SUSTAINABLE PHILANTHROPY WITH PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Great Fundraising Events: From Experience to Transformation

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Introduction

The realm of nonprofit events is a varied and exciting one and has even been likened to a high-wire act without a safety net (Allen, 2008). There are no second chances at a great event so the best that one can do is to plan, prepare, and most importantly be ready for the unexpected. It is important to remember that while an event will never be perfect, it does have the potential to create a lifetime memory for supporters and give a significant boost to the quality of their relationship with an organization (Allen, 2008). Therefore, whether the event is catering for 50 or 5,000 people, it must always be meticulously planned and implemented.

Fundraising events have become an increasingly important tool for nonprofit organisations, given the difficulty in recruiting (or engaging) donors through other channels. It has been argued that events can be valuable in driving awareness of the cause and/or its associated service provision. Furthermore, they can also be used to great effect in the context of stewardship, helping build long-term relationships with supporters, acknowledging and rewarding them for the contribution they have made to the organization. They can be particularly effective in the major gift context, where they can assist in the identification of new and potentially high-value supporters and add an enjoyable social dimension to supporter relationships as individuals participate in activities such as networking events, dances, dinners, galas and auctions.

Mass participation events have proved popular too, with early movers in this market now well established in the national and even global psyche. The Susan G Komen Race for the Cure Series®, for example, originated in 1983 in Dallas, Texas and is now the world's most successful series of 5K run/fitness walk events designed to raise public awareness of breast cancer. From the first event's 800 participants, the concept has now expanded to annual races that attract more than 1.5 million participants in more than 150 locations globally. Similarly, the Pan Mass Challenge (established by Billy Starr in 1980 and still under his direction) has grown from very modest beginnings into an event that today attracts 6,000 cyclists from 41 states and

8 countries. Over the past 37 years, PMC cyclists have given (or raised) over $547 million to fund cancer research.

In the UK too, many charities have experienced growth with the top 25 fundraising events now raising over £136 million ($180 million) for good causes. It is interesting to note that market leaders Macmillan and Cancer Research UK now account for 75% of that total and run ten of the biggest fundraising events in the country (Massive 2016). The iconic Race for Life, for example, is now the largest mass participation fundraising event outside of the United States and the largest women-only event in the world. It attracts around 500,000 participants raising £50m each year (Anon, 2017).

Digital channels have also made a significant contribution to the felt experience of fundraising events. Viral fundraising, for example, was a highly significant force in the events market in 2014, with the Ice Bucket challenge, raising $98.2m for the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Association in the period 29th July to 28th August. As a consequence of their delightfully simple idea, there have been in excess of 2.4 million ice bucket-related videos posted on Facebook, and 28 million people have uploaded, commented on or liked ice bucket-related posts. It had an impact in many other countries too, for example, raising £7m for the MND Association, in the UK. Although the contribution of this category of event has now waned, data collected in the UK do highlight an interesting opportunity. Research conducted by the Charities Aid Foundation (2014) indicated that contrary to what some in our sector had feared, the majority of people who gave money in response to the ice bucket challenge donated on top of their usual charity giving. Events are therefore one way in which we might potentially grow philanthropy.

However rosy the picture might seem, the events market does have its challenges, notably because they can be very costly to run in terms of time and money. Many nonprofit boards, therefore, regard events as an element of the fundraising portfolio that involves much greater risk. There is the obvious risk that the event might not turn a profit (if that were the objective) after what can often be substantive set-up costs, but there is also a risk associated with what economists refer to as the "opportunity cost." Could the resources have achieved a better return if they had been invested elsewhere? And then there is the very considerable challenge posed by the competition. There has been a steady growth in the number of nonprofit organizations conducting events, making it increasingly important for organizations to make their offerings distinctive, offering genuine and superior value for supporters and other relevant stakeholder groups (Sargeant and Shang, 2017).

Financial survival within an increasingly competitive fundraising environment demands the regular implementation of innovative and attractive fundraising campaigns, which in turn necessitates the procurement of fresh ideas for fundraising events, promotions and activities (Sowrey, 1990; Shaw, Pullan & Hiwaizi, 2009). So where do these ideas come from? What might it be that ultimately makes an event "successful?" and how can events provide new and potentially exciting forms of value for participants?

In this report, we aim to provide the answers to these questions. We will not be delving into the minutia of how to create specific forms of an event such as; challenges, auctions, or galas, but will instead focus on the big picture to understand what overarching factors may have a part to play in distinguishing genuinely outstanding fundraising events from merely 'average' ones.

Methodology

We began by assembling an international advisory panel drawing on events management expertise from the UK, USA and Canada. This panel helped frame the direction of our literature search and suggested numerous case studies of organizations that in their view had been particularly successful in their events practice and management. These events have all been successful in terms of the number of participants they attracted and/or amount of money they raised. It is important to note though that success here is defined by growth rather than by the absolute amount of participants or dollars raised. We, therefore, focused on organizations that have doubled or tripled either metric in a ten-year period or less.

Interviews were then sought with key informants in these organizations. The aim was to build up a detailed picture of their events practice and thinking. Thirty interviews were conducted in total and all interviews were taped (with permission) and digitally transcribed for later analysis.

In the discussion that follows, we examine each of the major themes that emerged from our analysis using both theory and our interviewees as informants and blending their ideas together. We begin, however, with an analysis of how we might define or categorize the form of fundraising that will form the focus of this report, namely fundraising events.

What Is A Fundraising Event?

The Oxford Dictionary definition of an 'event' stresses a number of dimensions:

> *Event: A thing that happens or takes place, especially one of importance.*

Events are an occurrence, which can be at any place and at any time and most notably here, is one of importance. So, an event is not classed as an everyday occurrence but something that is out of the ordinary or special.

An event can also be:

> *Event: A planned public or social occasion.*

So the occurrence must also be purposeful, prearranged and deliberate, in order that a particular goal or set of goals can be achieved. In the context of fundraising that might be dollars raised, the number of new contacts generated, but there might also be objectives relating to stewardship, such as donor satisfaction and commitment. Events can also be held for the purposes of awareness, although in the view of these authors, to be acceptable this must be deliberately planned for and metrics agreed in advance. Too often in our sector "awareness" can be an excuse offered in defence of a failed event. How often has the sector heard "we didn't raise any money, but at least we raised awareness?"

Cox (2017) tells us that there are four primary reasons for organizations to engage in fundraising events:

1. Fundraising;
2. Identification of Prospects;
3. Education and Cultivation; and
4. Recognition.

Although the purposes of these events are not mutually exclusive, identifying the primary purpose of an event prior to planning and implementation will help drive its success. Table 1 illustrates the various categories of events and the costs and outcomes associated with each. The “Cox Matrix” is, therefore, a useful tool for managing expectations about what a given category of event can achieve.

Table 1: Cox Event Matrix

Event Goal	Event Revenue	Event Expenses	Event Net $ Raised	Event Goal Outcome Evaluation
Fundraising	High	Moderate	+ $ Raised	Organization generates substantial funds to support the mission. Costs should not exceed 40% of revenue
Identification	None or minimal	Moderate	- $ Raised	Organization identifies prospective donors
Education	Moderate	Moderate	Minimal or no $ raised	Donor increases understanding of the organization; qualifies as a prospect
Recognition	None or Minimal	Moderate to high	- $ raised	Donor and others have already made gift; renewal cycle continues

As the table makes clear there are several purposes for a nonprofit event that are not solely limited to raising funds (see also Webber, 2004). An event may seek to thank the current donor base and act as a way of developing the already existing relationship between donor and organisation. It might also encourage new supporters to get involved by explaining the work that the charity does or be used as an opportunity for networking possibly with a view to securing other categories of support (e.g. corporate sponsorship). Alternatively, the event may seek to solidify the organisation's brand within a specific community and to raise awareness of their work.

In respect of Cox's first category, events can also be categorised in terms of the activities that will take place. In the UK for example, HM Customs and Excise consider that the following forms of events may be held for fundraising purposes[1]:

- Auctions of bought-in goods;
- Bazaars, jumble sales, car boot sales, good-as-new sales;
- Dinner dances, balls, discos or barn dances;
- Endurance participations, treks;
- Exhibitions; such as art, history or science;
- Fetes, fairs or festivals;
- Film showings;
- Firework displays;
- Games of skill, contests, quizzes;
- Horticultural shows;
- Lunches, dinners, galas, barbecues;
- Performances; such as concerts, stage productions, and any other events which have a paying audience;
- Sporting participations (including spectating), such as sponsored walks or swims, bike rides; and
- Sporting performances.

[1] A fundraising event in UK law is one organised and promoted primarily to raise money for the associated charity and participants must be aware of the primary fundraising purpose. Fundraising, with a few exceptions, is exempt from VAT and direct tax. However, any fundraising event which is classed as a trading activity will not receive VAT exemption to prevent unfair competition with other organisations holding similar events who do not receive the benefit of VAT exemption

There are thus several helpful classifications of events in the fundraising literature, but what was interesting to us was that all those we could identify focused on event practicalities, forms of event or what the event might deliver in terms of benefit for the organization. We were unable to find a single framework that examined the benefits or outcomes that might result for the event participant. As we shall shortly show this is a significant weakness.

