Writing the Voice of Philanthropy: How to Raise Money with Words

by
Frank C. Dickerson

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Claremont Graduate University in Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Faculty of Education

Claremont

GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

Claremont, California
2009

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Approved by:

Charles Kerchner

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this dissertation of Frank C. Dickerson and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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Fund raising is a poor cousin in the family of philanthropic studies, where the focus of serious scholars turns to more esoteric matters. Ignored is the CENTRAL TASK of nonprofit leadership: *writing the voice of philanthropy*—writing discourse that becomes the voice of the needy, thus motivating people to care and to give.

Writing the voice of philanthropy is modeled in this recasting of gospel-writer Luke's story about a kind-hearted traveler from ancient Samaria: "The Samaritan stood in the lobby of a roadside lodge in Jericho, supporting with his shoulder, a weak and badly-beaten man he'd rescued after bandits robbed and left him for dead. The innkeeper listened with wide-eyed, slack-jawed amazement as the Good Samaritan spun the tale of the stranger's brush with death. He then asked the proprietor: 'Please tend to him. I promise to repay anything beyond the 2-denari I'm leaving for expenses.'"

This re-write tells a story, then asks. It reduces the dramatic elements of scene, actors, plot, tension, and resolution to words, then adds an appeal for help—all without losing emotional impact. A difficult task. To measure how well philanthropic discourse accomplishes this task, I…

- Analyze linguistic and rhetorical characteristics in a 1.5-million-word corpus of 2,412 online and paper-based fund-raising texts from 880 leading nonprofits across nine subsectors;
- Survey those who write, or cause that discourse to be written, profiling their education, training, work challenges and joys, ambitions, and advice to newcomers in fund raising;
- Measure the effect on response of hand-personalization, added as a paratextual variable of direct mail envelopes and content to enhance interpersonal involvement—important, since nothing else matters in an appeal if the envelope it comes in doesn't get opened or its content doesn't get read.

The corpus analysis discovered that fund-raising discourse reads like academic prose, lacks interpersonal involvement, and contains virtually no narratives. The survey found the central task of equipping leaders to write the voice of philanthropy is relegated to oral tradition and job-shadowing at best. Six tests confirmed that the paratextual variable of hand-personalizing mail correlates with increased response and higher net income.

Rhetorical Structure and the Neurology of Narrative

In the following excerpt from my dissertation's literature review, I argue that to be effective, the *form* a piece of writing takes has to be guided by the *function* it exists to serve. Organization design scholars call this *contingency theory* (Galbraith 1973). Put simply, contingency theory holds that . . .

1.) there is no one best way to organize something, and
2.) not all ways of organizing things are equally effective.

In other words, *it all depends*. It *all depends* on the task you want to accomplish.

The prime task a fund raiser seeks to accomplish is obvious by the job title—the task is to raise money. And generations of fund raisers have learned by observation that effective fund appeals . . .

1.) *connect* at a personal and emotional level, and
2.) *narrate* stories about people helped.

The following reviews two veins of literature that inform the practice of raising money with words . . .

1.) *rhetoric*, particularly the work of Kenneth Burke, and
2.) *neurolinguistics*, how the brain processes language, and more specifically, how it processes narrative.

One of the overarching conclusions I draw from my research is that to be effective a fund raiser must learn how to write a *connecting narrative moment*—a brief human-interest narrative that paints a compelling word picture of how a philanthropic cause makes a difference in the life of a single human being.

The following represents the views of several thought leaders who drove me to that conclusion.

The research that follows builds on the Connor and Upton study by analyzing a 1.5-million-word national nonprofit corpus comprised of 2,412 fund-raising texts across nine philanthropic sectors. Despite the inadequacies of their ICIC corpus, Connor and Upton's seminal study laid down the tracks I now follow. In addition to benefiting from their *linguistics* insights, Ritzenhein (1998) provides a *rhetorical* perspective based on Kenneth Burke's (1945) dramatistic pentad, a framework that adds another dimension to the present analysis.

