donor – with the communication that results in donor acquisition through a first gift, or through cultivation activities prior to a gift. Stewardship activities also serve to maintain and build social capital.

Social capital is then transmuted into economic capital through solicitation, which may be performed in person, online, through direct mail, via advertising, or at an event, to name some possibilities. One clear example of transmuting capital is the practice of peer-to-peer solicitation, in which a person who is a donor helps to solicit a friend or acquaintance on behalf of the charitable organization or cause.

Organizations then use capital received as revenues to pay for expenses, such as providing programs or overhead expenses.

This simple linear model is shown in Figure 1.
Analysis

The study adopts a three-step, iterative, deductive analytical approach of 42 interviews with fundraisers using Atlas and Nvivo coding software using predefined codes as predicted by the proposed theoretical model outlined above. In step one, researchers have coded for the presence of each form of capital present in fundraisers’ narratives of their practice (drawing on definitions by Harvey, 2011,429-430 & Portes, 1998), as follows:

- **Social capital** or instrumental benefit – which includes connections with others who will share resources with you because of participation or association. These include social and business connections, networks, alliances and relationships, both direct and indirect.

- **Economic capital** in the form of financial assets such as a line of credit, a bank account balance, or business assets.

- **Cultural capital** in the form abilities and competencies such as personal dispositions, knowledge, know-how, skills and tacit knowledge.

- **Symbolic capital** in the form of reputational or indicative capital such as qualifications, honors, distinctions and affiliation with a group or set of practices (such as philanthropic giving).
Once the presence of various forms of capital have been identified, researchers have sought to identify and code for the actions with respect to any of the above forms of capital, as follows:

- **Building (consolidating, adding to).** This includes identifying the mechanisms and processes through which capital is accumulated and structured. Within this code, questions focus on how fundraisers seek to create the structures of various forms, but particularly social capital, i.e. “social networks; social standing and intellectual [and moral] currency” (Harvey et al, 2011, p. 425) around and within which various forms of capital is accumulated. More specific questions include: what are the mechanisms through which relationships are built and connections established such as events; written narratives; letters; bringing colleagues on board, and so forth? How is this done both externally and internally to the organization?

- **Transmuting (transforming).** Within this code researchers seek to identify examples within fundraisers’ narratives of one form of capital representing or being used to create or generate another form of capital. In other words, how do fundraisers convert other forms of capital, into social and economic capital and vice versa? How do fundraisers understand and create meanings of social capital through language/ metaphor or more objective means?

- **Using (drawing from).** This includes identifying the ways in which fundraisers describe how existing capital is used, manipulated or consumed. Within this code, the researchers have sought to identify how fundraisers describe making use - whether this be by manipulation, consumption or other means - of existing forms of capital to accumulate more capital. This includes both their own capital and those of others within the philanthropic field.

Finally, guided by the proposed theoretical model and our proposed theoretical partnership drawing on Portes (1998), Siisiäinen (2000) and Harvey et. al. (2011), we have sought to identify what outcomes of these processes, such as economic benefit, reproduced and new social structures, the generation of new or reproduced meanings of the gift, or social connection, etc., may be evidenced. We will conclude our analysis with considerations of what to level to which previously identified consequences of the fundraising and philanthropic process as identified by the researchers’ previous studies may be further evidenced or confirmed when
applying a social capital theory lens to fundraisers’ practice. These include the idea of missing beneficiaries and the reproduction of inequitable social structures (Alborough, 2019) and reinforced notions of stigma and exclusion of certain populations (Hansen, 2018 & 2020).

At the time of writing this working paper, the full systematic analysis continues. Here, we share evidence that both supports the concept of applying social capital theories to understand fundraising, and a preliminary new model of capital dynamics in the fundraising process.

**Preliminary Findings**

Our preliminary findings are organized to align with the linear model proposed in Figure 1, as our *prima facie* application of Bourdieusian social capital insights. We begin with insights associated with building capital. Then, we share findings related to transmuting capital. After this, we describe themes related to using capital. The section then transitions to describe a new model (preliminary) based on the analysis completed so far.

**Building Capital**

So far, we have identified three themes regarding building capital. Each one is discussed, below.

