

An understanding of cultural elements that are critical in determining how fundraising is carried out in a particular society and country is vital for professionals who seek philanthropic support for their organizations.

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Fundraising, culture, and the U.S. perspective

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In their article “Developing Globally Literate Leaders,” Rosen and Digh (2001) relate the following incident: “Walk into the headquarters of Ping An Insurance Company, look up, and you’ll see a bust of Confucius—not at all surprising in this Chinese company. But look again. Facing Confucius from across the lobby is none other than Sir Isaac Newton. In fact, paintings of great Eastern and Western thinkers serve as a backdrop all the way down the entry hall to where Confucius and Newton peacefully coexist” (p. 70). This illustration can easily be translated to the world of non-governmental organizations throughout the world. Local roots that give modern philanthropy its impetus exist alongside with Western, particularly U.S., ideas on how to motivate philanthropy that is based on ancient roots.

U.S. citizens, regardless of their own cultural and ethnic heritage, often view philanthropy as their domain, forgetting that their own roots, whether distant or recent, contain elements of giving to others. As Tempel (2003) wrote, “Americans tend to be myopic

about philanthropy. We sometimes even think and talk as if we invented it” (p. 26). True, a formalized means of giving and receiving, of offering and asking, has perhaps been most recognized as an organized and substantiated practice in the United States, but many of the traditions, habits, and professional pursuits that are part of our daily lives as donors or fundraisers came from other lands as the United States was settled.

Philanthropy is as ancient as human existence. Most religious and cultural entities express charitable expectations from their members, and yet little attention has been paid to this subject, particularly by Americans, for whom philanthropy is a way of life. The editors of *Philanthropy in the World's Traditions* wrote in the introduction, “That so little attention has been paid to this subject is surprising” (Ilchman, Katz, and Queen, 1998, p. ix). They also state that philanthropy is rooted in the ethical notions of giving and serving to those beyond one’s family and often driven by religious traditions as well as shaped by cultural behaviors and practices. The term *philanthropy* also causes some difficulty, with confusion over related concepts of charity and altruism. Voluntary giving and serving others is the oft-accepted definition of philanthropy, and yet there is no universal acceptance of values that promote and drive philanthropy because cultural values vary greatly. Recognition of the cultural roots and influences on philanthropy allows us to understand more completely how philanthropic activities are related to societal benefit in different settings. Ilchman, Katz, and Queen concluded that “philanthropy was not a free-floating activity separated from the complex elements of the societies in which it resided, but was influenced, indeed structured, by the specificity of particular cultures” (p. x).

Culture is valuable for providing a foundation or framework to a practice and tradition of giving. According to Wilson, Hoppe, and Sayles, “Culture strongly influences how one behaves and how one understands the behavior of others, and cultures vary in the behaviors they find proper and acceptable” (1996, p. 1). There is the external culture, which is exhibited in outward behaviors and traditions that are readily discernible, such as a mariachi band performance.

Internal culture is less evident because it involves the way people think about situations and conceptualize information. Culture can be most easily explained as a people's way of life. All cultures view reality differently. These views are set in unique communities that have beliefs and behaviors not always shared or understood by others in the outside world. Some cultural meanings are easily recognized; others are more subtle and demand careful observation in order to come to conclusions about the culture itself. For the fundraising professional, therefore, consideration of cultural elements is vital prior to any fundraising activity in any country. Unfortunately, many fundraisers approach a relationship and solicitation from their own perspective, therefore leaving themselves unprepared for cultural differences that can easily be misinterpreted and misconstrued. The cultural dimensions of charity and philanthropy, terms that engender much academic discussion yet have the end result of giving to others, and the distribution of income and wealth all have a variety of meanings from culture to culture.

Two main lessons emerge. There are thought leaders who maintain that in our borderless society, our global community, culture does not matter. In fact, culture matters more because as discernible borders come down and information flow as well as movement of peoples occurs, cultural barriers go up and present new challenges and opportunities. Learning about fundraising in various cultures is not a one-way transaction. While many countries look to the U.S. model for understanding how various principles and strategies can work, we in the United States can also learn a great deal about expanding our own knowledge and practice through observation of how fundraising works in other lands. For example, while telephone solicitation may not function well in many countries due to limitations on this means of communication, the Internet may reach people in the most remote areas and therefore is used by nongovernmental organizations quite effectively. The second lesson is that within cultural differences that shape fundraising practices, there is a universality of principles that every good fundraiser must practice. The elements of making a strong and compelling case for support cut across borders. How these elements are shaped

when case expressions are prepared and presented is another matter, but making a case remains a universal concept. So as we consider culture and its importance in forming the foundation of philanthropy and fundraising anywhere in the world, we can share the views of Rosen and Digh (2001): “Culture is no longer an obstacle to be overcome. Rather, it is a critical lever for competitive advantage” (p. 74).

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as nonprofits are known in much of the world outside the United States, have played a critical role in shaping local civil society because of shifting social and political developments. Events of the past fifteen years, perhaps best seen during the post-Soviet era and the developing democracies in many parts of the world, have caused citizens to push for more self-expression and freedom of expression, for the opportunity to voluntarily gather together for common vision and goals, and for the aid of those in the poorer segments of society. NGOs are organized to serve the public good; their profits are not distributed to members or owners. Therefore, they have served as excellent vehicles for the development of democratic ideals. There are societies where NGOs are controlled by government and not highly developed, but they still maintain traditions of voluntarism and philanthropy.

