

Findings reveal what factors contribute to outstanding fundraising programmes

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The findings from a year-long study that sought to identify what factors contribute to outstanding fundraising appeals are published this week. The Clayton Burnett-commissioned research, led by academics at the University of Bristol and Indiana University in the US, analysed the leadership, communication and structures behind some of the UK's most successful fundraising programmes.

Professor Adrian Sargeant from Indiana University and Professor Jen Shang from the University of Bristol conducted an analysis of the UK's most successful fundraising programmes to establish what factors differentiate outstanding fundraising from good fundraising and which elements contribute to an organisation doubling, trebling or even quadrupling its income.

The analysis included a survey to define the organisations and programmes perceived as having achieved great fundraising together with a series of detailed case studies of organisations as diverse as Save The Children, the British Heart Foundation, The Royal British Legion and the British Red Cross.

Findings from the report include:

- Successful fundraising directors tend to be Level-5 leaders who embed themselves holistically in their organisation creating great fundraising for a cause they are passionate about. They lead and inspire others through a combination of will and personal humility.
- Once in role these great leaders allocate a substantive proportion of their time to appointing or developing exceptional teams with a joint focus on both communication and technical skills.
- They also develop exceptional structures and processes to optimise the impact of this talent. This included establishing reward and recognition structures that were longer term in aspect and tied to the drivers of long term growth. This led to excellent staff retention.
- Key too, was the development of an organisational learning culture both within the fundraising team, but also within the organisation as a whole. Such [cultures](#) legitimise occasional errors as the necessary cost of innovation.
- What really made the difference between good fundraising and outstanding fundraising, however, was the quality of thinking the leader was able to engage in and in particular whether they were able to take a systems perspective on their organisation. All The Level-5 leaders we interviewed were natural systems thinkers, although most would not have used this term. The level of abstraction that system thinking permits made it possible for our

fundraising leaders to take a more holistic perspective on [problem solving](#) and further develop the culture of their organisations to place fundraising at the core.

- Said report co-author Prof Jen Shang 'a systems thinking approach requires a shift in thinking away from the dimensions that must be managed (such as teams, structures, culture and communication) to a holistic perspective on how the parts integrate with each other, when it is helpful to draw specific boundaries and how these boundaries then enable the separated parts of the whole to mutually influence each other. Outstanding fundraising leadership was characterised by an ability to take a systems perspective on problem solving, increasing the impact of fundraising yes, but simultaneously assisting others in their achievement of their goals.' The leaders studied by the researchers were also instrumental in developing and encouraging systems thinking within their teams.
- Great fundraising was usually created in the context of the emergence of an integrated culture. Formal functional departments (such as fundraising, marketing, campaigning) were usually complemented by a reward system that fostered coordination and cooperation and an integrated learning culture that encouraged joint problem solving by teams of systems thinkers.

The full report is available from the [Clayton Burnett](#) website.

Provided by University of Bristol

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