Donald Ritzenhein (1998) examines the content of twenty-one fund-raising letters found in Torre and Bendixen's (1988), *Direct Mail Fundraising: Letters that Work*. With texts evenly divided among hospitals, universities and community service agencies, Ritzenhein uses *arguments within letters* as the units of analysis. Each analytic unit is comprised of a reasoning process and conclusion; a total of 190 discrete arguments are identified in the corpus. He discusses the corpus and draws on terms from Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad to posit hypothetical structures that illustrate the applicability of Burkean structure: "*Given social needs* (scene) *or an organization of high quality* (scene), *a prospective donor* (agent) *is asked to contribute* (act) *money* (agency) *so that the organization can address those needs or maintain its high quality* (purpose)" (1998, p. 29). He also employs Burke's notion that elements of text may be arranged asymmetrically in different combinations Burke called ratios, in order to shift emphasis from one element of the pentad to another and thus better accomplish the communicative goal of the analysis. Ritzenhein illustrates ratio manipulation of the elements in Burke's pentad by recounting Senator Edward Kennedy's 1969 Chappaquiddick speech. Citing Ling (1998) he notes that Kennedy focused attention on the "scene or situation (that is, the swift, dark river into which his car, along with Mary Jo Kopechne, had plunged), as one over which he had no control and in response to which he was a victim" (p. 30). In Kennedy's speech "the agents, or voters of Massachusetts, rather than he, himself, were in control of the future" (p. 30). Applying the pentad to direct mail fundraising, Ritzenhein found that 71 percent of the letters he studied "began with descriptions of the scene, expressed either as the social needs the organization was trying to cure or the high quality of the institution itself" (p. 30). He concludes that the practice of fundraisers in focusing on the scene suggests a conviction that if they "describe their organization (scene) accurately and compellingly, their prospects will give, an act that is in keeping with the described scene" (p. 30).

With his heuristic use of Ken Burke's dramatistic pentad, Ritzenhein broadens the analytic frame for direct mail fund-raising letters. He views them as dramatic efforts and interprets their construction as such—examining setting (scene), actors (agents), motives (purpose), plot (agency), and actions (narrative) the linguistic assets used to words move actors within settings, and to express motives and the plot fulfillment (funding for a worthy cause). This framework suggests that the efficacy of a fundraising text is more helpfully evaluated when it is judged for its impact as a dramatic act. Burke sees all communication essentially as drama—complete with players, scenes, plots, places, words, and motives. The Burkean dramatistic pentad is perhaps not only a useful lens for evaluating, but also crafting fund-raising discourse. Although it stretches Burke's original context and intention in devising the pentad and Austin's speech act theory, they do frame a question: "To what extent does the discourse of direct mail fund-raising letters and online text, mobilize the five elements of Burke's dramatistic pentad so that it becomes, in John Austin's paradigm, a *performative* utterance that can *raise money with words*?"

Had Ritzenhein reviewed the ICIC Corpus using Burke's paradigm, the rhetorical analysis would probably have been consistent with the conclusions Connor and Upton drew. Connor and Upton's linguistic analysis on Biber's dimensions of variation (2003) found that scores on the dimension of narrative were not only lower than academic prose, but even lower than official documents—fund appeals lacked the human drama and identification central to Burke's paradigm (1945, 1950). But Burke's dramatistic pentad is not only *descriptive*, providing a frame for analyzing the dramatic quotient of a communication product; it is also *generative,* guiding those who create such works. Whether a communication product is written, spoken, or enacted, Burke's paradigm can provide a map for arranging characters and plot elements in scenes that create poignant *connecting narrative moments*. Given fund-raising discourse's lack of *people*, *tension*, and *resolution*, this may be useful.

Vergarao (2002, 2007) compares discourse English Italian discourse strategies in sales letters across cultures and Fusari (2007) recently compared Italian and American fund-raising discourse and noted that in contrast to American letters, Italian fund-raising discourse used very high-pressure techniques, getting quite personal. Whether high or low pressure, a commonality fund-raising professionals agree on is the need to get personal—that in order to *raise money and build partnerships with words*, most agree that the voice of philanthropy must seek *to make a human connection.* And though the words are read on a sheet of paper or computer screen, an underlying assumption of this research is that that human connection can best be made if words are written as though they were spoken—as if the writer were sitting across the table from the reader in a coffee shop where hiding behind words is hard. The tendency of words getting in the way of full-bodied communication is a subject Tannen (1998) addresses in her observations about what she terms America's argument culture. Of the tendency to think of writing and speaking as verbal combat, in which there are winners and losers, she writes:

