

# Testing Mechanisms for Philanthropic Behaviour

René Bekkers<sup>1\*</sup> and Pamala Wiepking<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Center for Philanthropic Studies, VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands

<sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology & Erasmus Centre for Strategic Philanthropy (ECSP), Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands

## Introduction

This special issue of the *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* presents a collection of nine papers testing mechanisms that drive philanthropic behaviour. These mechanisms are based on our literature review studying philanthropic donation behaviour (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007, 2011). From over 500 scholarly papers, we distilled eight mechanisms that we consider the main drivers of philanthropic donation behaviour: (1) awareness of need; (2) solicitation; (3) costs and benefits; (4) altruism; (5) reputation; (6) psychological benefits; (7) values; and (8) efficacy. The overarching question all papers in this special issue contribute to answering is: *What motivates people to display philanthropic behaviour?* By testing one or more specific mechanisms that were derived from the philanthropic literature, the authors of the papers in this special issue increase our understanding of philanthropic behaviour. The majority of the papers in this special issue study donation behaviour. Two papers examine volunteering, and one paper studies blood donations. Interestingly, the papers on these other forms of philanthropic behaviour show that mechanisms driving different types of philanthropic behaviour are similar.

We are thankful for the opportunity to be the guest editors for a special issue on the understanding of

philanthropic behaviour. In the past decades, the academic philanthropy literature has been dominated by analyses of (cross-sectional) survey data. This body of research has resulted in a wealth of knowledge about the characteristics of donors and volunteers. However, the reasons why these characteristics are associated with philanthropic behaviour have been less clear. We firmly believe that progress in philanthropic studies can be made by a more specific focus on studying the actual mechanisms that drive philanthropic behaviour. We would like to use this opportunity to call on our colleague researchers to also contribute to this progress by studying specific mechanisms that drive philanthropic behaviour.

This special issue has enabled us to bring together talented researchers who have contributed to the understanding of the mechanisms that drive philanthropic behaviour. These international researchers come from a variety of academic backgrounds and have conducted their research within different paradigms and use different research methods. This is also something we feel is important to increase the understanding of philanthropic behaviour. Philanthropic behaviour is a diverse and complex phenomenon and is affected by such a large range of individual and contextual (including cultural) factors that an interdisciplinary and international approach is warranted. In order for an interdisciplinary approach to be successful, researchers have to respect differences in research paradigms and research methods. Also, it is important to acknowledge cultural differences when studying philanthropic behaviour. We feel the authors in this special issue set a good example for an interdisciplinary and international approach of philanthropy research. Through the review process, authors with different disciplinary origins have provided each other

\*Correspondence to: René Bekkers, Center for Philanthropic Studies, VU University Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1081, 1081 HV Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

E-mail: r.bekkers@vu.nl

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with constructive feedback, which, in our opinion, has resulted in an interesting set of papers.

The papers in this special issue do not only contribute to the academic literature, they can also be relevant for philanthropy professionals working in the third sector. Each of the mechanisms discussed can be manipulated. Philanthropy professionals can make more informed decisions about communication with donors and volunteers when they know which 'buttons' to push in order to influence giving and volunteering behaviour. The mechanisms driving philanthropic behaviour are the principles that explain why pushing one button results in more giving and volunteering, whereas another does not. We have asked the contributors to this special issue to devote explicit attention to the practical implications of their findings. We call on philanthropy professionals to also engage in the debate of unravelling the mechanisms driving philanthropic behaviour. The only way to find out whether the theoretical mechanisms work in real life is to test them in the field. Collaboration between academics and philanthropy professionals on this matter will certainly increase our understanding of philanthropic behaviour.

Next, we provide a short summary of the eight mechanisms that drive philanthropic donation behaviour. This summary does not do justice to the complexity of these eight mechanisms. We refer the reader to the explanation of the mechanisms in Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) for a complete discussion, including cautions when interpreting the mechanisms and important moderators affecting the mechanisms.

