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Research Article

Developing the Field of Behavioral Nonprofit Management

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Abstract: We define *behavioral nonprofit management* as the study of individual behavior within nonprofit organizations, as well as the psychological and social mechanisms driving those specific behaviors. While nonprofit management research traditionally relies on administrative or survey data and is primarily concerned with organizational and environmental variables at the meso- and macro- level, the behavioral approach focuses on individuals, such as donors, volunteers, employees, managers, and board members working either individually or collectively. This article reviews the current status of behavioral research in the interdisciplinary field of nonprofit, voluntary action, and philanthropic studies, and argues that nonprofit scholarship would benefit from engaging more explicitly in behavioral approaches for theoretical development and empirical testing. We recommend using experiments and other behavioral research methods to advance theories through understanding the behavioral foundations of nonprofit organizations and voluntary actions. We envision the goal of behavioral nonprofit management informing not only nonprofit management practice but also public policies that aim to increase individual, community and societal well-being.

Introduction

Nonprofit organizations are unique organizations, differing from both private for-profit and public organizations in both ownership and control. This makes nonprofit organizations, and the people who support and run them, behave differently than other types of organizations. To explore and distinguish these differences, scholars have engaged in research that stretches across disciplines, including economics, business, public administration, political science, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, among others. While much of the research revolves around the roles, activities, and outcomes of nonprofit organizations through this multidisciplinary lens, as nonprofit scholars we argue that our field has yet to develop our own explicit tradition of using behavioral approaches in the study of nonprofit organizations.

In response to *JBPA*'s Symposium on "Taking 'behavior' literally," this essay reflects upon the current status of behavioral research in the field of nonprofit, voluntary action, and philanthropic studies. We ask: What is "behavioral" in the study of nonprofit organizations? How has behavioral research in other disciplines contributed to nonprofit scholarship? How does behavioral research complement traditional nonprofit scholarship? And finally, what are other potential areas of behavioral nonprofit management? This is not a systematic literature review *per se*; rather, we draw examples from both the top field journals (e.g. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, *Voluntas*) and also other disciplinary literatures to illustrate these research questions. We do not attempt to give thorough descriptions of every study but focus on what we believe to be appropriate examples that illuminate the leading themes. We argue that nonprofit scholarship would benefit from engaging more explicitly in behavioral approaches for both theoretical development and empirical testing, and we suggest some promising avenues of inquiry that nonprofit scholars may find interesting.

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What is behavioral nonprofit management?

Behavioral science is an umbrella term for multiple disciplines and fields, such as social and cognitive psychology, sociology, anthropology, behavioral economics, among others, that study human behavior through systematic experimentation and observation (Whitley & Kite, 2012). It seeks to understand not only *how* individuals behave, but also *why* they behave in a certain way. Different disciplines and fields may have different focuses on "behavior." For example, psychologists have long been interested in examining the biological, cognitive, emotional, and social processes underlying human behavior. Behavioral economists combine the insights from psychology to investigate individual decision-making in economic contexts, and how individual behavior, as well as the beliefs and preferences which individuals' choices are based upon, differs from the standard economics model (Mullainathan & Thaler, 2000). Sociologists study how human behavior is shaped by the social groups to which people belong and by the social interactions that occur within those groups (Robertson, 1987). On the other hand, political scientists use the behavioral approach to study political behavior and decision making, as well as political attitudes (i.e. people's beliefs and values about politics), at the individual and the collective level (Mintz, Valentino, & Wayne, 2021). Similarly, behavioral public administration also considers both individual behavior and attitudes (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2016).

There are at least two important characteristics of the behavioral approach. First, the behavioral approach emphasizes the study of individuals; this is particularly true in disciplines that traditionally focus on institutions or organizations, such as political science, public administration, and management. However, this does not exclude looking at individuals as social beings. Groups, organizations, or other social environments in which individuals interact are important for understanding behavior and behavioral change. Therefore, the behavioral approach seeks to understand the actions taken by individuals, and interactions between individuals in teams and groups (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017). Second, the behavioral approach embraces multidisciplinary lenses, applying a wide range of concepts, theories, and methodologies to systematically study human behavior. Using techniques from observation to experimentation, behavioral scientists develop and test theories that explain when and why individuals do what they do. Through understanding and predicting human behavior, behavioral science often aims to help people make better decisions or influence their behavior. Applied behavioral science has been used to assist managers in managing their employees, or to help policy makers in finding appropriate interventions to incentivize desired behavioral outcomes.