> Our schools and universities, our ways of doing science and approaching knowledge, are all deeply agonistic. We all pass through our county's educational system, and it is there that the seeds of our adversarial culture are planted. . . .The argument culture, with its tendency to approach issues as

> polarized debate, and the culture of critique, with its inclination to regard criticism and attack as the best if not the only type of rigorous thinking, are deeply rooted in Western tradition, going back to the ancient Greeks. (p. 257)

The academic style of writing among the fund-raising letters in the ICIC Corpus reflects the argument culture in education Tannen describes. As noted above, if that culture's measurement-reward system honored writing that exhibited logic, argumentation, and expository prose and even penalizing the converse—subjectivity, emotion, and narrative—then that conditioning could explain why fund-raising letters sound more like academic than a conversation between friends. In this case, writers were simply applying the style of writing learned throughout their formal education. However, the problem is that the form prose takes must fit its function. In organization design theory among management scholars, this notion is given formal status in contingency theory (Galbraith 1973), which is based on two premises: 1.) there is no one best way to organize and 2.) not all ways of organizing are equally effective. Applied to the task of writing fund-raising discourse, if data suggest that a more conversational, narrative, and involved form of prose better fits the aim of creating a human connection that will be more likely to prompt the reader to make a contribution, then that form should be used in writing fund-raising copy for mail or web-based appeals.

I propose that an alternative method of processing and communicating language is explained in an area of investigation of the neurobiology of language acquisition and processing I will call here, *the narrative brain*, a subject that dates to the use of electroencephalograph (EEG) to observe brain activity. Gastaut and Bert saw that subject readings changed as they watched a movie (1954). Almost forty years after that beginning, a breakthrough discovery was made by neuroscients at the Instituto di Fisilogia Umana, in Università di Parma, Italy. In 1995, resaerchers made tentative discoveries abot how the brain processes stimuli. These discoveries have led to additional findings by neurologists at USC and UCLA which help inform the growing field of neurolinguistics. They provide a basis for understanding how humans acquire and process language and in turn this knowledge can inform the practice of writing. Since many recent discovers directly relate to linguistic dimensions of communication and how language parts of the brain process different types of languate, the evidence of these studies can lead to an understading of not only how and why language is processed, but how a writer can best create language for maximum impact.

The 1995 team at Parma was led by neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti. The seminal dioscovery was the identificaton of a special class of neurons that fired in the brians of macaque monkeys during specific grasping activities like picking up a peanut. What took the team by surprise even more, however, was the fact that neurons in their subjects were activated not only during motor activity, but also when a monkey *saw* a another subject or a lab worker engage in the same actions (Jeannerod, Arbib, Rizzolatti & Skata 1995; Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Gallese & Fogassi, 1996; Arbib 2006). In one instance, "a graduate student entered the lab with an ice cream cone in his hand. The monkey stared at him. Then, something amazing happened: when the student raised the cone to his lips, the monitor sounded—brrrrrip, brrrrrip—even though the monkey had not moved but had simply observed the student grasping the cone and moving it to his mouth" (Blakeslee, 2006).

The connection between the activation of a monkey's neurons and processing language is found in the common neurological heritage between motor activity, such as reaching for and grasping and learning, and language acquisition. Rizzolatti & Arbib (1998) claim that the human ability to now communicate by transferring information represented symbolically as words was preceded by the ability of humans to recognize the actions of others. "This mechanism" they write, "was the neural prerequisite for the development of inter-individual communication and finally of speech." (p. 190).

Further research has led to the discovery of in human subjects of far more sophisticated mirror neural nets. These discoveries collectively suggest that these cells not only allow people to perceive action, but also process the social meanings suggested by those actions. Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti (2004), write about the larger implications of their original discovery in article that suggests implications to the realm of human communication and empathy, a line of argument directly relevant to those who write fund-raising discourse:

> We provide a unifying neural hypothesis on how individuals understand the actions and emotions of others. Our main claim is that the fundamental mechanism at the basis of the experiential understanding of others' actions is the activation of the mirror neuron system. A similar mechanism, but involving the activation of viscero-motor centers, underlies the experiential understanding of the emotions of others (p. 396).