### **Awareness of need**

Philanthropy addresses the needs of recipients. But, if potential donors and volunteers are not aware of existing needs, they will be less likely to engage in philanthropic behaviour. Also, more often than not, actors respond to a perceived need, rather than an objective need.

### **Solicitation**

In most cases, philanthropy occurs in response to a solicitation from or on behalf of an organization. Whether actors are solicited to engage in

philanthropic behaviour, and how often they receive solicitations, are important factors that increase the level of engagement in philanthropy.

### **Costs and benefits**

Acts of philanthropy are costly for the actor as they require a donation of his/her own resources. In some circumstances, however, the costs are lowered (e.g. through a charitable deduction), and, in many cases, acts of philanthropy also yield material benefits for the actor (e.g. exclusive access to meetings or services of the organization). Philanthropy will be enhanced when it can be done at lower costs, and when it yields more benefits.

### **Altruism**

Acts of philanthropy can be inspired by a 'true' or 'pure' concern for the well-being of recipients or the creation of a public good or service. Knowing that certain needs are addressed already, donors who are motivated by altruism will reduce their giving to these needs.

### **Reputation**

The desire to obtain or maintain a positive social evaluation from others leads actors to engage in philanthropy (when such behaviour is expected to be evaluated positively).

### **Psychological benefits**

Acts of philanthropy typically generate a private internal benefit for the actor, even when the act of philanthropy cannot be observed by others. The psychological benefit is sometimes referred to as 'warm glow' or 'joy of giving'.<sup>1</sup>

### **Values**

Actors display philanthropic behaviour to create a 'better world' — in line with their own perception

<sup>1</sup>Note, however, that 'warm glow' in the theoretical model of 'impure altruism' (Andreoni, 1989) refers to all types of private benefits, including a positive reputation, a sense of duty or the satisfaction obtained by acting according to a moral principle.

of a 'better world'. Acts of philanthropy thus often express a value held by the actor. These values include, among others, religious, political and more general altruistic values.

### **Efficacy**

Actors are more likely to engage in philanthropic behaviour when they perceive their contribution to be more effective.

We will now describe the nine papers in this special issue in the order of the eight mechanisms. We start with a paper that examines multiple mechanisms.

### **Multiple mechanisms**

In their paper, 'Who Volunteers? Constructing a Hybrid Theory', Einolf and Chambré examine three distinct approaches in the literature on volunteering: (1) social theories, emphasizing the influence of roles, context and networks; (2) individual characteristic theories, emphasizing traits, values and motivations; and (3) resource theories, studying skills and free time. Whereas Einolf and Chambré do not refer to the mechanisms explicitly, the three approaches clearly refer to different mechanisms as driving the decision to engage in volunteering. Social theories refer to the mechanisms of solicitation (being asked to volunteer through social networks) and reputation (the display of role conform behaviour to others). Individual characteristic theories refer to the mechanisms of values (endorsing prosocial values such as generative concern and moral obligation) and psychological benefits (having a volunteer role-identity). Resource theories emphasize the costs and benefits of volunteering as an important mechanism that influence the decision to engage in volunteering.

Einolf and Chambré use data from the first (1995) wave of the MIDUS to predict engagement in volunteering from variables representing the three approaches. Whereas they find that variables from each approach are predictive of volunteering, the variables representing roles, context and networks have the strongest predictive power. The three approaches offer complementary views on mechanisms that drive volunteering.

### **Values**

In the paper 'Print media portrayals of giving: exploring national "cultures of philanthropy"', Australian researchers McDonald and Scaife examine the value mechanism from a unique and underexplored perspective in philanthropy research. They explore the cultural values related to philanthropy in the USA and Australia, two Anglo-Saxon countries with a distinct different history and culture of philanthropy. The authors examine the way philanthropy is depicted in the media, by studying the term 'philanthropy' in newspaper articles published in the top four newspapers both in the USA and in Australia between 1986 and 2010. Examining affective frames of philanthropy in the USA and Australia, the results show that, as the authors anticipate, the overall nature of philanthropy is portrayed in a positive way; for example, as 'a vehicle for good work' in the USA and as 'a good thing' in Australian media. A small proportion of the papers do report critically on philanthropy, in both countries. Especially corporate philanthropy or philanthropic behaviour with obvious self-interest motivation is reported on in negative terms.