Similarly, we define *behavioral nonprofit management* as the study of individual behavior within nonprofit organizations, as well as the psychological and social mechanisms driving those specific behaviors. While nonprofit research traditionally is primarily concerned with organizational and environmental variables at the meso- and macro- level, the behavioral approach provides the micro-foundations of nonprofit organizations through focusing on relevant individual actors working either individually or collectively, such as donors, volunteers, employees, managers, and board members. Behavioral nonprofit management seeks to understand how and why these individuals make certain decisions regarding nonprofit organizations and voluntary actions. For example, why do donors give money to charities and how does this inform the fund development of a nonprofit? Why do volunteers give time to nonprofits and how does this inform nonprofit volunteer management? In addition, behavioral nonprofit management studies how individuals act and interact within nonprofit organizations and how the organizational context affects individual behavior. Why do people choose to work for nonprofits rather than other types of organizations? How can managers motivate nonprofit employees and increase their job satisfaction and performance? What factors affect the decision making by managers or board members' in a nonprofit? Through understanding how and why these individual actors think and behave, the goal of behavioral nonprofit studies is to inform both better nonprofit management practice and also public policies that aim to increase individual and societal well-being.

How has behavioral research from other disciplines informed nonprofit studies?

The largest body of behavioral research that relates to nonprofit organizations and management has been conducted primarily by economists, social psychologists, and sociologists, particularly around charitable giving and volunteering. Scholars from these disciplines have drawn concepts and theories from their own fields to understand donor or volunteer behavior. Understanding when and why people give their money or time, as well as the consequences of prosocial behavior, often provides practical implications for fund development and human resource management in nonprofit organizations.

Economists conceptualize charitable giving as the process of purchasing a commodity, which is affected by an individual's income and the price of giving, and motivated by potential benefits in return (see Vesterlund, 2006; Andreoni & Payne, 2013 for reviews). Behavioral economics research, in particular, manipulates the price of giving in lab or field experiments and offers direct insights regarding how different fundraising strategies, such as matching, rebates, and seed money, affect an individual's choice to donate (e.g. Eckel & Grossman, 2003; List & Lucking-Reiley, 2002; Huck and Rasul, 2011). To identify people's motives for charitable giving, economists have tested whether government funding "crowds-out" individual donations. Early economic models argued that when the public is solely interested in the provision of a public good (e.g. education, health care, or other human services), they will help provide for it through charitable giving up to the point where the government steps in (Weisbrod, 1977). Individuals will no longer be compelled to give when the government provides a good, thus government funding "crowding-out" individuals' charitable contributions dollar-for-dollar. However, many experimental studies have provided evidence supporting only partial or incomplete crowd-out (see De Wit & Bekkers, 2017 for a review). Instead, later models suggest that in addition to the public benefit, donors are also motivated by private benefits that accrue to them from their own gifts, such as recognition, prestige, or a warm-glow (i.e. experiencing a good feeling by giving a donation) (Andreoni, 1990).

Psychology research, on the other hand, focuses on personality, emotions, values, and psychological processes associated with charitable giving. For instance, a considerable body of research has provided evidence of the "identifiable victim effect," which refers to people's tendency to be more generous towards an individually identifiable recipient than towards a group of individuals. Studies suggest that fundraising appeals can promote generosity by providing tangible information that elicits greater sympathy or perceived impact (Small, Loewenstein & Slovic, 2007; Cryder, Loewenstein, & Scheines, 2013). Social psychology and sociology theories also situate individual giving behavior in its social contexts by examining the influence of environmental variables on individuals' giving behavior, such as social information, social identity, and social networks. A well-known field experiment, for instance, found that people gave more when informed about others' high contributions, suggesting that social information increases giving (Shang & Croson, 2009). Psychologists have also used experiments to identify the causal effect of giving on one's well-being, and found that prosocial spending, including on charities, promotes greater happiness than spending money on oneself (Dunn, et al, 2008; Dunn, et al., 2014 for a review).