At the core of the Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti's discovery is evidence from fMRI scans of human subjects, what was only sugested in their experiments with monkeys—that the human brain contains ". . . neural mechanisms (mirror mechanisms) that allow us to directly understand the meaning of the actions and emotions of others by internally repilcating ('simulating') them without any explicit reflective mediation" (p. 396). The researchers acknowledge the ability of humans to reason and thus "understand other people's minds at the conceptual, declarative level" (2004, p. 396). However, they suggest that such propositional language fails to recruit the empathetic mirror neurons they discovered. Ironically, the prose of those who compose the discourse of fund raising—who, of all writers, should be keenly aware of the need to target the emotional side of the brain—may be missing the mark. This seems to be the case in the use of the *conceptual, declarative* language ubiquitous in discourse of fund raising in the nonprofit sector (e.g. found by Connor and Upton in their studies of fund-raising letters). Connor and Upton (2003) suggest fund-raising discourse is skewed toward the conceptual and declarative style of academic prose (see Biber 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1993, 1995, 2004; Biber, Connor, and Upton 2007; Biber and Conrad 2003; Biber, Conrad, and Reppen 1998; Biber and Conrad 2003; Biber, Conrad, Reppen, Byrd, and Helt, 2003; Biber and Finegan 1988).

Yet Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti argue that "the fundamental mechanism that allows us a direct experiential grasp of the mind of others is not conceptual reasoning but direct simulation of the observed events through the mirror mechanism" (2004, p. 396). The implication to writing fund-raising discourse is this—perhaps writing so focused on factual content, by its design, circumvents the way the human brain is hard wired—preferring to learn of socially significant content not through propositional language, but through narrative and conversation-like prose that involves the reader (Rosen, 1988; Tannen, 1982, 1989). This is consistent with the commonly acknowledged understanding that a moviegoer will almost always prefer an action adventure or romantic comedy to a talking-head documentary. It also may suggest that writers seeking to persuade others to support charitable causes should consider writing in a more conversational or narrative style that *shows* rather than *tells* a donor how he or she should feel.

"The novelty of our approach" write Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti, "consists in providing for the first time a neurophysiological account of the experiential dimension of both action and emotion. What makes social interactions so different from our perception of the inanimate world is that we witness the actions and emotions of others, but we also carry out similar actions and we experience similar emotions' (2004, p. 396). While these researchers acknowledge that a cognitive approach can inform one person about the emotional state of another (e.g. through a description of a their low income level, hard life in the context of a city with a high cost of living), the emotional impact may be greater were the writer to tell a short anecdote that *shows*, rather than *tells*, what it is like to be poor. Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti describe what happens in the mirror when the *showing* approach is used: "information concerning the emotions of others is directly mapped onto the same viscero-motor neural structures that determine the experience of that emotion in the observer. This direct mapping can occur even when the emotion of others can only be imagined. . . . It is likely that the direct viscero-motor mechanism scaffolds the cognitive description, and, when the former mechanism is not present or malfunctioning, the latter provides only a pale, detached account of the emotions of others" (p. 401). The question for writers is this—does their style of prose limit the impact it can have among readers, by providing what Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti describes as *only a pale, detached account of the emotions of others*? Moreover, is it reasonable to expect that fMRI experiments that indicate others have felt empathy upon seeing empathetic images is even applicable to written prose?

As noted above, more recent research at the University of Southern California (USC) suggests that the *channels* by which another's actions are understood and can trigger mirror neuron response are not limited to visual input alone. Just *reading* or *hearing* about an action can produce the same response as *seeing* the action firsthand. Among the resarch team was the lead investigator in the lead investigator from the Parma group that discovered the presence of mirror neurons in 1995—Giacomo Rizzolatti. The lead researcher at USC was Lisa Aziz-Zadeh from the schools Brain and Creativity Institute. Representing UCLA was Marco Iacoboni, director of the Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation Lab at the Ahmanson Lovelace Brain Mapping Center in the David Geffen School of Medicine. Aziz-Zadeh and her team found that among 12 volunteers studied, the premotor cortex of their brian's indicated *the presence of the same neural activity when they heard words describing an action as when they saw it*. "In sum" Aziz-Zabeh writes, "these results support a key role of premotor areas with mirror neuron properties for embodied semantic representations of actions, whether they are delivered through visual or linguistic modalities" (Aziz-Zadeh, Wilson, Rizzolatti & Iacoboni, 2006, p. 1521). In other words, this study suggests that *semantic representations* (reading or hearing about another person's circumstances) creates the *same effect* in the brain as if the reader/hearer were in the situation the described. That is, hearing or reading is almost like being there. UCLA's Marco Iacoboni describes this as the new science of how we connect with others (2008). It is an issue at the very heart of effective writing and thus at the heart of effective fund raising. (cf. Rizzolatti, Fogassi & Gallese, 2006; Shamay-Tsoory, et al., 2005; Stemmer, 2005, Vignemont & Singer, 2006; Xu, Kemeny, Park, Frattali & Braun, 2005).

