

One minute with...

Pamala Wiepking

What induces people to give their money away? Meet the woman who explores what makes philanthropists tick

What makes us give money to charity?

Most giving is done through some sort of social interaction. Eighty-five per cent of donations are made in response to a direct request - through a friend, on the doorstep, through a media appeal. People feel obligated because of their reputations - they want to establish them or don't want to damage them. In general the people who are most generous are the ones who are asked to give most often.

Who gives the most?

Religious people tend to be the most giving across the board. There is a lot of research on that, and it applies across cultures. This is partly because of the values they have grown up with, but also their religious attendance. If you're getting together with other people who are giving, who can see whether or not you are giving, then to some extent you have to live up to those expectations if you want to be involved in this social group.

You have investigated whether we get more miserly as we grow old. What did you find?

The older you get, the more likely you are to give more, but this evens out and eventually declines in people over 75. The economist Russell James and I did a study to find out why this is. We thought it might be related to a decline in cognitive ability, but we didn't find that. Instead we found that older people stop giving because they are less often in situations where they encounter requests for donations. They are physically less capable of going to services or gatherings.

Does gender make a difference?

Women tend to be more generous. That is partly because they are more empathic, care more about others and about inequality. Men donate more to political parties, and they are more likely to be generous if they are well educated and well off.

But rich people aren't always the most philanthropically minded...

Poorer people give away a higher proportion of their income than richer people. I think there is a



PROFILE

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logical explanation for this. Most people give similar amounts in similar situations. If you're asked in a door-to-door collection you might give €2, if you're asked by direct mail perhaps €10, and that is equal across all incomes. It is not because rich people are inherently less generous.

You've also looked at whether we lie about how much we donate. What did you find?

We compared donations as reported in a survey with donations as recorded in a charity's database. Interestingly, we found that most people do not lie about their giving. However, some people underestimate their donations, for example those with a Protestant religious affiliation (they do not want to make public that they gave; it is between them and God) and respondents in higher income households, who might have forgotten the relatively small donation.

How can people be persuaded to give more?

We need role models. In the Netherlands, philanthropists are not publicly applauded. In the US, anyone who gives even a little is celebrated.

Interview by Michael Bond