Event Motives and Fundamental Human Needs

We began our study with an expectation that highly successful events would result from a high level of donor-centricity. In short, those organizations that have a detailed understanding of donor expectations and motivation would tend to do better. Our interviewees rapidly confirmed that intuition. The following quotes are illustrative:

> *"You want it to exceed their expectations so if they have the expectation that it will be fun then it needs to be fun, and if they have the expectation that it will be entertaining or informative, then it needs to be those things."*

> *"If you can find a good concept that meets audience need, meets audience appetite, and marry that up with a good (product), you have a bit of a formula for success there."*

Some of our interviewees had conducted detailed audience research (gathering data on lifestyles, connection to the cause, feelings about fundraising etc.) and then developed profiles or "personas" of the kinds of individuals they would look to target with a given event. Event planners were then able to focus on the needs of these very specific individuals and plan experiences they would find deeply moving and personally meaningful.

> *"One of our segments we created we labelled Matthew. He was a 39-year-old gay man. He lived in a Victorian terraced house in Hackney, with his long-term partner Edwin. They've owned their house for several years and are paying off the mortgage. Matthew reads the Guardian (newspaper) and Men's Health (magazine) He likes to watch shows like the Bake Off on TV,*

> *that kind of thing. He was a little bit closer to the cause, in the sense that he was aware of the HIV epidemic in the '80s and had lost some friends to Aids related to illness. So he feels closer to us as a consequence."*

Although discerning individual motives or clusters of motive is essential, there has been surprisingly little academic research on the topic – at least in the context of events. In their paper in 2003, New Philanthropy Capital neatly summarize what they see as being key motives for event participation in its broadest sense:

1. Philanthropic - the donor believes in the underlying charitable cause
2. Prestige - person wishes to be seen at the event as it provides either a signal of wealth or of social grouping
3. Leadership - to encourage others to give, show of generosity
4. Relationship with the charity - donor has direct personal experience of relevant cause, for example losing a friend or family member to cancer
5. Warm glow - donor takes enjoyment from giving to charity
6. Associated warm glow - supporting friends or associates who are organising the event
7. Peer pressure - friends and committee members encourage attendance. In practice, we believe a significant reason why people attend fundraising

New Philanthropy Capital (2003)

The wider literature reports something of a dichotomy in event motivation. Some individuals will attend because they like the content of the event, while others will participate because they are passionate about the cause. Work by Bennett et al (2007), for example, found two main motives for taking part in sporting events: a person's level of involvement with the cause(s), and the desire to pursue a healthy lifestyle. It was interesting to note that "exhibitionism" also emerged as a factor i.e. the ability to be seen by society and by their peers (through social media), to be involved and active in the community. Consequently, the authors suggest that images portraying the social dimension of a charity sports event where spectators can observe participants may be profitably woven into event advertisements (Ibid, Page 173). However, overemphasising the charitable dimension of a sporting event may lead participants to think that the event is not serious or challenging, thus reducing the potential for donations among sports enthusiasts. As the above research also showed strong connections between serious-mindedness and the motivation to participate in sporting events, the authors suggest that advertisements for such events are also displayed in ‘serious’ media channels so as not to discourage those individuals seeking a genuine challenge.

The wider events literature highlights the need to stress the cause as well as the challenge to address both potential motives (Saget, 2012).

> *“Yeah. Absolutely. I've personally gone to a couple of fun runs and sort of mass participation events of that nature, and I've hardly seen any advertising for the charity involved, so that if you didn't have a clear idea who you were running for and why. You wouldn't really know what charities were on offer. You were just sort of running for the sake of running.”*

All this work has clear implications for professional practice, but it is possible to dig deeper and examine the more fundamental human needs that are being met either consciously or unconsciously through attendance at an event. The relevant literature here is drawn from the domain of social psychology. It tells us that as human beings we thrive when we experience a high degree of psychological wellbeing. Psychologists such as Ryff (1989) have in turn specified six elements that are commonly used to measure it. They are:

1. Need to make a difference;
2. Autonomy;
3. Positive relations with others;
4. Growth;
5. Purpose in Life; and
6. Self-Acceptance.

We will elaborate on each below.

Need to make a difference: Defined as the competence to choose or create environments best suited to an individual's needs/values and where they are capable of making a desirable difference. In the context of fundraising events for example, if participants in a marathon perceive they can make a difference in finding a cure for cancer, they will experience high psychological wellbeing along this dimension. Similarly, if a disability charity's donors feel they can make a tangible difference in another human being's life by participating in a gala dinner they will experience high psychological wellbeing.

Autonomy: Defined as a sense of self-determination and the ability to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways. An individual would experience a high degree of autonomy if they perceive that they have selected a new and innovative event in which to participate. They will also experience higher autonomy if they are in some sense in control of their own experience and in the context of fundraising have options around who to ask and how.

Positive relations with others: Defined as the need that people have for warm, satisfying and trusting relationships with others (Deci & Ryan, 2011). One might experience a close relationship by being introduced to other donors at an event, or by connecting directly with a beneficiary of one's giving. The greater the sense of connection that one might engender the higher the psychological wellbeing along this dimension.

> *"I love meeting the people, I love the humour, I love the encounter, I like being amongst my own in a performance, team-oriented activity."*

> *"I think it's that sense of human connection, it's very powerful seeing someone who has directly benefitted from your giving."*

Growth: Defined as a feeling of continued development, realizing one's own potential, seeing oneself as growing and expanding, seeing improvement in self and behaviour over time, being open to new experiences, and changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness. Many different kinds of events have a clear potential to contribute to an individual's growth as individual's master a new level of fitness, for example, or wrestle with one of the world's great causes or issues.

Purpose in Life: Defined as having goals for the future of one's life and a strong sense of direction. Research indicates that the clearer one's life purpose is the higher one experiences psychological wellbeing (e.g., Reker, Peacock & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Linking with a nonprofit through attendance at an event can help define or fulfil an individual's purpose. Our research suggests that the more inclusive one's life purpose becomes of the needs of others (and ideally humanity) the greater will be the experience of wellbeing (Shang and Sargeant, 2017a). Events can be engineered to stretch how good an individual feels along this dimension

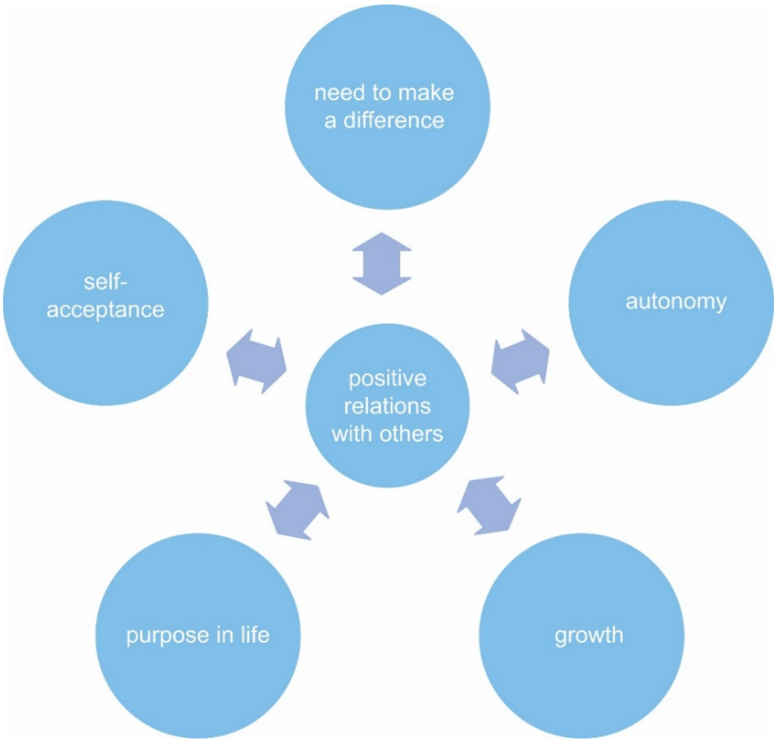
Self-Acceptance: Defined as the ability to experience positive feelings about their sense of self in the past. Looking back, can we accept the selves we have been? The more integrated our sense of self is of all our life experiences; the higher self-acceptance we will experience (Ryff & Essex, 1992). An event might thus encourage the sharing of life stories, or tell stories that a donor may be able to identify with, because they too may have had similar experiences. Sharing how others have accepted their sense of self might potentially prompt others to do likewise.

A successful fundraising event can heighten participants' sense in any of these six dimensions. But to be effective, fundraisers need to ask themselves what combination of these fundamental human needs they can best meet given the supporter group that they will attract to any given event. Once these needs are specified, fundraisers can then explore how they might be able to meet these needs through the design of their events *and* their associated communications. This does not happen by default it needs to be actively planned for.

In doing so, it is important to bear in mind the interconnected nature of these needs. For example, we know that events can very effectively build positive relationships with others; that is their strength. But in addition to enhancing this dimension of the event, it is worth considering how participants might also experience the fulfilment of other human needs, *through* that additional human connection. In this way we can see that simply creating great social interaction at a dinner is not enough, the enhanced connection should be leveraged, for example, to enhance the feeling that one has made (or could make) a difference to others. In this way, the boost in positive relations can transform the way one thinks about other needs and greatly enhance perceptions of wellbeing as a consequence.

The idea is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Interaction of Fundamental Human Needs



Similarly, one might already experience a degree of autonomy in a nonprofit relationship selecting which fundraising campaigns to support, which digital communications to respond to, which forms of giving will be undertaken etc., but an event too can serve in this capacity. Supporters can experience autonomy by choosing the kind of relationships they want to enhance and reflecting on who they want to bring to the event (physically or digitally), who they want to be acquainted with during the event, and how much they want to get to know whom, better. In assisting participants to reflect in this way, fundraisers can help individuals to meet their fundamental human needs, so that when they attend they can not only feel good about the cause but also feel good about themselves.