It is also consistent with the feeling that many people experience, when they read a book that is just too good to put down. Iacoboni explains: "Mirror neurons suggest that we pretend to be in another person's mental shoes. . . . In fact, with mirror nerons we do not have to pretend, we practically are in another person's mind (Ker, 2005, p. 1). The results of the work by Iacoboni, Molnar-Szakacs, Gallese, Buccino, Mazziotta, and Rizzolatti (2005) suggests that mirror neurons enable that which is written in an empathetic style to actually create empathy, as indicated by neural activity observed in their testing. The implications to the process of persuasion is apparent If nerual activity measured by fmri suggests that the brain can differentiate between a static image of a isolated tea cup, a tea cup in a to-be-enjoyed setting, and a tea cup in a to-be-cleared-from-the-table scene, then it would follow that prose written to accentuate emotional content by portraying a person in an empathy evoking scenario would work better. These findings are consistent with previous research by Damasio (1994, 1999, 2003) and other neuroscientists and neurobiologists (Gazzaniga, 1998, 2004; LeDoux 1996, 2002). Empathetic writing is illustrated below in a paragraph written by science writer, Gordy Slack, which he composed to summarize the implicatoins of the the past decade's neuroscientific discoveries vis-à-vis mirror neurons. As he describes how we feel what feel when we see a sad person, like a play within a play Slack's words not only illustrate the empathy factor, but also illustrate how narrative creates greater reader involvement through creating empathy (which in fund raising is assumed to help motivate response):

> A young woman sat on the subway and sobbed. Her mascara-stained cheeks were wet and blotchy. Her eyes were red. Her shoulders shook. She was hopeless, completely forlorn. When I got off the Ftrain, I stood on the platform, paralyzed by emotions. Hers. I'd taken them with me. I stood there, tears streaming down my cheeks. But I had no death in the family. No breakup. No terminal diagnosis. And I didn't even know her or why she cried. But the emotional pain, her pain, now my pain, was as real as day. (2007, p. 1)

Twenty-first century neuroscience forces those who write the discourse of fund raising to question how they write. Do some writing strategies stand a better chance of evoking empathy in the brain that others? Given that the brain is already hard-wired to interpret empathy-evoking messages, what does this imply for writers? Does it suggest that a conversational style might be more personal and thus more empathy-evoking than expository prose? Does it suggest that human-intgerest andecdotes are better for evoking empathy than carefully edited factual declarations? Does it suggest referring to specific indivuduals by name (like characters in a story) rather than as classes of people (like subjects) evokes greater empathy? The data in this study will measure the presence or absence of linguistics features in prose that are connected with these styles of writing.

Frank's (1990) discourse analysis of the language used in direct mail communication acknowledges that among professionals in the field, the use of emotion is ubiquitous, as she shows that direct mail copy often resembles the 'speech-like' writing tendencies. She observes that in an attempt to add emotion, copywriters use a conversational style. Research into the nature of what I call the narrative mind seems to provide empirical underpinning for the observations of practitioners in fund raising which has long posited that nothing communicates as well as a good story. Next I review the relevant literature of fund-raising practitioners.

Two of the variables discussed above (narrative-style discourse and hand-personalized direct mail), have been reported to correlate positively with increased results. Narrative copywriting, featuring brief human-interest anecdotes to dramatize charitable causes, has been advocated by Jerry Huntsinger (1977, 1989a, 1989b, 1992), and advocated by most direct mail fundraisers. This practice parallels a similar format popularized in advertising by John Caples (1936, 1938, 1957, 1974, 1983) and David Ogilvy (1963, 1983). Both Caples and Ogilvy achieved statistically significant results using the short story/long copy technique, making them two of the most widely cited advertising copywriters in the advertising field, as Huntsinger is in fundraising.