*The process of building social capital also requires skill at identifying potential social capital, and identifying the potential of transmuting that social capital into other types of capital.* UK Respondent 1 raises funds for a classical music performance organization. Here, they discuss one possible reason that a potential donor might be interested in developing a philanthropic relationship with the organization:

> Because we have to find something or we have to engage with somebody on a level that is of interest to them. And it might be that their favourite nephew is showing great musical talent and they are not remotely interested, but they would love this nephew to have a nice career in music. And a good start would be to meet a real-life musician and it might be nothing to do with {organization} or {place}, he’s got this nephew who is particularly fond of.

UK Resp 1 continues with two more possible reasons for a potential donor’s interest:

> So whether it’s because they are a new business that has moved to {place}, therefore, they might want somewhere to entertain. Or whether it’s somebody who
has huge passion for Elgar’s music, and knows that there’s a history of Elgar, and he had a relationship with {organization}.

UK Resp 1 concludes:

We will go in with some link usually. But it’s exploring that and making that the most important thing, which you have to be very clever about.

In this portion of the interview (which has been condensed for space), the fundraiser suggests three quite different possible reasons someone might have for engaging with their organization: fostering a family member’s interests, extending their own social and instrumental capabilities in a new area, and personal passion for music that has a specific tie with that organization. Uncovering these interests is a skill; but so is recognizing how they might connect with developing an interest with the organization, and whether that interest has the potential to further the goals of both parties. The last segment makes it clear that the fundraiser considers this ability to be a skill, something they enjoy doing well.

Fundraisers build multiple kinds of capital, sometimes with the same activities. In the segment below, US Respondent 1, who is a fundraiser for a higher education institution, describes fundraising activities for which they are responsible.

I handle our digital fundraising initiative. So I send our e-mail solicitations to the donors and I also do social media promotion over our social media channels, so Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. And then I also write marketing and communication copy for annual giving.

In this excerpt, US Resp 1’s activities would effectively build symbolic capital with potential donors by burnishing the reputation of the school with those who have an interest. Social media posts and communication copy are likely to highlight honors, qualifications, and other reputational subject matter. But these activities may also build shared cultural capital, especially among alumni. By helping to build on personal dispositions, and sharing news that is of interest to a discrete group, these posts and communications help to foster a shared sense of what is important, and provide information that can be shared with others.
US Respondent 2 works for a farmers’ market, a cooperative organization that has significant community outreach and actively tries to reduce food insecurity. They speak to a desired efficiency of activities in this excerpt:

*I think that would be a good opportunity not just to raise funds, but to also just market the {organization}. I think any sort of communication should emphasize, really, the value that the {organization} adds to the community.*

Here, US Resp 2 identifies a single opportunity to communicate, with multiple goals: both economic capital, and also symbolic capital – the reputation of the organization within the community.

*Some capital is built directly for the organization, and some is invested in the individual fundraiser to further the work of the organization.* The capital built and invested in the fundraiser was primarily in the form of skills and of networks. For example, US Resp 1 shared:

*So in college, I studied English basically just because I didn’t really know what I wanted to do and I knew that I was a pretty good writer. And my concentration within English was professional writing and rhetoric, so it was basically how can we use writing to persuade, engage, and entertain. And I was like, “Oh, well, I guess one way I can be involved in the art world is if I use the stuff that I’m learning in my English classes to tell everybody why these arts are important.*

Here, US Resp 1 is referring to activities they undertook before becoming a fundraiser that proved not only helpful in their later career, but also formative in deciding which career to follow. These skills merged with their other interests to suggest a way to be effective in support of causes about which they care.

**Transmuting Capital**

So far, we have identified three themes regarding transmuting capital. Each is discussed, below.

*Existing cultural and symbolic capital can be transmuted into social capital.* For example, knowledge and reputation opens doors, giving the opportunity to develop social capital, as shown in this example from US Resp 2:
I go out and give talks, community cooking demonstrations. I work with cooperative extensions. I go to neighborhoods and meet with people and do that sort of intervention, that sort of person-to-person work.

In this example, the cooking skills (cultural capital) and the imprimatur of the organization (symbolic capital) are fundamental to creating the opportunity to get to know people.

**Social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital work together to transmute to economic capital.** In this vignette, UK Resp 2 describes how social connections worked together with insights that resulted in economic capital for the organization.