But returning to a statement set out previously in this chapter—that the U.S. vision of fundraising in the rest of the world is myopic, limited, and even unknowledgeable—I restate the belief that an understanding of what occurs in the cultures giving and receiving around the world is valuable for professional understanding and growth, to say nothing of not appearing to be parochial or provincial.

As our international colleagues have indicated in the chapters that follow, fundraising occurs in all areas of the world. Some regions or countries experience fundraising as something managed from the United States but designed to assist locally, such as work done by UNICEF and CARE. Other examples are projects instituted by U.S. organizations such as Counterpart, which establishes programs and aids local personnel in assuming their management

and funding. Alongside these efforts, philanthropic traditions continue locally. For example, while international causes function and succeed in Kenya, locals also take up and fund causes such as caring for street children or AIDS victims.

In some parts of the world, U.S. trainers, consultants, and fundraisers have been invited to become part of the philanthropic scene. The Fund Raising School at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University is one such example. International participants come to the United States to learn principles and techniques of fundraising that they then implement in their own countries. In addition, the Fund Raising School has been invited to teach classes in other countries, making it more possible for many to learn how fundraising works in the United States and how these principles can be adapted to local cultures and practices.

In *The Worldwide Fundraiser's Handbook* (2003), Norton discusses why fundraising is important for an NGO's success. Every organization needs money to survive, develop, and expand. Fundraising is vital to reducing dependency on some parent organization, founder, or limited funding source. Fundraising is vital for an organization's viability over time. It is especially significant in building a constituency that will not just use the NGO's services but will also foster its ability to provide services and carry out its vision.

In carrying out fundraising efforts, on the one hand, professionals in every land have found commonalities in some practices and concepts. In order to develop and flourish, and do more than just survive, good management practices must be implemented. Ethical practice and stewardship, while interpretations vary from culture to culture, are vital for NGO success in gaining the confidence of donors of all types. Making a compelling case, regardless of types of case expressions that are culturally defined, is necessary in order to appeal to regional and national constituencies. Certainly motivations for giving tend to be universal: giving to meet a need, make a difference, bring about change, and more. When participants in fundraising courses are asked to list motivations they believe are inherent in their cultures and subcultures, the commonality of reasons for giving is quite surprising.

On the other hand, fundraising professionals or NGO personnel who raise funds find that some practices and concepts differ considerably among nations. For example, in some cultures, prospect research would be impolite at the least and highly intrusive and suspect at the most. Consider former Soviet republics, where the KGB maintained records on citizens. Making the leap from this mentality to the positive reasons for accumulating information about prospects and donors is quite a challenge there. In many countries, volunteer activity is minimal and not widely accepted as a practice. In other lands, people may do pro bono work on behalf of a program or organization they believe in and not recognize such activity as volunteering in the U.S. sense. Volunteering for fundraising is not a widely accepted practice, yet activity exists in many places that can lend itself to an organized effort leading toward such endeavors. Strategies used for fundraising vary from country to country, sometimes due to economic and societal pressures and restrictions or capabilities, and sometimes due to cultural acceptance of certain means of communication.

These types of similarities and differences, and many others, emerge in the following chapters in the sampling of fundraising descriptions by world regions.

Returning, then, to how culture in all its parameters affects the practice and techniques of fundraising, a consideration of Edward T. Hall's "The Silent Language," which became a classic in understanding culture and its effects, contains timeless and useful guidelines. An anthropologist working with collaborator Mildred Reed Hall, he developed four categories that define cultural variables. These relate very well to fundraising in varying cultures:

- *Relationships*. Because Hall wrote about overseas business, he used business terms: in deal-focused cultures, relationship grew out of deals, and in relationship-focused cultures, deals derived from already developed relationships. When this concept is applied to fundraising, donor development processes and strategies take on new meaning. Some donors come on board because of a quid pro

quo mentality, while others become donors due to relationships already established.

- *Communication.* In some cultures, concise and precise communication is preferable; in others, many details and stories are necessary for complete understanding. The astute fundraiser will understand the context of culture when preparing a case and presenting it.

- *Time.* Some populations are punctual and adhere to schedules. Hall called this “monochronic.” Other people consider time fluid and flexible, and personal relationships are more important than schedules; this is defined as “polychronic.” A classic example, almost a stereotype, is the difference in how Latin Americans relate to time versus Western Europeans.

- *Space.* Proximity may cause discomfort in some places, while in other sites it is a way to form quick and warm relationships. This cultural concept will define what strategies for making the request for funding will be used and be successful.

Other characteristics that complement Hall’s work are how cultures define status, accomplishment, social position, and distribution of power, or whether there is more emphasis on the individual rather than the group, or vice versa. The list could continue, but the above illustrates how cultures shape fundraising principles that are applicable in many settings if they are appropriately adapted.

Within the confines of this small volume, this introduction is intended simply to point to the richness and variety evident in global fundraising practice, while recognizing legitimate differences that shape application of principles. Further discussion on individual nations’ philanthropic roots, use of language to define fundraising, definition of philanthropy versus charity, the role of philanthropy in society, and how philanthropy and NGOs can function under various forms of government are all issues and concepts that merit much more and thorough discussion. The power of fundraising for NGOs internationally is impressive, and this volume provides a sampling of what lies out there. We hope that U.S.

practitioners will be intrigued, tantalized, and inspired by getting acquainted with the wider world of fundraising as it occurs in many cultures and nations.

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