Effective advertising and fund appeals are often expressed in story form in order to create an emotional connection. Harold Seymour (1988) suggested that "Giving is prompted emotionally and then rationalized. The heart has to prompt the mind to go where logic points the way" (p. 29). Harrison (1984) cites six primary emotions that can be tapped in developing fund-raising communication: joy, surprise, grief, anger, fear and disgust. He concludes that, "while we cannot underestimate the importance of a logical, rational, well-developed case, we also cannot afford to overlook the power of human emotion in our approach to the potential giver" (p. 78). Herschell Gordon Lewis (1984, 1989) suggests that by substituting emotional words for more their more abstract synonyms can increase reader response to direct mail copy. Among 100 pairs of word choices, he contrasts "give" with the more abstract word, "donate."

It is one thing to say that emotional content is important. It is quite another to describe how to produce such prose. Thus, much of the knowledge needed in the field of direct mail fundraising must be garnered from those who write not for charitable causes, but in order to connect with readers in their fields.

Sandell (1977) conducted his research before the advent of readily available computerized corpus analysis in Sweden, a nation that has since led the way in computerized analysis of texts. His work, titled *Linguistic Style and Persuasion* is framed by the question: "Can linguistic style influence the persuasive effect of a message" (1977, p. vi)? His work begins with a 100-page literature review ranging from the concept of style and how it is operationalized through such measures as lexical density measured by type-token ratio—the measure of "the number of different words (types) to the total number of words (tokens) in a text" (1977, p. 26). Other operational characteristics Sandell identified include parts of speech, structural organization that form larger discourse units, use of rhetorical devices such as tropes.

Douglas Biber's research (1988), whose methodologies are used in this study, seems to follow closely Sandell's work, yet Biber does not seem to have been aware of Sandell's seminal efforts. Among the many sources Sandell cites is an early study by Carroll who isolated 38 linguistic features in nine general categories (articles, nouns, adjectives, count words, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, and organization measures) to determine "What are the basic dimensions in which style varies" (1960, p, 283). Carroll's study was innovative in the late 1950s by selecting not just one or a small range of style criteria, arrayed on 29 scales measuring semantic differentiation. His schema presaged what Biber would do a similar study in the 1980s, with the assistance of computer technology. In a manual calculation environment, Carroll found that thirty-one variables in his study offered useful data with median correlation coefficients of .58, six had coefficients over .80, nine over .70, one was under 2.0 and just three were under 3.0. Sandell noted what Biber observed about the complementary nature of some linguistic features (that is, when one is present in a text another is may be absent). However, the studies Sandell reviewed often contradicted one another: "Variables that load the same factor positively in one study are in another found to load the same factor with opposite signs" (1977, p. 46). He concludes his extensive review noting that "we have not found any single study, or series of studies, focusing on the whole or the main part of the range of persuasive effects and employing a systematic set of style variables chosen on the basis of theory" (1977, p. 101). Sandell chose advertising texts from eight national magazines for which two 1968 issues were chosen. From these 14 advertisements focusing on consumer food advertising were settled on, which represented 20 percent of available ads. In consultation with Swedish advertising executives, twelve variables for analysis were identified (average word length, average clause length, average sentence length, percentage of nouns in texts, percentage of verbs, percentage of adjectives, percentage of other parts of speech, unusual words, reinforcers, ellipses, initial assonances, end assonances). The strongest correlation coefficient was in relation to adjectives, of which Sandell remarked: "Apparently persuasive texts rely heavily on using adjectives to achieve their ends" (1977, p. 128). Additional correlates found included the use of ellipses, word length, use of reinforcers, assonance (the repetition of vowel sounds to create a rhythmic sound to the text). Nouns and verbs did not seem related to persuasive intent in the factor analysis.