Fundamental Human Needs of the Team

The same learning we identify above can be applied in the context of the team. Fundraisers too have fundamental human needs and meeting these effectively can be immensely helpful in retaining key members of staff. We learned that highly effective events also tend to be events run by highly cohesive and loyal teams.

> *“You've got someone that's dedicated, that's diligent, has extreme attention to detail and can think outside the box, I think that you can work with people to reflect on their skills and to develop within your own organisation. If we help them to grow they will stay.”*

> *“I think the most important thing when I think about it; it's having a team that's in place for a long time. I’ve been here for ten years and I've moved up through the roles. I started as an event assistant and I've worked my way up to the head of the team. On my way, I have seen what needs to change and how we need to get there, but also I've been able to get and have had a lot of, support from senior staff because of how long I've been in the organisation. I think that's helped a lot.”*

The notion of support is particularly important in events. By their very nature, they involve working closely with the public and managing a much higher degree of risk than would be the case with other forms of fundraising. Attending to the human needs of the team can help build much-needed resilience to cope with the highs and lows of the event fundraising journey. It can also empower them to take appropriate levels of risk.

Psychological Distance

As we established above, events can be particularly effective vehicles for enhancing positive relations with others. The psychology literature tells us that fundraisers can enhance the positive relations that supporters experience in their lives by shrinking the psychological distances that supporters experience toward others. This idea stems from what is known as construal theory (Trope and Liberman, 2010).

According to this theory, distance can be experienced as:

- Temporal distance (time);
- Spatial distances (physical space);
- Social distances (interpersonal distances, such as distance between two different groups or two dissimilar people); and
- Hypothetical distances (imagining the likelihood that something will happen).

Hypothetical distance is important in fundraising because many events are used to relay a situation facing a beneficiary group and posit a potential solution. If hypothetical distance were high, then a donor would feel it less likely that their gift would contribute toward a solution.

Fundraising events, in comparison to other modes of communication, are best positioned to help supporters shrink their psychological distance with others. This is because it is a situation where people experience the closest spatial distance with others. Of all the different types of distance, research has shown that people are most sensitive to physical distance (Zhang and Wang, 2009). In addition, it turns out that by shrinking the distance between a supporter and a beneficiary during an event, one can markedly shrink the individual's temporal, psychological and hypothetical distance too. So events are uniquely powerful and of course, the lower the psychological distance the greater the sense of positive relations a donor will experience.

Construal theory also tells us that people mentally construe things that are psychologically close to them differently from things that are psychologically distant. To understand how this works we need to begin by explaining how these two forms of construal or ‘mindset’ vary. To make the explanation easier we focus below only on temporal distance (how the “present” differs from the future”), although the same arguments can be mounted for all four.

a) Abstract Versus Concrete

When taking decisions about the here and now individuals prefer to think in terms of concrete information. Asking now for a one-off donation by indicating what a donation at specific levels will buy is, therefore, a good strategy to adopt. Telling a donor that $20 would buy a tent or immunize two children would both be examples of a ‘concrete’ appeal. When taking decisions about the future (e.g. potentially leaving a bequest) individuals prefer to think in the abstract and would thus pay more attention to the general approach that would be taken to providing aid. This general approach can also play to the abstract values of the organization. So for example, compassion in international relief, human respect and dignity in health and welfare provision etc. All these themes would work better in soliciting bequests than talking about the specific and immediate needs that characterize annual campaigns.

b) Superordinate Versus Subordinate

This is a fancy way of saying that in the present, informing people about the mechanics of how an organization is achieving its goals would be the optimal strategy. For a hospice, talking to donors about the medications, the numbers of beds, the number or nurses etc. would all be appropriate. These are the nuts and bolts that allow a hospice to pursue its mission. In persuading individuals to leave a bequest, however, research suggests that stressing the superordinate, or what the successful achievement of the mission will deliver, would be a much better approach. Promotional messages stressing the organization’s ability to improve the quality of the end of life experience and the support provided for families would, therefore, be more appropriate. ‘Why’ is more important in the future than ‘how.’

c) Decontextualized Versus Contextualized

Giving in the present can be bolstered by focusing on the organization and the help it is providing now to beneficiaries. The rationale offered for support is very much set within the context of the organization; “We can help x number of beneficiaries, touching their lives in the following ways…” For bequests, the organization should give consideration to illustrating why the work of the organization is of broader social significance. For example, sticking with the hospice example, ‘society has a duty to provide the best terminal care that it can,’ ‘*our* loved ones might one day benefit from palliative care,’ ‘no-one should be allowed to suffer unnecessarily,’ etc. Rather than talk about the immediate benefits of patient care per se, the benefit to the local community and/or the wider society should be emphasized.

d) Structured Versus Unstructured

While annual appeals can be undertaken in a relatively unstructured way, focusing on the most immediate and pressing of needs, appeals for bequests need to articulate a longer term and more coherent plan for what the organization is trying to achieve. Some charities remind donors of key milestones in the journey to date (e.g. in 1950 we … in 1980 we … in 2010 we…) and then explain what will happen in the future (in 2020 we need to … in 2040 we need to …).

e) Consequences versus causes

The perception of distance (i.e. the future mindset) leads to a greater focus on causes (vs. consequences) and focusing on causes (vs. consequences) leads to a greater perception of psychological distance (Soderberg et al, 2015). Causes are regarded as “higher level” and consequences “lower level” because eliminating or changing the cause affects the consequence, but eliminating or changing the consequence does not affect the cause. For example, a village in Sudan is experiencing a drought and its inhabitants are starving through lack of food. The cause of this situation is the lack of water to cultivate crops and to keep livestock, and the consequence is a lack of food to sustain the village. Changing the consequence in this situation by providing food aid to the village does not alter the fact that they are still experiencing a drought and that they are unable to live off the land themselves. This distinction matters because in the event context it can be tempting to focus on the cause, yet this body of work suggests that if the event goal is to raise funds then fundraising messaging would do better to major on the alleviating the consequences.

So combining what we have learned so far, what other implications are there for fundraising?

The first key learning is that events are uniquely powerful in shrinking people's physical distance to others, but the full potential here to reduce overall psychological distance will only be realized if the reduction in physical distance is properly leveraged. Other forms of distance should be targeted and notably social distance.

Research has also shown that psychological distance does not have to be experienced statically, it can be experienced dynamically. In other words, the movement towards someone can induce a sense of closeness. Thus, one way to heighten one's sense of closeness to others during such an event is to create situations where people can feel that they are experiencing the movement of themselves toward others. For example, instead of having volunteers standing at the entrance for guests, volunteers can be instructed to take 2-3 steps forward to greet each event participant (when possible), so a sense of "getting closer" to a friendly volunteer can be created. Similarly, if the event involves a speaker, he/she should be encouraged to visit each table to shake the hands of participants and exchange a few words. Technology may be employed too, showing visual images that take participants off to the beneficiary community, or perhaps through the use of virtual reality technology so that they can experience the cause directly. Repeated exposure to such stimuli for even a brief 30 seconds can change people's perceived sense of psychological distance (Liberman and Forster, 2009).

Immediately after an event, the felt close physical distance with others (supporters, beneficiaries or friends) will fade. Unless the closeness is transferred to a closer social distance with the family or friends they brought with them, a new friend, or the charity brand, the effect of the reduced physical distance on giving will also fade.

Thus a critical function that fundraising events should serve is transferring the close physical distance to closer social distance.

As one example of what we mean, interactions between events participants can be gently guided. In a dinner situation, individuals can be asked to introduce themselves and to identify what they have in common with others on the table (i.e. that can be the specific brief for the exercise). Cards and pens can be provided so that those who wish to can share their contact (or social media) details with the others they have just met. In the digital space too, one can create opportunities for individuals to get closer to other participants or beneficiaries by opening additional lines of communication and encouraging individuals to make use of them (i.e. merely providing the functionality is not enough).

The second key learning is that when the event lowers psychological distance donors will be more likely to give and experience positive emotion and wellbeing as a consequence of their engagement. It is, therefore, important that a request for a gift be made while the effects of the event can still be felt. That means soliciting at the event itself or within 24-48hrs thereafter. Any ask should be consistent with the principles of a ‘close’ construal, namely, it should be a concrete, contextualized solicitation that includes subordinate and incidental features of what is happening or how the ask is being made.

If a request for support is made following an event, it can be helpful to have individuals rehearse the psychological closeness that they experienced before asking them to take an action on the organization’s behalf. The goal is to have individuals experience what they felt for a second time. This might be accomplished by having them post their pictures from the event, or rating the quality of the social experience in some way, or how close they felt to others. Priming these thoughts will greatly enhance the likelihood of these individuals saying yes to whatever was asked of them and critically, donors will feel better about themselves for taking the action.

Remember too our earlier point about shifting feelings of physical proximity to social proximity. This theme can be continued post event perhaps sending a follow-up email or text or social media post to encourage supporters to get in touch with the new friends they just made at the event, perhaps to share pictures or thoughts. Too often, in our experience, individuals are left to their own devices to do this and of course, it does not happen.

As time passes from the original event, the goal should be to begin to transform the focus from what happened in the event, to why everyone chose to come together in that way. Our use of the ‘what’ and ‘why’ here is very deliberate. Psychologists (Giacomantonio, De Dreu and Mannetti, 2010) found that when people’s thinking occurs at a concrete level (e.g. within one week of an event), they focus more on what happened, while when people’s thinking occurs at an abstract level (e.g. within 1 year of an event), they focus more on why what happened, happened.