When examining thematic frames of philanthropy in the two countries under study, the authors find that an important difference in media portrayals of philanthropy in the USA and Australia relates to the perceived role of the government in providing public goods. Whereas in the USA papers report philanthropy as a distinct and valued source of complementary funding for the nonprofit sector, the Australian newspapers have a focus on philanthropy as a substitute of — and to some extent, a threat to — the welfare state. In Australia, '... the promotion of democracy presupposes the central role of governments in provision of fundamental resources for all'; whereas in the USA publications, 'Philanthropy is a better means of redistributing the nation's wealth than higher taxes on the rich'.

Another key difference between the USA and Australia is that in the USA, philanthropic acts are more celebrated and perceived as unique and exceptional, even though giving is more common for Americans than Australians. In Australia, on the other hand, gifts often go undervalued and are rarely acknowledged. The authors relate these different attitudes towards philanthropy to the individualistic

and egalitarian culture of, respectively, the USA and Australia. In the US newspapers, McDonald and Scaife find support for the more individualistic culture, especially in relation to philanthropic behaviour: 'There was an acknowledgement that generosity should be recognised and rewarded to encourage further generosity' Whereas they conclude from the Australian newspapers: 'In egalitarianism, there is a strong reluctance to stand out from the collective, for fear of being perceived as "tooting one's own horn", potentially restricting philanthropic leadership in egalitarian cultures such as Australia.'

In their paper 'Generation green: understanding the mechanisms and motivations influencing young adults' environmental volunteering', McDougle, Greenspan and Handy show how values and benefits matter for giving time to a cause as a volunteer. Focusing specifically on volunteering for environmental organizations, the authors investigate how environmental value orientations and perceptions of personal benefits are correlated with the likelihood and the intensity of engagement. The authors distinguish egoistic, altruistic and biospheric environmental value orientations, but find no reliable differences among volunteers and non-volunteers in these values. Although correlated with other pro-environmental behaviours, environmental volunteering is a distinct form of behaviour that benefits the environment.

McDougle, Greenspan and Handy also find that volunteering for environmental organizations is related to volunteering for other causes. Their data offer no direct evidence on the mechanisms producing this relationship. The mechanisms of solicitation and values provide an explanation, perhaps even in an interactive way. Volunteers for one type of organization (e.g. a student union) may be asked to volunteer for another type of organization (e.g. a nature conservation group) because they are likely to say yes as a result of their prosocial values. The paper shows that environmental volunteering is not 'altruistic' or 'egoistic' but a complex mix of both. A variety of mechanisms that have both 'altruistic' and 'egoistic' aspects is driving environmental volunteering.

### *Psychological benefits*

In their paper 'Gender differences in charitable giving', Mesch, Brown, Moore and Hayat examine

gender differences in values and psychological benefits in relation to donation behaviour. Previous research has shown significant differences between men and women in receiving intangible psychological benefits from making donations as well as in the different values that influence male and female donors (see for example Einolf, in press; Bennett, 2003). The authors study empathic concern as an example of the psychological benefit mechanism and 'the principle of care', the moral principle to care about others, as an example of the value mechanism.

Using two large-scale survey studies, the General Social Survey and the Knowledge Networks study, the authors show that women have stronger feelings of empathic concern and have a stronger moral principle to care about others than that of men. Moreover, the authors find that women are more likely to give and give higher amounts, while holding constant for these psychological benefits and value motivations, as well as other factors known to influence philanthropic behaviour (such as income, age and educational achievement). In the authors' words: 'Gender matters in philanthropy, and our study underscores the importance of seeking to better understand philanthropy through a gender lens.'