Review of Literature Relevant to Profiling Those Who Write the Discourse of Fund Raising

Margaret Duronio and Eugene Tempel (1997) found that patterns of effectiveness among those who have made the field of fund raising their career are preserved and passed on through informal apprenticeship, mentoring, how-to seminars. A relatively limited body of scholarly research that has been published. However, numerous fund-raising professionals have published practical guides to practice (cf. Geller, 1998, 2002; Huntsinger, 1977, 1989a, 1989b, 1992; Housden and Thomas, 2002; Jutkins, 1994; Kuniholm, 1989, 1985; Lautman, 1984, 2001; Lewis, 1989; Warwick, 1990, 1992, 1993, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c 2008a, 2008b 2008c, 2008d, 2008e; Warwick, Har, and Allen, 2002). In addition to book-length works, a few serial publications include regular contributions from practitioners (*The Chronicle of Philanthropy, NonProfit Times, Fund Raising*

Management). Three academic journals feature research on philanthropy and the nonprofit sector (*Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly, Nonprofit Management & Leadership, Voluntas*). According to Kelly (1991, 1998) among the nation's 34 academic research centers on philanthropy, *acts of asking* (soliciting funds for charity) generally takes second place to the research on *acts of giving* (the impact and motivations for giving). This was confirmed by Layton, whose annotated bibliography of the literature of philanthropy found that "while there is an enormous practical literature on fund-raising, there is almost nothing which examines the phenomenon of "getting" with the same depth and comprehension that the phenomenon of giving has received. Within this realm, the impact of fund-raising and competing for resources on the performance of nonprofit organizations merits particular attention" (1987, p. xv). The lack of scholarly study on *acts of asking* seems consistent with the research of Duronio and Tempel (1997) which found that "one of the most serious challenges facing fund raisers and hampering the professionalization of the field is the discomfort with and distaste for fund raising experienced by fund raisers themselves. . . . What was a surprise was the realization that many fund raisers themselves have a negative perception of fund raisers and the field in general" (p. 191).

Drucker observed that in the twentieth century, institutions supplanted families as the dominant structures entrusted with "every major social task whether, economic performance or health care, education or the protection of the environment, the pursuit of new knowledge or defense" (1973, p. 3). He also noted that the ascendancy of institutions gave birth to the profession of management, as the "organ of the modern institution . . . . It is professional—management is a function, a discipline, a task to be done; and managers are the professionals who practice this discipline, carry out the functions, and discharge these tasks." (1973, p. 6).

Like their commercial counterparts, nonprofit institutions proliferated in the twentieth century, and for their success, they too depend upon the vision and management skills of their leaders. "Their management," Drucker predicted, commenting on all non-business institutions, "may well become the central management problem—simply because the lack of management of the public-service institution is such a glaring weakness, whether municipal water department or graduate university" (1973, p. 8).

From the 1960s to the early 2000s nonprofit organizations learned the language of management and marketing. Key figures include Borden (1964); Bagozzi (1975); Engel, Blackwell, and Kollat (1968); Kotler (1969, 1982); Kotler and Levy (1983); Kotler and Fox (1985); Levitt (1960, 1986); Lord (1981, 1988); Lovelock and Weinberg (1980); McCarthy (1960); McLeish (1995, 2007); Nash (2000); Sargeant (1999); Stone (1979, 1996); Stone and Jacobs (2001); Vögele (1992). Seminars, books, and academic programs proliferated and applied principals of management to the running of non-profit organizations. Among the nonprofit functions cognate to those of commercial organizations, fund raising held particularly high hope for benefiting from the gains of management science, particularly those of marketing, since results were measurable. Fund-raising results belonged to what Drucker (1973) described as the economic sphere that has measurements both for the allocation of resources and for the results of decisions.

In their struggle for survival, a sort of economic Darwinian competition predestines that few commercial ventures, once birthed, actually survive. Those that survive owe their lives to the fact that they achieved results in the key result area of profit. Similarly, nonprofit institutions that survive have established and achieved measurable objectives in the key result area of fund raising. Although nonprofit organizations are prohibited from distributing revenues in excess of expenses, beyond that constraint, they are not prohibited from achieving a surplus of revenues over expenses (commonly called profit). Indeed, to effectively survive and serve its constituencies, nonprofit organizations must generate more income than expenses.