So, the switch in approach here allows subsequent fundraising to be consistent with the more ‘distant’ temporal mindset where people begin to view their experience in a more abstract and decontextualized way. This needs to happen a few weeks after the event. If the event is an annual one, communications consistent with the “distant mindset” should also be used in the run-up, until just a few weeks before. Then an approach based on the “current mindset” should kick in until a week or two following the event’s conclusion

Creating a Supporter ‘Experience’

Many of our interviewees indicated that their focus had shifted from the content of the event per se, to what the supporter would experience as they participated in the event.

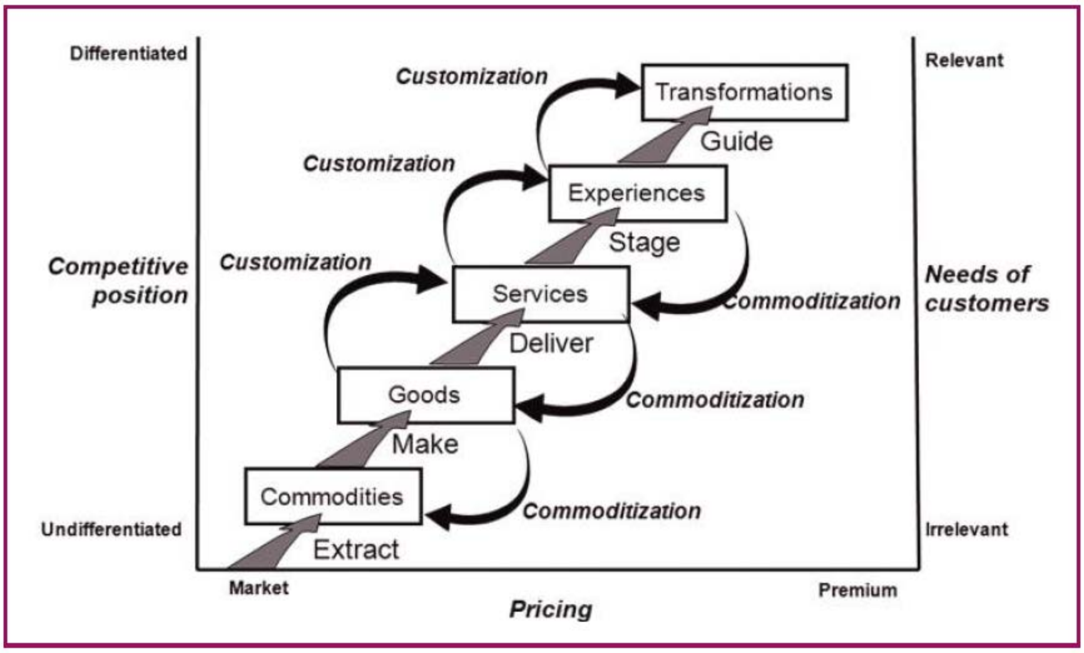
> *“The thing that I would say that is really important is making sure that your event is in some way experiential to the donor or the supporter that is in the room. For me, what we typically do … We sit you down, we talk at you and then there's a point where we ask you to make a gift. There's really not a time where we give the supporter an opportunity to interact with the mission.*

> *"I always want someone that comes to events to touch or to feel or to have an experience with the cause in some way. For instance, one event I did for a literacy organisation (where high school tutors help second graders get up to speed in their reading).*
>
> *"At everyone's place setting, there were books on the table, in the middle and then there were these blank bookplates that could be completed and stuck inside the covers of the books. One of the things that we did is we just stopped in the middle of the breakfast. It was part of the programme where we said, right - what was one of your favourite books when you were a child? I want you to reflect on that.*
>
> *Just think about what that book was and how excited you were to have that book because a lot of kids didn't own a book in their home. They've never had it and we want to change that today because if you can in the centre of your table is a book and what we want you to do is pick out a book. Also on the table, you're going to see a blank bookplate and we want you to stick that in there and we want you to write a message to a child. We're going to give all of these books to a child for them to take home and your message to them will be inside."*

Many of our interviewees had similar stories to tell of events that had been particularly compelling for supporters because of the experiential component they embedded.

However, this notion of "experience" and planning for consumer experiences is far from new. As early as 1997 Crompton and McKay, tracked the emergence of the "experience economy", where consumers were increasingly seen as desiring of experiences that were out of the norm. For Pine and Gilmore (1998), this was only the latest phase in a longer-term shift in the focus in consumer marketing as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: From Commodities to Transformations



Source: Pine and Gilmore (1998)

The description provided by the authors of each stage in the evolution was:

- A **commodity business** where the organization charges for undifferentiated products.
- A **goods business** where an organization charges for distinctive, tangible things.
- A **service business** where an organization charges for the activities it performs.
- An **experience business** where it charges for the feeling customers get by engaging with it.
- A **transformation business** which charges for the transformational benefit customers (or "guests") receive as a consequence of their participation.

From their perspective, it is mass customization that drives the progression through the model. Thus, customizing a good turns it into a service, customizing a service turns it into an experience and customizing an experience turns it into a transformation.

The diagram also demonstrates that as you move in pricing towards the more premium end, the need for differentiation increases. Consumers at this end of the spectrum require a distinct offering, something they have not seen before and that will enthral them and engage them. Pine and Gilmore (Ibid) also argue that an experience should have a 'theme' and ideally a participative story to unify its various elements. For events fundraisers, the 'theme' should obviously be closely aligned with their mission and the reason for holding the event. Pine and Gilmore also state that surprise should play a big role, as should "staging the unexpected".

At the pinnacle of Figure 2 is the notion of 'transformation'. While experiences have typically been produced or crafted by an organization, transformations occur within the guest or donor. The transformation could be in terms of personal wellbeing (as described above), learning, or happiness. By providing a meaningful and memorable experience, the aim of the fundraiser should be to change the individual and create a lasting effect on them. Through reflection on the overall experience, fundraisers can raise more money, raising awareness for a cause etc., but also create healthier, happier and more aware individuals. Elevating the audience in this way, by creating a lasting subjective effect is one differentiator that can take a simply good event to a great event.

Many nonprofits have historically viewed fundraising events as akin to a service business, where individuals pay (or raise money) for the privilege of enjoying the activity they are going to attend. More recently there has been an acknowledgement that nonprofits can offer more immersive experiences for individuals that can draw them into (and allow them to experience in some way) the cause.

Save the Children's Forced to Flee event, for example, was designed as an immersive journey bringing to life the real experiences of children affected by conflict. The attendees were led into the event and given a headset so that they could have a multi-sensory experience. The experience lasted 45 minutes, took visitors through classrooms with bullet holes in the walls, passing through dangerous camps, and then eventually to a Save the Children safe play area, which are found in many war zones and acts as a safe haven for children. The aim of the event was not to raise large sums through admission donations, but to raise awareness of the conditions that these children are facing and to tell their stories authentically.

However, there may also be utility in nonprofits thinking about the transformations that they can engineer for their donors, so that the focus shifts from mere experience, to one which helps shape or develop the supporter in some way. To lift events to this level requires a much richer understanding of the role that philanthropy can play for the donor. Organizations that stage experiences alone – without considering the effect these experiences could have on participants will eventually see their experiences either become passé or commoditized.

> *"The second time you experience something, it will be marginally less enjoyable than the first time, the third time less enjoyable than that and so on until you finally notice the experience doesn't engage you nearly as much as it once did. Welcome to the commoditization of experiences, best exemplified by the increasingly voiced phrase, ''Been there, done that.'' Companies can escape this commoditization trap by the same route that all other offerings can take: customization. When you customize an experience to make it just right for an individual – providing exactly what he needs right now – you cannot help changing that individual. When you customize an experience, you automatically turn it into a transformation."*
>
> Pine and Gilmore (2014, p26)

Other authors have also been interested in the notion of extraordinary experience or transformations. Mossberg (2003, p27) for example proposes that an extraordinary (positive) experience includes:

1. An active, dynamic process;
2. A strong social dimension, which often accompanies this process;
3. The integration of the components of meaning and a sense of joy;
4. The involvement resulting from absorption and personal control;
5. A process that is dependent on the context and an uncertainty associated with something new; and
6. An experience always interwoven with life satisfaction.

Similarly, Tarssanen and Kylänen (2005) have developed what they term “the experience pyramid” in order to illustrate the key elements that are central to the creation of experiences:

1. Individuality, which is about triggering in the customer a sense of being dignified as an individual.
2. Authenticity, which reflects the customer’s subjective perception of what a genuine product, (or experience), is.
3. The story, which performs the primary function of linking all the elements of an experience.
4. Multisensory perception, which means that the event offers an experience that can be appreciated through as many senses as possible.
5. Contrast, which refers to the event’s ability to contrast with what the attendee might have been expecting or with their everyday routine.
6. Interaction, which represents the relationship between donors, the nonprofit, the beneficiary and other relevant stakeholder groups. As we outlined earlier this is a factor widely accepted as being linked with life satisfaction and wellbeing

The notion of authenticity bears some elaboration. Pine and Gilmore (2014) have argued that no matter what the offering, customers will judge it based on whether or not they view it as authentic. Does it really offer mission related value or an experience consistent with the brand of an organization. Unrelated or inauthentic experiences can make people feel good, but they do not contribute to the sense of having a meaningful supporter relationship. In short, one might raise money on the night, but relationship quality and lifetime value will not be enhanced.

