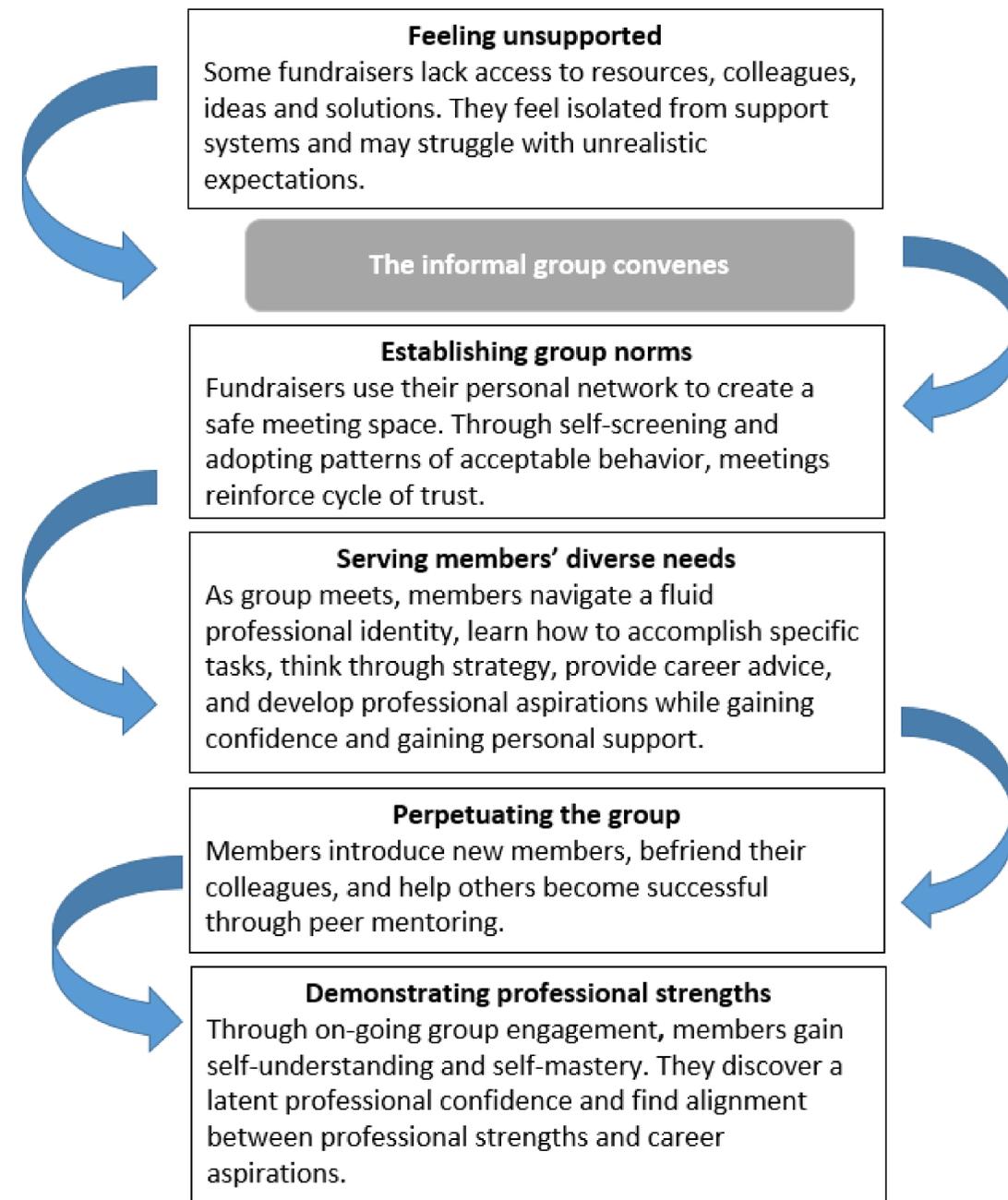


Breaking the isolation: fundraisers, informal support groups, and professional growth

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From Isolation to Strength: A Theory of Informal Association Development and Outcomes



The Questions

What is the process by which fundraisers build networks of support?

How do fundraisers use informal resources to develop their professional capacity?

The Context

As most nonprofit organizations are small, little is known about the individuals who do fundraising work in these organizations (McKeever, 2015).

Creative approaches such as fostering informal associations may be particularly important because indications are that small organizations have a particularly difficult time attracting, supporting, and retaining these employees (Bell & Cornelius, 2013).

Methodology

- As part of a larger study of the profession (Nathan & Tempel, 2017), we discovered some fundraisers who felt isolated appeared to create informal professional associations.
- This grounded theory study focused on how a social group (fundraisers) changed and the processes that drove that change (informal association) (Charmaz, 2015).
- This exploratory study was based on two focus groups held 18 months apart with the same group of four, female fundraisers.
- We coded transcripts individually and collectively in an iterative process to develop a preliminary theory (Charmaz, 2015).
- Next steps: An individual interview has been conducted and additional interviews are scheduled. Ongoing analysis will refine our theory.

Discussion & Implications

- This informal group provided many of the services and support provided by formal associations. Literature has indeed shown that such associations can provide self-regulation, knowledge diffusion, and professional identity—similar to that offered by larger, formal associations (Suddaby, Hinings, & Greenwood, 2002), but with a dose of care, friendship, and coaching.
- Implications for fundraisers: seek out peer mentors, ask them, establish a regular meeting schedule and create a safe space.
- Implications for managers: establish internal mechanisms for peer mentoring, encourage fundraisers to build networks, support their time out of the office to learn.

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