As fund raising seeks to mature from a field to the rank of profession, the codification of both fund-raising principles and practices becomes critical. The quality of what I am calling the voice of philanthropy (the written texts of fund-raising discourse) varies widely not only in form, but also effectiveness. Regarding form, Fisher Howe, writing in Harvard Business Review (1985), conceptualized this level of variability as a ladder of communication effectiveness. On the bottom rung he placed the least effective channel—handouts. On the top rung he placed the most effective channel, the medium of one-to-one conversation. In the middle he placed the predominate mode of fundraising discourse in America—direct mail. Fund raising by mail and online is a component of the larger direct marketing industry, which The Chase Econometrics and Wharton Economic Forecasting Group predicts will account for $2.33 trillion by 2004, and will grow 8.8 percent annually, compared to an expected overall growth rate of 5.3 percent (Stone & Jacobs, 2001, p. 4).

Mastering the art and science of effective written communication with donors and potential contributors is, therefore, critical to maintaining the financial support of nonprofit organizations. Unfortunately, those who would choose fundraising as a career must master this body of knowledge if they are to advance as professionals in the field. Sullivan (1995) suggests that for any field to be called a profession, in addition to achieving a degree of autonomy and commitment to the greater public good over self interest, its members must be trained in the principles and practices which have been codified into a body of knowledge.

The individual parts of the body of knowledge, which informs the tasks of fundraising communication are scattered in hundreds of intellectual nooks and crannies throughout the social sciences.

In addition to the product of scientific method, Schön (1979, 1983, 1987) argues that practitioners reflecting-in-action create much knowledge in response to the challenges they face. Therefore, in addition to the more established social sciences, the contributions of many fundraising practitioners will be evaluated as well. The spade for unearthing this knowledge will be the question: *what is relevant to the task of enabling fundraisers to communicate effectively in writing with their constituents, in order to gain support for philanthropy?*

Answering this question is critical, if fundraising is to evolve from eclectic trade to bona fide profession (Duronio & Tempel, 1997; Tempel, Cobb & Ilchmann, 1997). For organizations whose income is gained and maintained primarily from direct mail fund appeals, and in accelerating volume from fund-raising texts online, understating the art and science of effective written communication is fundamental to survival. Even for organizations whose donors are come through more personalized communication approaches—e.g. group events and person-to-person solicitation—support comes because something is communicated. So regardless of the medium or size of gift, fund raising by and large boils down to the skillful use of words. The question is, are those responsible for writing and speaking voice of philanthropy adequately educated in the theory and trained in the skills necessary to do their jobs? Kotter, Schlesinger and Sathe's (1986) organization design perspective that is a useful heuristic for evaluating leaders' preparedness for the communication *tasks* of their jobs. I use the word *task* in the sense that Kotter, Schlesinger and Sathe define it in Figure 1.1 with a model, which follows a analytic sequence. That sequence first evaluates *tasks* to be accomplished (vis-à-vis this research, writing fund-raising texts). Then it aligns people and designs the organization to achieve those tasks.

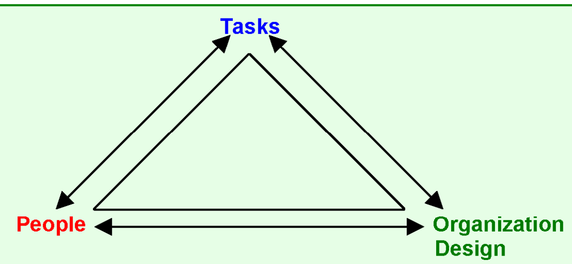

Figure 2.1 Three-way fit among the three key organization design variables.

Note. Adapted from Kotter, Schlesinger, and Sathe (1986, p. 16). Their model of organization design and change suggests that effectiveness in an organization is dependent upon creating a three-way fit among *people*, *task*, and *organization design* variables. This is accomplished as 1. *tasks* are clearly defined, 2. *people* are chosen who have or are helped to acquire the knowledge tasks require, and 3. the *organization design* components of *selection*, *development*, and *management* are orchestrated by leaders. This research questions whether leaders in the field of fund raising are adequately orchestrating a key organization design variable necessary to ensure those who write the discourse of fund raising are equipped to do their work—language training. Instead, those who *write the voice of philanthropy* learn their craft mainly from mentors and on the job. Thus the work of one of the most critical tasks in fund raising relies upon apprenticeship and oral tradition. Little codified knowledge exists. If fund raising is to become a profession, this must change.

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