Emotional Contagion

A further route to Pine and Gilmore's notion of transformation is heightened emotion. In the context of events, emotion could potentially be heightened through the development of what is termed emotional contagion. In effect, one feels emotion because one observes it in others. Research tells us that people routinely "catch" each other's feelings when working together in groups and the phenomenon has been recognized in the psychological literature as a type of interpersonal influence (Cacioppo and Petty, 1987; Levy and Nail, 1993). There is also what is termed "cognitive contagion" or catching other people's ideas, but there are differences. To understand ideas, words are key but to understand feelings, face-to-face nonverbal cues are much more important. Studies show that emotional contagion most often occurs at a significantly less conscious level, based on expressions, gestures, and facial movements that presenters (or other participants) might make to an audience (Leopold and Rhodes, 2010).

The most straightforward application of emotion contagion is that fundraisers should create emotional events. But simply evoking an emotion is not enough. The key here is contrast. Storytelling and the mood of the storyteller can be used to take participants to emotional lows and then lift them to emotional highs. It is the contrast between the two extremes that is powerful, rather than aiming for a particular emotion per se and this cycling between contrasts can happen at multiple points during an event.

For example, the same story theme could be designed from the perspective a child, showing how her world feels (from bad to good). Then a similar story is told from the perspective of a mother. Then a similar story is told from the perspective of a field worker, and then, most importantly (and most often ignored), the story is told by a donor who experienced all these second hand, but for whom the experience was nonetheless powerful.

Event Narrative

In the previous section, we introduced the notion of storytelling. Almost all our interviewees stressed the importance of having a central narrative for their event. Indeed many of interviewees looked beyond the event itself, planning a narrative that began before and continued after the focal event. The following story is illustrative:

> *"I'll just tell you about something that I just recently worked on. This was an organisation that does adoption for children in foster care. For them, it really is about forever families. Although that is something that they talk about it's not something that they've ever brought into a narrative theme or into one of the major dinner events that they do."*

> *"What we wanted to do was to people to understand what really what it's about is creating forever families. We started from the very beginning with the invitations - so experiencing what it's like to be a child in foster care who is taken from a family and then is in a kind of limbo. We just asked what would it be like for you, if you found out tomorrow or you found out today that you weren't going back to your family and that you may never see them again".*

> *"We started there and then we took them along the journey. So in the logistical information that goes out right before the event, the question was, how would you feel if you found out that there was a foster family that really wanted to take you? That didn't want to let you go, for a long time. Then in the event itself, we contrasted the experience of a foster child who may never have a family, may be in the system and have up to 30 placements. And in the event what happened was the youth speaker who spoke, talked about that. He told donors would it feel like to know that there was a family that was waiting for you at the end of the day because nothing is forever except for family. We took that narrative arc and we just played it out with every speaker."*

> *"Then afterwards, we took people through an adoption process and the celebration that happens once a child gets adopted and let them know that obviously because of you, you made that happen."*

> *"When we think about event messaging, we think about what is the overall one thing that we want people to think about at the end of the day. What do we want them to think, feel and do? That's the question that I always ask. We want them to think that they matter that they can make a difference. We want them to feel like they're putting families together for the rest of a child's life."*

> *"Stewardship ties it all together. Then people don't feel like, oh yeah I paid $250.00 for a ticket and I went and I made a donation and that was it. Instead, they walk out of there knowing that this organisation and I as donor help families stay together forever. They're just plugged in at that point."*

Other interviewees also talked of the need for wider integration with the core proposition of the organization and building narratives around that.

> *"It's the build -up and it's beyond the event. We think of events as opportunities to engage people with a charity, its brand and the work that it does. It is a journey - whether that's a journey beginning digitally on Facebook or whether I see it on a poster or an advert or a bit of PR in the paper. It continues from there, to when I actually participate and beyond that, so the basics of how do I get my money in? Then how am I thanked? How do I feel about the process of fundraising for that charity? Then to the other products am I offered. If this is the start of my lifetime journey with a charity, what is the next offer for me? The whole journey needs to make sense."*

Picking narratives that could support this core journey were seen as essential to success.

Managing Innovation in Fundraising

Many of our interviewees saw innovation as the key to their success. Many traced the route of their success to a formal review of their events portfolio and an examination of how this might need to be changed. A review of this kind was typically initiated as a consequence of changes to the core fundraising proposition, a recognition the nonprofit had no cohesive events strategy or narrative or the detection of falling rates of participation and overall supporter satisfaction. When subjected to formal scrutiny many organizations appeared to have long histories with events that should have been divested many years previously but were continued either because of inertia or because of a historic and possibly emotional attachment to them on the part of specific leadership or board personalities.

> *"We had a fundraising event every single month, which is insane. It's insane. It's just not sustainable. It's not good. There was a tonne of turnover in the position that was organizing all these events because no one wanted to do it."*

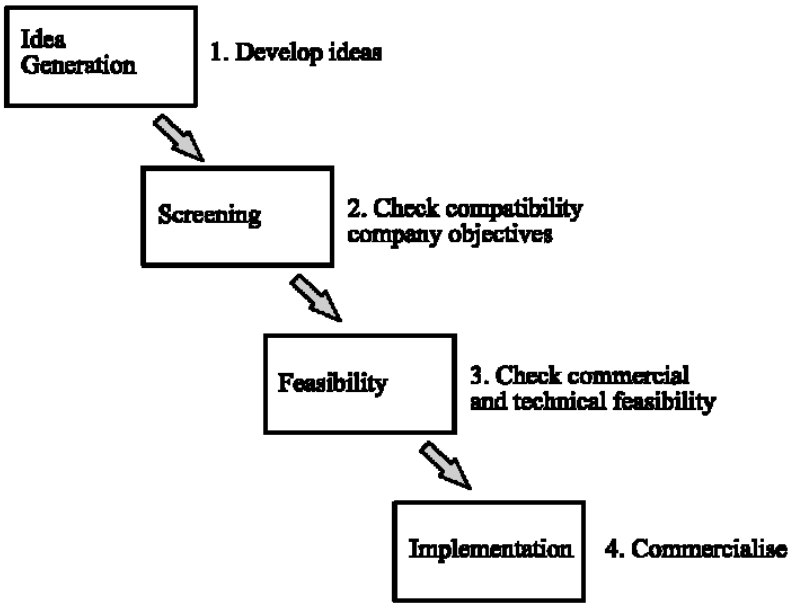
> *"I don't think people should be raising money with events in general as much as they do because it really wears out your staff. It wears out your supporters too. People don't want to go to another rubber chicken dinner. That's something that you can quote me on. I've been to so many fundraising events this year. It's like, "Oh, my God. Another rubber chicken and I've just paid how much money to get in here?" The market is becoming flooded."*

> *"When I got there, they had 10 events a year. Now I have been here for a year or two, we have ratcheted down to three events a year and we're primarily a major gift shop. Our revenues have gone through the roof because all of those events were a huge drain and yet people didn't want to give up the events entirely."*

> *"We decided to do a review, and we sent out feedback forms and had interviewed people to find out what it was that they liked and didn't like about the events. A lot of people just said, you know, they didn't like the event, they just came because they were loyal to (our organization). Actually, it didn't inspire them, and we realised that we weren't bringing any new people in through the events, just the same people year on year."*

Nonprofits organisations have been described in the past as inherently innovative (Nielson, 1979) as there are facets of the organisational form, being self-governing, voluntary, nonprofit distributing, private from the government, and organised (Salamon & Anheier, 1997), which make them well suited to creating new ideas and innovating. Our interviews revealed, however, that the process they go through in stimulating innovation is identical to that employed in other sectors. The model conceptualized by Majaro (1988) is typical of the approach adopted (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Model of the Innovation Process



Organizations typically focus most of their effort in new product/service development activity in the commercialization process at the expense of attending to earlier stages in the model (Boeddrich (2004). As a consequence, our interviewees noted a lack of methodical and systematic procedures for the generation of new ideas. This appeared largely to be ad hoc, an issues which raises a concern since if fewer and lower quality ideas are input to the screening and evaluation process then valuable resource can be expended exploring innovations that will ultimately prove unworkable. (Stasch et al 1992; Alam, 2006).

Innovative new ideas for fundraising may involve completely new activities that deviate from convention (Andrews & Smith, 1996) or they might take the form of variations proposed to existing events, including:

a) New features or technologies in those events,
b) New forms of giving,
c) New forms of celebrity involvement,
d) New and creative positioning or promotional messages.

But where might all these ideas come from?

Where Do Successful New Ideas Come From?

New ideas for fundraising events can arise from inside or outside an organization (cf. Boeddrich, 2004) and may either be developed from existing activities or generated through formal or informal idea screening procedures (Brem & Voigt, 2009). Innovation can also be driven by suppliers offering enhancements based on emergent technology, capitalising on new forms of ticketing, event management or auction processes that individuals can access through their digital devices.

> *"I think everybody is trying to follow trends. Where the people go, charities and a whole range of other businesses aren't too far behind. I think the bigger charities are probably closer to the trends than the smaller charities, but everyone's out there thinking who can we copy from?"*

> *"We have a formal process that we go through, led by our innovation team. They routinely canvas for new ideas, or invite input of ideas they have come up with themselves."*

> *"Sometimes innovation is driven by suppliers. There are many competing suppliers that handle various aspects of events. If we move quickly we can gain an advantage with that, although you have to be nimble because technological innovation is generally shared with the sector as a whole."*

The marketing literature tells us that new ideas can also be generated as a result of customer complaints/suggestions or from a more systematic analysis of any gaps that might be found either in terms of the donor groups served or bundles of unsatisfied need in existing market segments (cf. Burgelman, Christensen & Wheelwright, 2004).