Volunteering is another area that has received considerable attention across social science disciplines. This line of research largely uses social survey data to investigate the questions of who volunteers and why. Plenty of research in psychology and sociology has examined what subjective dispositions (e.g. personality traits, motives, norms, and values) and socio-demographic characteristics are linked one's tendency to volunteer, as well as how volunteering changes across one's life course and social context (Wilson, 2012 for a review). A growing number of studies have also examined the consequences of volunteering on people's health and well-being (De Wit, Qu, & Bekkers, 2022; Qu 2022; Qu, Konrath, & Poulin, 2020). Although there is limited experimental research on this topic, a recent randomized controlled trial finds that older adults assigned to a volunteering intervention condition demonstrated significant improvements in life satisfaction, purpose in life, and personal growth scores over a 12-month period than those who did not volunteer in the control condition (Jongenelis et al., 2021), although the psychological benefits were not observed at the 6-month follow up (Jiang et al., 2021; Pettigrew et al., 2019) or in student samples (Schreier et al., 2013; Whillans et al., 2016). Findings from these studies offer practical implications to the recruitment and retention of volunteers. However, there is comparatively less research on volunteers' experience and behavior in the nonprofit organizational context, specifically, what management practices affect volunteer behavior, such as time volunteered, quality of work, volunteer satisfaction, and retention (Einolf, 2018 for a review).

The decision to give money or time to support an organization or cause is a complex interaction of different motivations. The findings associated with untangling these questions can have important implications for nonprofit management, guiding organizational decision making around fundraising, and volunteer recruitment, training and management.

How does behavioral research inform the nonprofit research agenda?

Nonprofit scholars have watched with interest as scholars in other disciplines take the behavioral approach in testing theories in their fields. It has only been the last decade (or less) that nonprofit scholars have begun to

more actively engage with behavioral research as well, with studies appearing in the leading nonprofit journals, focusing more specifically on the stakeholders of nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations are different from both public-sector and private (business) sector organizations in their governance structures, particularly as they relate to ownership and control (Fama & Jensen, 1983). Since excess profits cannot be claimed by "owners", that may leave different motivations to participate by the board of directors, paid staff, volunteers, and donors, as well as very different incentive structures within organizations. A behavioral approach to studying the implications of these unique attributes of nonprofit organizations can contribute to theory testing and development, as well as help evaluate and improve the practice of nonprofit management and governance. Behavioral research, through the analysis of the behavior of individual actors involved in organizational processes, can offer a micro-level perspective to some of the most fundamental questions in the nonprofit research agenda (Anheier & Toepler, 2023, p.154-155), such as why nonprofit organizations exist and how they behave. In the following, we draw examples mainly from top field journals to illustrate this point.

Providing micro-underpinnings to the theories of nonprofit organizations

Early scholarship has developed a variety of theories explaining the existence of nonprofits relative to for-profit and governmental organizations. Although most research answers this fundamental question at the organizational, field, or society level, behavioral nonprofit management can uniquely contribute to the theoretical development of nonprofit organizations through testing the behavioral assumptions of a theory or providing micro-foundations that support it.

Take the trust-related theory as one example (see Anheier & Toepler, 2023, p.165-167 for a review). It explains *why* nonprofits, rather than for-profits, exist to meet the unsatisfied demands for quasi-public goods. Nonprofits are supposedly more trustworthy because they have less incentive to profit at the expense of consumers due to the non-distribution constraint, particularly in situations where it is challenging for consumers to accurately evaluate the quantity or quality of a service or product (Hansmann, 1987). The theory in part assumes that consumers are aware of the ownership status of different providers and they use this information when purchasing a service.

Behavioral research on consumer attitudes and behavior studies have challenged these assumptions, showing that this is not universally the case (Schlesinger, Mitchell & Gray, 2004; Handy et al., 2010; Drevs, Tscheulin & Lindenmeier, 2014). Research using data from surveys or survey experiments finds that consumers indeed perceive nonprofits as more trustworthy, but also less competent, than their for-profit competitors when purchasing health care service (Handy et al., 2010; Schlesinger, Mitchell, & Gray, 2004); this influences their evaluations about service quality (Drevs, Tscheulin, & Lindenmeier, 2014). Early research also suggests that consumers may not use ownership in their decision-making because they are unaware of the ownership status of their service providers (Handy et al., 2010; Schlesinger et al., 2014). A more recent study finds that consumers who use ownership status in their search were more likely to choose for-profit organizations; only better educated and more informed consumers were more likely to choose nonprofit organizations (Ben-Ner et al., 2018). This example demonstrates that behavioral research can be used to test the underlying behavioral assumptions and provide nuances to theories of nonprofit organizations.