So we had done a few bits where the chorale team goes in and they would work with a couple of our sponsors on some ice-breaking things at meetings. So we knew it kind of worked... And one of our big donors who is also a businessman told us what they knew as businessmen would work internally. Which of course, we don’t know that – we could test it, but it’s expensive to test these things. And then we went for the {Prize Name} which is a locally based fund which is run by businesses that local arts organizations can apply to, to deliver an idea that will be attractive to businesses. And we put it forward, and we won. The prize is 10k pounds. So it’s kind of like a Dragons’ Den\(^1\) type thing, where they invest in this idea because they think it’s good. And straightaway those two men involved – their companies became competitors in the competition. And that would have been difficult, I think, to recruit in that first year without having buy-in.

Here, UK Resp 2 first activates social capital by sending in organizational representatives to local sponsors. One of the organization’s existing donors offers advice, sharing cultural capital (inside knowledge). Social capital then assists with the prize challenge, as the two businessmen previously consulted activate their companies’ support (using their positions, symbolic capital) to result in economic capital for the organization. Note that it can be difficult in some circumstances to identify a single discrete point of transmutation.

**The lack of symbolic/social capital is a barrier to transmuting/building economic capital.** US Resp 2 shares a barrier to their fundraising process in this excerpt:

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\(^1\) Dragons’ Den is a UK television show in which entrepreneurs pitch their start-up ideas to venture capitalists in hopes of investment. It is similar to Shark Tank in the US.
We had a little pushback since we’re both just there about a year now, so there’s a lot of turnover and we were both new last summer, so we’re still kind of, we need recommendations (reputation).

In this case, staff turnover has necessitated the rebuilding of social capital (personal connections) on the part of the individuals doing the work of fundraising in order to return economic capital. By stating that “we need recommendations,” US Resp 2 indicates that reputation or references (symbolic capital) might help patch the gap and allow the process to proceed more quickly.

Using Capital

So far, we have identified five themes regarding using capital. Each one is discussed, below.

**Social capital is used by the non-profit organization for logistical purposes.** The social capital that an organization possesses is often used and activated by fundraisers in order to “get things done” for the organization, as well as extend resource and capacity. For example, below US Resp 2 highlights how organizational capital, networks and connections can be activated to provide resource effective grant management for the organization:

*We work with the Chamber of Commerce, who’s a nonprofit, and they manage our grants for us. We write a line in and they take some overhead for their administrative cost."

In another example US Resp 2 notes how organizational capitals can be linked to source equipment:

*There are organizations like the Farmers Market Coalition has resource to get free – if you’re an existing market and you don’t have SNAP\(^2\) equipment, you can get free equipment from the Farmers Market Coalition."

**Fundraisers identify and use the social and symbolic capital of multiple parties to accomplish their objectives.** Closely related to the point above, fundraisers regularly describe how important the capital possessed by staff members, volunteers and other organizations is in

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\(^{2}\) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a US federal program that supports low-income individuals and families.
connecting with donors and the public. In the example below, UK Respondent 3 identifies that
the symbolic and cultural capital of front-line staff (in this case nurses in a hospice setting), as
well as that of the services they provide, are of far more use than that of the fundraisers
themselves when connecting with donors:

   No, they don’t want to hear from us. They want to hear a nurse, they want to hear
about the services. They are not really interested in us – we’re a means to an end.

Here, the fundraiser’s social capital is used to connect potential donors with the right people
inside the organization. UK Resp 2 goes on to highlight how social capital in the form of direct
relationships with volunteer fundraisers is used to continue generating further capital – social,
economic and cultural, for the organization:

   And the [fundraising] teams are amazing at building relationships with people
year after year, who back and do the same events. And hats off to them. But it is
not really about them...

Of note in these examples is UK Resp 2’s insistence that the capital that matters most is that of
others such as staff, volunteers, etc. The skill in fundraising therefore lies in both identifying and
then activating these individuals and the organizational capital.

   Cultural capital is used to further build social capital. Cultural capital in the form of
prior and current existing skill sets (sometimes not related directly to the cause, but rather those
inherent to the individual) are used to create opportunities to build social connections, and
diversify connections. For example, US Resp 2 talks about how previous skill and expertise can
be effectively activated:

   I know fundraising professionally means -- I thought where there's
common ground, it's really easy to have that conversation. But yeah, so I
enjoyed -- I started to work for {their university’s phonathon} for a couple
of years when I was finishing up undergrad and just calling people.