> *"I would say that when you start thinking, 'What's a good idea for an event?' that's not a good question. The first question is; Who are we targeting? Who are we trying to attract? What's either the hole in our donor base that we need to start building or, What's an audience we need to strengthen or build? What's the community we need to grow?"*

Ideas can also be elicited from members of the senior management team, frontline fundraisers and fundraising volunteers. Such routes require that a system (be it informal or formal) be developed to encourage individuals to come forward and share their ideas (Stasch, Lonsdale & LaVenka, 1992, p. 8). In general, the literature on new service development recommends that an organization start with all available sources and then quickly identify those that prove most fruitful so that a focus can be developed on a more manageable number.

Below, we list the main internal and external sources of ideas identified by the literature.

Internal Sources of Ideas:

a) Informal discussions with supporters;
b) Informal discussions with employees and/or volunteers;
c) Analysis of complaints received;
d) Focus groups with supporters;
e) Focus groups with other stakeholders;
f) Organized team-based brainstorming sessions;
g) Individual brainstorming, not using a facilitating software package;
h) Individual brainstorming using a facilitating software package;
i) Organized creativity sessions using techniques other than brainstorming (e.g., lateral thinking, SWOT analysis, an idea generation template obtained from outside the organization, environmental scanning or similar techniques);
j) Senior managers' insights; and
k) Accidental discovery and/or by-products of existing activities.

External Sources of Ideas:

1. Informal discussions with people in other charities;
2. Analysis of the activities of other charities;
3. Attendance at exhibitions, conferences or conventions;
4. Perusal of professional fundraising magazines;
5. Information from a professional body or trade association (e.g., the AFP);
6. Foreign charities;
7. Other foreign sources, e.g., foreign visits, foreign conferences;
8. Web sources dedicated to ideas for charity fundraising;
9. Web sources dedicated to idea creation for general business purposes;
10. Books devoted to fundraising;
11. Advertising/Creative agencies;
12. Ideas consultants;
13. Fundraising consultants; and
14. Suppliers of charity promotional merchandise

Work by Bennett and Savani (2011) investigated the extent to which the channels in this list were employed by UK charities. Table 2 contains the detail of their work and would seem to indicate a reliance on superficial sources of information that are not resource intensive to explore (e.g. copying the activities of competitors). This matters because as Bennett and Savani later note:

> *"Heavy use of convenient and inexpensive sources was negatively associated with satisfaction (with the ideas generated). The results imply, therefore, that the formal application of resource intensive approaches to the process of sourcing new ideas in conjunction with the consideration of a wide range of sources yields superior outcomes. Satisfaction with the quality of the new ideas obtained and with the financial returns from these ideas rose as the overall extent of idea sourcing increased and as the sample organizations intensified their employment of resource intensive sources"*
>
> Bennett and Savani (2011, p134).

Table 2: Sources of Fundraising Innovation (UK)

	% and Rank	
Source	Larger Charities	Smaller Charities
Analysis of the activities of other charities	48% (1)	52% (1)
Information from a professional or trade association	44% (2)	46% (3)
Internet pages dedicated to fundraising ideas and information exchange forums	40% (3)	48% (2)
Attendance at conferences, conventions and exhibitions	33% (4)	40% (4)
Organized team brainstorming	27% (5)	16% (10)
Focus groups	25% (6)	18% (9)
Advertising agencies	22% (7)	20% (8)
Fundraising and other consultants	18% (8)	22% (7)
Senior managers' insights	16% (9)	29% (5)
Individual brainstorming	15% (10)	24% (6)

Source: Bennett and Savani (2011, p134)

While the table illustrates the routes to the generation of new ideas currently employed by charities, it is important to recognize that not every idea will prove to be a winning idea. Consequently, there has been a lot of academic attention on whether (and under what circumstances) some sources are typically better than others. Pavia (1991), for example, determines that up to 75% of ultimately winning ideas were:

1. Raised by internal rather than external sources;
2. Based on a close understanding of clients' requirements; and

3. In some way unique.

The prevalence of internal sources is perhaps unsurprising because internal actors will have a much clearer understanding of the organization's mission, case for support and implementation capabilities (Lozada & Calantone, 1996). In short, the level of 'fit' is likely to be higher.

Below we briefly review the relevant literature.

Internal Sources

As we noted above, employees can be a good source of event ideas, but research suggests that they will tend to favour only small variations to the status quo and are less likely to submit proposals for radical change (McAdam & McClelland, 2002). We also know that if input is to be sought from this source it is important that there is a mechanism for canvassing views, but also a mechanism for converting some of those ideas into action. There is otherwise a risk that enthusiasm will wane if employees perceive that previous submissions have not been valued (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). Pressure to comply and participate in any process should be avoided. Research has also shown that pressure leads to the espousal of a plethora of implausible suggestions (Wilson et al 1988).

Employees can be canvassed individually or in group settings, perhaps using a technique such as brainstorming. However, while the technique of brainstorming is commonly employed, recent research has called into question its' utility (for details see Stroebe et al 2010). Recent studies routinely report that groups produce fewer ideas than an equal number of individuals working independently (Rietzschel, Nijstad and Stroebe, 2006, p247). A better approach might thus be to approach brainstorming at the individual level, perhaps facilitated by relevant software.

Kelly and Storey (2000) reported a number of studies that claimed that successful organizations were more likely to operate formal and systematic procedures (involving, for example, brainstorming, focus groups, systematic gap analysis or environmental scanning) for stimulating the production of ideas. The use of such systematic techniques also seems to foster an environment where offering input on new ideas is regarded as an institutional priority and thus an activity to which genuine effort should be applied (Andrews & Smith, 1996). Systematic procedures can also facilitate the 'selective probing' of ideas rather than 'the production of a flood of ideas, most of which will be impractical' (Sowrey, 1987, p. 54). They can also help foster the analytical and thinking skills of members of the team (Sadi & Al-Dubaisi, 2008).

External Sources

Many nonprofits look beyond their immediate organization for ideas. Sargeant and Kochanowicz (2014) cite the example of the Norwegian Blind Association:

> *'We must always be curious about the one thing that is better than what we do now. So we spend quite a bit of time travelling to the UK or Canada to try and find people who can help us to be better. Not to have the mindset that we are the best – but to continuously improve.'*
>
> *'We are always asking - are there other organizations doing anything new or exciting? Always trying to identify the best – and the best small things too. It may be just a well-designed 'give now' button. It is the Japanese philosophy of Kaizen – long-term gradual improvement. We always look around to see what might be learned from others.'*

Ideas can thus be identified by monitoring the activities of other nonprofits and not just those working in the same field. There can be a great deal of utility afforded by expanding the search to include other categories of nonprofit and those operating in other countries. Allen (2008) argues that this kind of copying allows an organization to build on the expertise of other organizations and then to generate fresh knowledge and further new ideas. There can though be a danger of mass imitation with a plethora of 'me too' type events being brought to market without any real thought being given as to the requisite fit. As Ansari, Fiss and Zajac (2010) have noted, this copying can lead to the adoption of inappropriate practices.

Similarly, new ideas can be identified through published sources, notably the Nonprofit Times or the Chronicle of Philanthropy, but also through emerging digital channels such as Fundraising Chat or Howard Lake's excellent www.fundraising.co.uk. The sites of suppliers that service the needs of the sector can also add value posting case studies of their client's success and offering advice to others (e.g. those of our sponsors www.givesmart.com or www.qgiv.com). A charity's management can also approach an advertising agency or fundraising consultant and include them in the idea generation process. This can offer value as these kinds of sources often employ 'creatives' who are exceptionally good at idea generation. A further advantage of engaging a consultant is that the individual might have a broader grasp of the market and the activities of others, than a charity's in-house personnel. They also exist "outside" of an organization's prevailing culture (Sadi & Al-Dubaisi, 2008). On the downside, there can be a danger that a consultant might be risk averse, looking for incremental gains that would prolong a relationship, rather than suggesting radical innovation with a higher possibility of failure. (Shaw et al 2009).

The Root of Successful Innovation

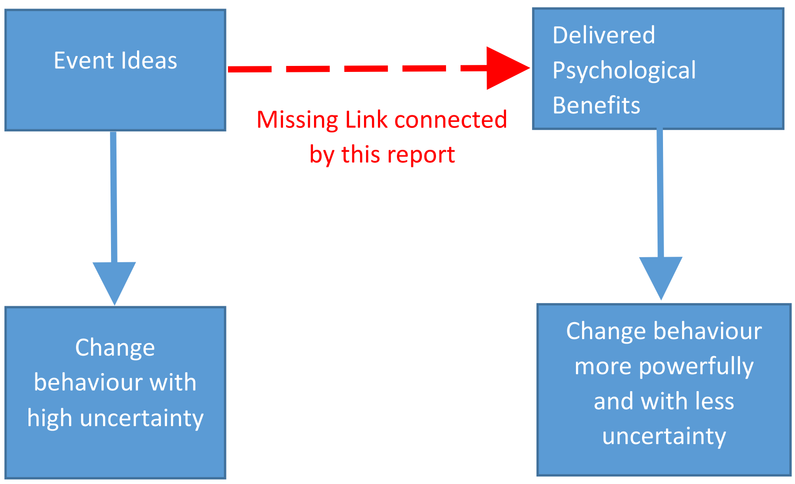
In all this discussion of ideas and their requisite sources, there is an implicit acceptance that what is sought is an idea for a new form of event or a modification to an existing one. We see this as an excessively "product driven" approach. It is focused on the derivation of new features without necessarily understanding why those features might be important.