In their paper 'Altruistic values, satisfaction and loyalty among first time blood donors', Boenigk, Leipnitz and Scherhag make two important contributions to the field of philanthropic studies. Their first contribution is that they give a survey of the literature on blood donation. The literature on blood donation covers a large variety of predictors of donor behaviour and attitudes. Boenigk, Leipnitz and Scherhag group these predictors according to the mechanisms that are assumed to explain their effects. Notably, they distinguish altruism — in this case, concern for recipients of blood — from the mechanism of values — in this case, altruistic values may motivate people to donate blood as an expression of the value of helping others. Whereas many studies have viewed blood donation as an act of altruism, the accumulated evidence shows that concern for recipients and the expression of altruistic values are not the only drivers of blood donation. Neither do altruistic values nor altruism seem to be the strongest drivers of blood donor behaviour. Being asked to give, material costs (inconvenience) and



benefits (e.g. medical checks), and the psychological benefits (satisfaction with the experience) are also important mechanisms.

In their second contribution to the literature — an empirical test of the influence of altruistic values and satisfaction on loyalty — Boenigk, Leipnitz and Scherhag provide evidence supporting the conclusion that commitment to blood donation is not merely an expression of altruistic values but also a result of positive experiences during the blood donation procedure and a lower level of inconvenience (fear, travel distance). First time donors who report less positive experiences (e.g. less friendly and less competent treatment by staff), report a lower willingness to donate blood in the future. How satisfied people are with their treatment by the blood donation staff contributes to a positive attitude towards blood donation, constituting a ‘warm glow’. In terms of the mechanisms, the psychological benefits of donating are higher among those with a positive attitude. The practical implication of these findings is clear: blood collection agencies can enhance donor loyalty by providing clean facilities and friendly and competent treatment by staff.

In “The effect of the word ‘loving’ on compliance to a fundraising request: evidence from a French field study”, Guéguen, Jacob and Charles-Sire show that activation of the concept of love leads people to engage in philanthropic behaviour. The researchers solicited 1800 passers-by at a French university to donate money to the Association against Muscular Dystrophy. The experimental procedure relies on the technique of priming: exposure to a word or concept that unconsciously activates a set of cognitions. The participants were primed with the concept of ‘love’ through the phrase ‘loving = helping’ printed on t-shirts worn by solicitors. The results show that participants primed with the concept of ‘love’ are more likely to donate and give higher amounts than those approached by solicitors who wore t-shirts with no print or with the text ‘donating = helping’. The results for another experiment asking for the donation of blood were similar.

Guéguen, Jacob and Charles-Sire argue that exposure to the ‘loving = helping’ t-shirt makes participants more aware of the needs of others. Alternatively, as the authors state in their discussion, it can also be argued that the priming procedure increases

the psychological benefits of giving: ‘...the word “loving” could have the property of activating [such] a positive mood, which in turn influences helping behaviour.’ The experiments show that activation of the concept of love is a technique that is easy to use and can have a dramatically positive effect. It is a ‘giving nudge’ (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

### *Efficacy*

In the paper ‘The impact of generalized and institutional trust on donating to activist, leisure, and interest organizations: individual and contextual effects’, Evers and Gesthuizen examine the relationship between different types of trust and giving to different types of charitable organizations in 19 European countries and the USA. By examining the relationship between individual and country level generalized trust (trust in unknown others), institutionalized trust (confidence in organizations) and charitable giving, Evers and Gesthuizen contribute to the understanding of the efficacy mechanism. The authors argue in their paper: ‘the implicit mechanism underlying the relationship [between trust and giving] is the expectation that people who generally have a positive view on (unknown) others, donate more (often) because they more easily have the feeling that their contribution will make a difference.’