Consider another example. Research comparing cross-sector differences often refers to the intrinsic motivation perspective, which suggests that nonprofit employees may be willing to accept lower wages because they receive intrinsic rewards from supporting an organization's mission (Ben-Ner et al., 2011). While empirical studies testing this theory have used organizational level data to examine whether there are wage differentials between nonprofit and for-profit organizations, the behavioral approach directly examines and compares the motivation and utility between nonprofit and for-profit employees. Research using survey data finds that nonprofit workers value making a positive difference in people's lives more and perceive a better person–organization fit, while for-profit organization employees value career advancement more (De Cooman et al., 2011). Nonprofit workers also report higher job satisfaction than those in other organizational forms, despite the lower wage levels (Benz, 2005; Borzaga & Tortia, 2006); and motivations are important in influencing workers' overall satisfaction with their jobs (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). Workers at nonprofit organizations also report better quality of life compared to their counterparts in for-profit organizations (Kamerāde and McKay, 2015; Binder, 2016; Qu & Robichau, 2023). A recent study using a natural field experiment with short-term workers finds that those who choose to contribute to a social cause outperform the ones randomly assigned to

the same job, providing direct evidence that the social mission of a job positively influences workers' job performance (Jeworrek & Mertins, 2022). Thus, through revealing behavioral mechanisms underlying organizational behavior and outcomes, behavioral nonprofit studies can contribute to the development and systematic testing of nonprofit theories.

Evaluating and informing nonprofit management

Nonprofit organizational behavior and management issues can also be explained through the lens of those who govern and manage the organization. For example, various aspects of nonprofit financial management–securing, managing, and allocating financial resources for mission achievement– can benefit from understanding the behavior and decision making of individuals. We have already discussed how behavioral research on donor behavior in other disciplines may improve nonprofit fundraising practice. Similarly, understanding donor behavior also informs the resource allocation between programmatic and non-programmatic (e.g. fundraising and/or administrative) expenditures. The standard economic model suggests donors should not care about a nonprofit's overhead ratios because they represent average rather than marginal expenses; therefore, without considering donors' preferences and behavior, the optimal expenditure on fundraising is to spend until the next dollar raises only one dollar (Steinberg, 1986). Nonetheless, behavioral research finds that donors negatively respond to nonprofits with high overhead using actual giving data (Bowman, 2006) and experiments (Gneezy et al., 2014). This has two implications for nonprofit management: first, nonprofit managers are constrained by donors' preferences and behavior in resource allocation; second, when an organization's overhead level exceeds donors' expectations, nonprofit fundraisers face the challenge of developing fundraising strategies to overcome the myth of overhead. More recently, nonprofit scholars have begun to use survey experiments to examine the potential mechanisms underlying donors' overhead aversion and propose coping strategies that nonprofits can incorporate in their fundraising messages, such as providing additional information on a nonprofit's performance and transparency (Tian et al., 2020), explaining the purpose of higher overhead as building long-term organizational capacity (Qu & Levine Daniel, 2021a), or providing tangible information about what donations can buy (Qu & Levine Daniel, 2021b).

While behavioral nonprofit research has predominantly focused on donors, nonprofit management can also be informed by more research on the preferences and behavior of staff, managers, and board members. For example, the issue of the "nonprofit starvation cycle" has garnered much scholarly attention. Although most behavioral studies have approached it from the donor perspective, namely, donors' overhead aversion; another angle is to look at nonprofit managers, specifically, their perception of risk and ratio management behavior. Parsons et al. (2017) surveyed 200 nonprofit executives to examine their perceptions of donor pressure and their willingness to engage in ratio management. They found that managers were more likely to manage ratios by making real changes to spending or manipulating accounting information if they perceive donor pressure, particularly from donors who make restricted gifts and government grantors. A recent experimental study assesses the accounting and spending behavior of nonprofit financial managers when they are subject to pressure from different stakeholders, including donors, board members, and the media (Schubert & Boenigk, 2021). This study finds that donor pressure significantly affects both accounting and spending behavior, whereas board and media pressure affect only accounting choices. Similarly, in a survey experiment, Kim & Mason (2020) found that the personality type of nonprofit managers was linked to their willingness to either expand or decrease their spending based on a hypothetical change in government funding. They found that managers were risk averse in making budgeting decisions, suggesting that they were indeed constrained by the perception of increased overhead. Through direct assessments of the mechanisms affecting nonprofit managers' decision-making, experimental studies complement previous research on ratio management relying on administrative data on nonprofits (Keating et al., 2008; Krishnan et al., 2006).

