

Public Abstract

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Title:Revisiting fund-raising encroachment of public relations in light of the theory of donor relations

This qualitative study of public relations and fund-raising practitioners in charitable organizations found fund-raising encroachment of public relations occurring at a rate roughly comparable to levels documented in the first studies of encroachment conducted some 15 years ago. Encroachment tends to reduce the strategic focus of public relations and has been found to concentrate public relations activities on one organizational public at the expense of others. Partly as a defense against encroachment, the theory of donor relations advances the concept that fund raising is a specialization of public relations. Contrary to concerns that practitioners of fund raising would not accept the idea that fund raising is a specialization of public relations, a majority of fund-raising practitioners in the study sample expressed support for the concept. However, both fund-raising and public relations practitioners had reservations that the reconceptualization of fund raising as a public relations specialization would end fund-raising encroachment, preferring separate-but-equal organizational structures for the two functions. The research also found support for a refinement of the theory of donor relations through incorporation of contingency theory, which describes all interactions between an organization and a public as taking place on a continuum between advocacy and accommodation.