The authors formulate hypotheses explaining giving to activist (e.g. humanitarian and environmental organizations), leisure (e.g. sports and outdoor clubs) and interest organizations (e.g. trade unions, profession and farmer organizations) derived from social capital theory (Putnam, 2000; Uslander & Brown, 2005), a theory with roots in both sociology and political research. They find that, at the individual level, both generalized trust as well as institutionalized trust positively relate to giving to all three types of organizations. When examining the relationship between aggregated levels of generalized and social trust on giving, they found that in countries in which people on average have higher levels of generalized trust, people are more likely to give to activist and leisure organizations but not to interest organizations. In addition, the authors show that, in countries, in which people on average have higher levels of institutionalized trust, people are less inclined to make charitable donations to all

three types of organizations. Thus, in countries where people trust their government and institutions more, people are less inclined to make voluntary donations to charitable organizations.

In 'Charitable giving inside and outside the workplace: the role of individual and firm characteristics', a study comparing giving inside and outside of the workplace, Osili, Hirt and Raghavan examine the efficacy mechanism through the study of confidence in charitable organizations. Several studies have shown confidence in (the efficacy of) charitable organizations to positively influence incidence and level of giving (see for example Bowman, 2004, Sargeant and Lee, 2004, Bekkers and Bowman, 2009, Wiepking, 2010). The authors contribute to this literature by examining the role of confidence in charitable organizations in workplace giving, in which potential donors are often asked to provide unrestricted gifts to particular charitable organizations, such as United Way. With unrestricted gifts, donors have greater uncertainty about how their donations will be spent than with restricted gifts, which are labelled to contribute to a specific project. Therefore, the authors argue that confidence is more important in workplace giving than in regular charitable giving. When people have more confidence in charitable organizations, they trust that the organizations will spend their money more effectively, in line with their expectations. Hence, as the authors argue, there is a conceptual link between confidence in charitable organizations and the efficacy mechanism. As hypothesized, the authors find that a donor's confidence in charitable organizations is positively related to non-workplace (regular) charitable giving, but that confidence in charitable organizations is even more important in the case of workplace giving.

In addition, the authors provide very interesting insights into the solicitation mechanism: 'We find, whereas demographic factors affect non-workplace giving, they are much less important for workplace giving. We attribute this finding to the importance of the solicitation mechanism, in that workplace campaigns allow us to hold constant the solicitation mechanism and focus on other factors that influence giving. In contrast, we found that donor confidence in nonprofit organizations is particularly important for workplace giving.'

The final paper in this special issue, by Wardell and Ashley, is entitled 'From solicitation to search:

a study of monitoring costs as a driver of donor giving behavior in online portal websites'. The authors adapt a general theoretical model of search behaviour to the context of philanthropic choice. How do people decide which organizations to support with monetary donations? In addition to identification with victims and the mission of charitable organizations, people are increasingly paying attention to the impact of donations. Gathering information about the impact of donations, however, is costly. Donors have to make search and monitoring costs in order to spend their money wisely.

Organizations soliciting donations, in turn, are increasingly paying attention to the desire for higher transparency and accountability among donors. Organizations provide project updates to inform donors about the impact of their donations. This type of information should strengthen the perceived efficacy of donations and lower the search and monitoring costs. Wardell and Ashley examine the effect of project updates on donation behaviour to organizations advertised in an online giving portal. Interestingly, their findings show no significant effects of project updates on the amount donated to projects or the likelihood to give again to a specific project. Apparently, giving to projects advertised through the online portal is not affected by search and monitoring costs for the majority of donors.

We are proud of the wide variation in the papers in this special issue. The authors investigate a range of philanthropic behaviours, coming from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, using both experimental, archival and survey data, and testing a multitude of hypotheses. Despite this large variety, all the papers are inspired by view that research on philanthropy benefits from a specific focus on the mechanisms that drive acts of philanthropy. The papers also illustrate the benefits of this approach for philanthropy professionals. We hope you will enjoy the papers as much as we did.

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