Here, US Resp 2 acknowledges the importance of skills learned as technical competence and
cultural capital in establishing new relationships in order to enhance and further build social
capital both for themselves and the organization.
**Economic capital is used for the organization.** Economic capital in the form of donations and incoming resources are used to not only purchase goods, services and expertise for the organization, it is also used to invest in staff members’ cultural and symbolic capital. This investment enhances the organization’s ability both to generate further capital, as well as provide services and resources for clients and beneficiary groups. For example US Resp 1 notes:

> Well, the organization that I worked at previously was a lot smaller and so we had a lot less resources. And I mean I wrote direct mail, but we didn’t have a digital fundraising team at all. I mean, granted, I’m pretty much the team here, but we have a lot more resources and a lot more money to try new and different things.

This theme is closely related to and important to note in relation to the following theme:

**Economic capital is used for beneficiaries.** Economic capital is used to fund both direct and in-direct services for beneficiaries. This includes programming, equipment, resources, education, onward grants and so forth.

> Our Perennial are unrestricted funds, but our grants are mostly for what we call healthy food incentive funds, so it’s a pool of money that was redirected to SNAP doubling, so if you swipe your card for $10, we’d give you $20 to spend, so just free money for local food.

Here, US Resp 2 provides an example of the physical resources made available to beneficiaries via the use of economic capital generated by fundraising.

Economic capital, however, is rarely directly transferred to or controlled by beneficiaries and is often directed to beneficiaries in the form of a gift or loan. As will be observed in the next section, which models our early findings, this is the case with other forms of capital, where it is observed that social capital appears not to be exchanged between beneficiary or NPO recipients and the NPO organization. This observation will be addressed and considered in the future, on completion of further, in-depth analysis and consideration of final findings.
Preliminary Revised Model

Below, we present a revised model of how social capital in the Bourdieusian sense (drawing on Portes, 1998; Siisiäinen, 2000 & Harvey et. al., 2011) maps on to fundraising activities. Note that, based on data focused at the preliminary level of observation presented thus far in this paper, the model is now conceived as multi-level, and quite dynamic.

The revised model seeks to capture and present the inter-directional nature of forms of capital. Important to note is the centrality of various forms and sources of social capital that are used, managed and directed by fundraisers for the benefit of the organization and donors.

Within this model fundraisers build capital – social, cultural, economic and symbolic in various ways and on various levels. Some of this capital is actively reinvested in self (e.g. on professional development; and through networking); some is shared with the charitable organization to enhance resources and further forms of capital. In the latter instance, fundraisers behave as capital intermediaries and invisible managers and users of organizational capital inherent in other staff members and volunteers.

The organization and fundraisers support each other with cultural, economic, social, symbolic capital in bidirectional flow that enhances the capital of each party, where this bidirectional flow is beneficial. However, it is the embodied capital of the organization in the
form of staff, volunteers, programmes, knowledge etc, that remains at the forefront of narrative and discursive presentations of the NPO and its work.

Fundraisers build social capital with donors, often utilizing the social, symbolic and cultural capital that they have identified and cultivated within the organization and with organizational representatives. The social capital tends not to be accrued to the fundraiser as an individual, but rather as an agent of the organization.

Donors give economic capital to the organization, and receive symbolic capital from helping and being affiliated with the organization, but more specifically “the cause” being represented by the NPO. Sometimes social capital also flows in both directions between donors and the organization, especially in the case of major donors.

Beneficiaries give symbolic capital to organization in the form of animating mission, and identifying and describing accomplishments. The organization gives economic capital to beneficiaries (through programming), and sometimes cultural capital in the form of training and access to artistic and educational opportunities. However, our evidence doesn’t yet show examples of beneficiaries as a party to giving or receiving social capital or other forms of capital that would enable active participation and inclusion within the philanthropic field.

The implications of these preliminary findings and consequent modelling are still under consideration. Conclusions are, therefore, subject to change as we continue our systematic analysis.

Conclusion

This working paper argues the appropriateness of social capital as a lens to help us understand fundraising dynamics. In doing so, it calls for a consideration for whom and where the social capital activated within fundraising practices is enhanced and/ or diminished; and the impact this may have on the NPO sector and civil society’s overall purpose. Given how dependent the sector is on the skill and experience of fundraisers and the income that they generate, this study is relevant to a wider context in which fundraising and philanthropy takes place, in the UK, US and internationally. By refining social capital theory using new qualitative evidence, we offer a theoretical extension that contributes to international scholarly discussion of both social capital and fundraising processes.
References