New ideas must certainly be sought that are appropriate for the focal segment of supporters and in some way reflective of their interests so that attracting them to the event will not be a problem. But for us what drives longer-term success is the much deeper understanding of fundamental human needs that we articulated earlier. At the most basic level, innovation should be fuelled by a higher level of sophistication in clarifying exactly what psychological benefits these events are delivering (or might deliver) for supporters. New ideas can then be deliberately solicited that have the potential to contribute substantively to their wellbeing.

This suggests to us that alongside the processes we described above, there should be a diagnosis of how an event should ideally make people feel and a refinement of either current practice or a newly mooted idea to take account of how to optimize that. Including this dimension in decision-making will greatly heighten the power of the event and make success more likely because the innovation is then solidly driven by theory rather than a random idea that may or may not be successful.

The idea is depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Integration of Donor Wellbeing



To be clear, we are not advocating the replacement of an organization centred framework with this donor-centred framework. We are simply offering it as an alternative framework through which events can be designed. The addition of this new framework we hope will offer event fundraisers many new opportunities for innovation. The successful implementation of these innovations will transform the way supporters experience giving into one that is much more personally fulfilling. Our previous research has shown that this personal fulfilment can increase lifetime giving by a minimum of 10% on average (Shang, Reed and Sargeant, 2017) and double and sometimes triple the likelihood of someone considering leaving a bequest at the end of their journey (Sargeant and Shang, 2016), and all without additional cost to the organization!

Also, to be clear we are not suggesting that successful fundraising events today do not provide psychological benefits to their attendees. On the contrary, it became clear from our interviews that the reason why they are successful is because they are intuitively providing people with the psychological benefits they need. Our research merely makes this learning explicit and therefore something that all organizations can benefit from.

Board Support

A further contributory factor to success in the opinion of many of our interviewees was a high level of board understanding and support. Many ideas failed, not because they were bad ideas but because one or more board members raised an objection. Such objections might arise as a consequence of the nature of the idea itself, or as a consequence of the returns, the project might generate. Many boards were felt to have unrealistic expectations for the early performance of new and innovative ideas.

> *"I guess you need from the outset to have understood and explained the objectives and got that buy-in. I think if there is the expectation that you will make cold hard cash within the first year of a new venture, then you're probably not paying close enough attention because realistically, most ventures take a little while or need testing to make them work well. It can also take time to establish a brand."*

> *"There's an irony in that the more experienced a board is the more cynical they tend to be because they've tried and seen a number of different things."*

Our interviewees felt that the key to success here was a) to have one or more fundraising champions on the board who could argue the case, and b) to seek early input and offer involvement throughout the development process.

> *"I think it would be about the overall buy-in or at least the foundations and the groundwork of that buy-in being achieved before you have even come up with any ideas or before you've even started the process because otherwise, it's more difficult to explain what you're doing"*

> *"Sometimes the culture exists, the objectives were agreed, the buy-in exists, there's a robustly thought out idea, but in some instances, even that won't be enough because personality does get in the way. It depends on the person themselves. If they are authoritarian, then you might need to just let them be involved in the idea generation so that they can feel it's their idea. Or if they're a lot more relaxed and allow for freedom to innovate, then they're more likely to be receptive to the evidence. I think your approach should vary by the personalities in play. I've seen it work both ways really."*

Our recent work on boards suggests a third alternative (Shang and Sargeant, 2017b) in that fundraisers could think of boards as an additional stakeholder group with needs that must be met. Rather than think in terms of personalities per se, fundraisers could explore what board members are looking to achieve through their involvement with the organization either at a superficial level (in terms of organizational specifics) or in terms of the human needs that they are looking to fulfil. They might then be engaged with the event's program in a manner that would allow them to meet those needs and be markedly more supportive as a consequence.

Critical Role of Technology

The final factor highlighted by our interviewees related to the use of technology. Many new developments were seen as having taken place over the past 5 years that have revolutionized the quality of the donor experience making it easier for individuals to buy tickets, engage in live or silent auctions, to make payments and to provide feedback on their overall experience. Technology has also facilitated peer-to-peer fundraising and the growing of networks to support a cause.

What was interesting in this section of our conversation was that innovation was largely driven by agencies or firms providing services to the sector. On occasion, nonprofits had identified core issues and actively sought technological solutions, but where this did occur it seemed to be process led in the sense there was a recognised difficulty in handling (for example) auction bids and payments that needed to be resolved. It seemed to us, that the core of innovation in this space was focused on the needs of the organization which when satisfied then translated into a better quality of service for the supporter.

Rarely did it seem that technological innovation would be specifically sought to enhance how good a supporter might feel about themselves, rather than the service or event per se. This deeper way of thinking represents a significant opportunity for the future. Technology (or more likely additional functionality within existing technology) could be specifically developed to offer utility in the fulfilment of fundamental human needs. Notable here are the needs for connectedness, autonomy and competence. To meet these needs well, designers must consider first who will form the focus of the relationship the technology will seek to bolster. Is the aim to build a relationship with the beneficiary, the organization, volunteers, other supporters, or the friends and relatives of the supporter themselves? System design must logically flow from this.

It was interesting to note that many of our interviewees felt that a greater integration of digital technologies would in the future be crucial for success. Nonprofits will never abandon reality because it can provide some of the richest experiences, but the integration of virtual reality (or augmented reality) either in the narrative arc for an event or in relation to the overall supporter journey, is certainly a possibility.

Some of our interviewees were particularly excited by the notion of co-creation of value and the role that technology might play in that space. So far in our report, we have argued in favour of a greater focus on the needs of supporters in fundraising activities. Modern technology already allows the co-creation of value in the sense that supporters can become part of an organization's story by sharing experiences and stories online, but it seemed to us that an additional level of power might be generated through the design of reflective activities that would prime individuals to think through their individual needs and what their support of the focal nonprofit might mean to their sense of who they are. The same notion could be applied to technology that facilitates peer-to-peer fundraising. We appreciate that many such programs allow the surface level sharing of stories and photos, but how much more powerful might this be if it prompted individuals to actively consider what these things might mean to them or be expressive of what they were trying to achieve through their engagement with the nonprofit?

Finally, technology was seen as an essential tool in the context of events that involved a degree of peer-to-peer fundraising. In the view of our interviewees, it had revolutionized this space. In this sense, technology was seen as the key to mass participation with an organization and its cause. In their study of this issue, Braiterman et al (2016) stress the importance of establishing appropriate systems to support participant giving, where fundraising is a purpose of an event.

In their view, systems should be established that:

1. Stress the significance of giving in the registration process. The requirement to give should be a primary facet of any communication;
2. Acknowledge anyone participating in an event (but not giving) in post-event communication (for their interest and time) and ask them to consider a donation;
3. Encourage those who have fundraised but have not made a gift to join their donors by making a gift;
4. Include donation buttons in email communications, with a link taking the donor directly to a donation form;
5. Remind individuals that they can act as a role model for others by making the first, (or a significant) gift;
6. Draw links between gifts at particular levels and the impact they will achieve. This is a well-established principle in direct response fundraising, but it can be a less well-developed aspect of many fundraising events; and

7. Create a progress indicator in the fundraising centre that indicates whether or not participants have made a donation (among other important activities).

To this list we might add:

8. Facilitate human connection. Across all event types, data from Blackbaud tells us that participants who send email messages raised more than their peers who did not send email. Walk fundraisers who sent email raised 7 to 20 times more funds than non-emailers. This is, therefore, a critical issue to address.

Conclusions & Recommendations

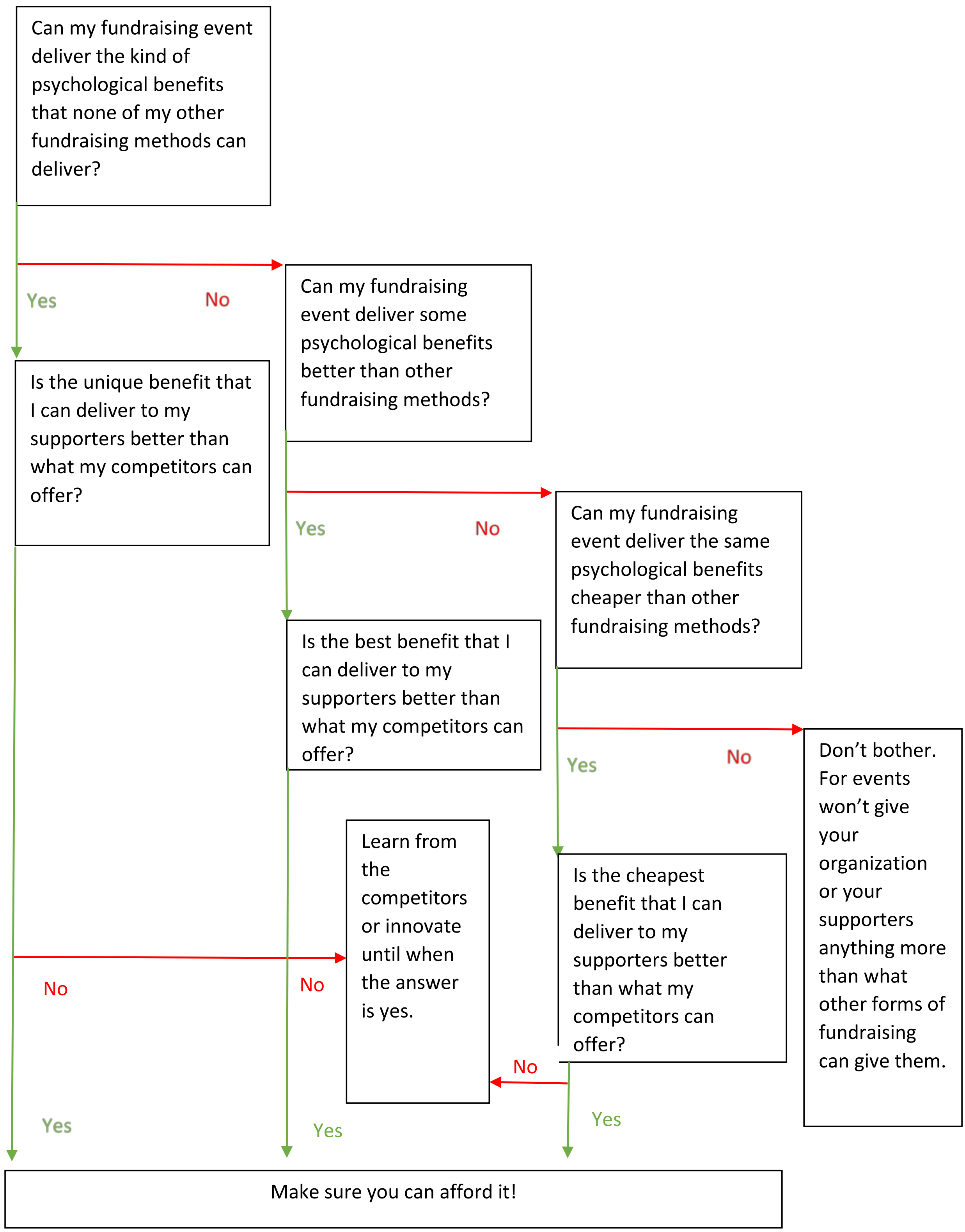
In this report, we have identified ten key factors that we believe contribute to outstanding success in events fundraising.

1. A High Degree of Donor-Centricity: Rather than think about what events might be needed to serve the purposes of the organization, events planning should be squarely focused on satisfying the needs and the motives of supporters. This requires that systems and processes be established to gather data about what these needs might be and that once known; action is taken as a result. It also requires that organisations measure the extent to which they are actually meeting donor needs. Many organisations play only lip service to the notion of donor-centricity when in reality they care little about it. If measures of fundraising success are only financial and do not include relationship metrics such as donor satisfaction, commitment and trust, an organization cannot claim to be donor-centric, and to excel in fundraising events donor-centricity is essential.

2. A Focus on Fundamental Human Needs: We also identified that a focus on surface level motives is not enough. Outstanding fundraising events are those that offer outstanding psychological benefits to their participants. In simple terms, this shift can be thought of as a move from reflecting on what supporters might want to experience to reflecting on how those experiences might make them feel.

We would go one-step further. The extent to which an event might provide psychological benefits might become one of the criteria applied to whether or not that event should be run at all. The decision tree in Figure 5 illustrates our thinking here. The key takeaway from applying this decision tree is that every decision is contingent on whether a unique or better psychological benefit can be delivered by the use of a fundraising event. It is evaluated in the context of all other fundraising methods and those of the competition. So a charity gala, when designed well, can deliver a unique and better experience than any other gala event in the focal community. When a non-profit cannot deliver psychological benefits in the best possible way, it should learn from its competitors, innovate or invest its budget elsewhere.

Figure 5: Events Decision Tree



3. Invest in the Team: Organizations running exceptional fundraising events have exceptionally talented and loyal events fundraising specialists. Retaining and developing these individuals must be central to any events strategy. This is obviously not a new finding as the retention of fundraising staff has been shown previously to correlate with enhanced fundraising performance (Sargeant and Shang, 2013). But what is new in this study is that fundraising teams need to be nurtured not only in terms of their professional competence and motivation but also in terms of their sense of overall wellbeing. We learned that fundraising events have inherently more risk associated with them than many other forms of fundraising and experiences in managing these events can often be draining or even painful (i.e. deaths can occasionally occur in sporting and challenge events). A focus on wellbeing, therefore, helps build the resilience of the team to cope with the inevitable highs and lows that can accompany a role of this nature.

4. Choose the Appropriate Mindset: In our report, we introduced the notion of psychological distance and explored how events can naturally serve to reduce distance and enhance feelings of connection and human warmth. A reduced sense of spatial difference can reduce other forms of distance and prime people to think in a “close” mindset. It, therefore, makes sense to make any requests for donations at the event or immediately thereafter explicitly from that “close” perspective. It should be a concrete, contextualized solicitation that includes subordinate and incidental features of what is happening or how the ask is being made. Where solicitations are being made shortly after the event it can be helpful to remind individuals of the closeness they experienced before they are prompted to give money. We also learned that the most appropriate mindset will vary as distance from the event (or event feelings) increases. Thus in the longer run up to the event and in subsequent stewardship, the nature of the language should shift to be more appropriate to the distant mindset. In this mindset “why” is more important than “what”. We cannot stress too highly that the use of appropriate language is critical because it is respectful of how the individual may be thinking and thus the kind of approach they might be most receptive to receiving.

5. Focus on Transformations Not Experiences: All of the events we examined were offering supporters a high-quality experience and we noted a general shift from planning the features of an event toward planning the experiences it would offer. It was also interesting to note that our successful events fundraisers were actively planning for these experiences to start in the run-up to the event and to be continued into the stewardship thereafter. They were also making efforts to integrate the core of this experience with the fundamental proposition of their organization and the values it espouses. In this way, the event could be perceived as authentic and help build genuine feelings of relationship with the nonprofit.

Many of our interviewees talked in terms of these experiences being in some sense transformational for the supporter. We build on this idea drawing on the work of Pine and Gilmore (and others) to suggest that transformations can be planned for from the outset, by beginning with a clear definition of what kind of psychological transformation event attendees should receive, and what specific kinds of individuals might be looking for. It is these transformative experiences that currently define the frontier of event fundraising innovation and it seems clear that success in this domain will require an enhanced degree of tailoring and customization.

6. Drive Emotions with Effective Storytelling: All organizations have beautiful stories to tell of the difference they are making in the lives of their beneficiaries. However, not all organizations are good at collating these stories and sharing them in a structured way with their supporters. Deeply moving and intensely enriching stories are frequently going unheard. Our work suggests that these stories are critical in enhancing the level of positive emotion that supporters can feel at an event. Emotion is good because it can prompt action, but it also makes it easier for individuals to explore how their support of the nonprofit can contribute to meeting their human needs and shaping their sense of self. Our review highlighted that it is not the absolute level of emotion that is at issue, it is the difference experienced between the highs and lows that may be generated by an organization's stories, and this cycle should be repeated multiple times through the experience. We also noted the powerful role that emotion contagion can play and offered suggestions in respect of how to leverage it.

7. Constantly Drive Innovation: All successful events fundraisers gave a high priority to innovation. They were all constantly looking for new ideas or ways to enrich their old ones. Most reported having formal innovation processes and most were democratic in the sense that ideas were routinely canvassed from staff, volunteers and donors. On balance, our interviewees tended to favour formal systems for ideas generation, but our sample size is too small to infer any kind of causal link. What did seem apparent was that our successful organizations were all learning organizations, deliberately encouraging teams to be alert to new ideas and using staff development opportunities to help build the networks necessary to identify potentially fruitful ideas.

8. Focus Innovation on Human Needs: While the focus on constant improvement and innovation was obvious in our interviews, it appeared that the focus of much of that innovation seemed to be on finding new approaches to stimulate support or encourage individuals to engage. We found less evidence that the focus of the innovation was on the deeper human needs of supporters. Innovation was typically triggered by falling numbers, participation or satisfaction, but rarely was it triggered by a desire to enhance the wellbeing of those taking part. We do not mean to suggest that enhancements to wellbeing should be at the root of all innovation, only that it should at least be a feature in a charity's list of considerations.

9. Focus on Technology: Our interviewees gratefully acknowledged the contribution that technology had recently made to fundraising events with enhancements to ticketing and auction technology seen as being of particular significance. So too was the continuing integration of mobile technology making it possible to directly engage with proceedings at the event, share experiences, photographs and social media interactions, etc. The majority of the events we studied were actively using new technologies and systems to enhance supporter satisfaction. It is, therefore, no surprise that some 80% of fundraisers now claim, "better technology leads to better fundraising" (Bluemner, 2014). But while there have been massive leaps forward in the systems and technology now available to the events sector, we believe the role of technology could be enhanced yet further. Rather than focus on event functionality per se, technological innovation could be targeted at functionality that allows the individual user to experience a greater sense of wellbeing through their involvement with the event. Of particular interest here would be the needs for connectedness, autonomy and competence.

10. Create Board Champions: No matter how great the idea or how rosy the revenue forecast might be, an unsupportive management and board can still stifle many potentially outstanding events. Our interviewees stressed the need to plan from the outset for how approval would be granted. They suggested a deliberate reflection on the individuals and personalities that would be involved in decision making, actively considering when would be the best stage in the innovation process to involve specific individuals and how. We also learned that it is particularly important to identify and cultivate champions on a board who if necessary will fight fundraising’s corner and argue for investment in the event. Continuing the theme that has pervaded this report we would also suggest that fundraisers reflect on what individual board members might be looking to gain from their involvement with the nonprofit and to frame these needs in the context of the six fundamental human needs we have articulated above. In that way, individuals can be drawn into events fundraising in a targeted and meaningful way and it will be much easier to build the network of advocates necessary to give life to new fundraising ideas.

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