Despite these recent advances, most of the behavioral nonprofit research to date relies on self-reported survey instruments that measure people's attitudes or hypothetical decisions using vignettes or scenarios instead of measuring actual behavior. Related to the choice of methods, relatively fewer studies attempt to address causal inferences. In addition, many examine individuals without considering their actions and interactions within organizations, and how the group context affects individual decisions. In the following, we address how these gaps in behavioral nonprofit research can guide the future research agenda and choice of methods.

Extending Behavioral Nonprofit Management to the Group-level

One area that has very limited behavioral research in nonprofit scholarship is the group level of analysis, instead of only the individual level as discussed above. Research in other disciplines has regularly documented that individuals often behave differently in groups than they do alone. For several decades, economics, political science, business and public administration scholars have developed theories related to collective action (Charness & Chen, 2020). Additionally, business and psychology literature has examined team dynamics and team performance (e.g. Ilgen, et al, 2005). However, nonprofit scholars only occasionally draw from the extant literature of group behavior in their research. Nonprofit organizations are, by design, structured to be collaborative efforts. As discussed earlier, they have unique characteristics in terms of governance and control compared to other organizations. A nonprofit typically has a multi-person (volunteer) board of directors holding a governance and oversight role, a group of staff and volunteers implementing the organizations' programs, and community members and other partnering stakeholders working together to meet the mission. The individuals working (or volunteering) in nonprofits may also have different motivations than those in other forms of organizations. Therefore, one promising area for behavior nonprofit management research is to better understand individual behavior in a group context.

For example, behavioral nonprofit management research may draw from the collective action literature in economics and political science to explain an individuals' choice to join or support a collective effort. Collective action can be defined as the summation of individual personal decisions to either get involved or free ride on a given effort (Olson, 1965; Salisbury, 1969; Wilson, 1995). Olson (1965) argues that groups suffer from the free-rider problem, where individuals will not support an effort unless the marginal benefit of an expected outcome exceeds the marginal cost of their participation. Scholars in political science and other disciplines that study advocacy and social movements have done much work on overcoming the "free-rider" problem (e.g., Ostrom, 1998; 2005 and adherents). Some have argued that nonprofit managers would benefit from providing the "selective benefits" to incentivize participation in advocacy and political organizations (Salisbury, 1969; Wilson, 1995); these benefits can be material, purposive, or solidary benefits (Wilson, 1995). Chong (1991) also recognizes the social, psychological, and moral pressure that individuals may feel that can compel participation in advocacy efforts. In this line of inquiry, there is plenty of room for behavioral nonprofit management research that tests relative strengths or weaknesses of various incentives for individuals' participation and collaboration in a collective effort, such as recruiting and organizing volunteers. Behavioral approaches might be used to predict an individual's likelihood to free-ride in joining a community association, examine the effect of social pressure or shared norms on nonprofit employees' work behavior, and investigate when and why board members choose to volunteer for new leadership roles.

In addition, other disciplines, particularly psychology and sociology, have been keen to study the role of cognition, relationships, and social pressure on group behavior. This line of theorizing recognizes the group affect (Barsade & Gibson, 1998, 2012), specifically, the impact of group dynamics and group processes on group and individual outcomes from both the top and bottom. The top-down perspective suggests that strong leaders or strong group culture could influence individual behavior and emotions. The bottom-up group approach of group affect, on the other hand, is the aggregation of individual traits, moods, emotions, and perspectives in a group (Barsade & Gibson, 1998). Group behavior emerges from the interaction of different cognitive, emotional, motivational, and socio-historical factors of individual members. In other words, groups of individuals can create a unique "group mind," "group cognition," or "socially shared cognitions" that cannot simply be explained via the role of individual preferences in the group (Tindale et al., 2008). While group cohesion and strong relationships between participants may positively influence group performance, "groupthink"—the tendency of individuals to put group solidarity over critical assessments of a situation—can hinder the group from making optimal decisions (Park, 1990).

These concepts and theories can be useful in studying the formation of shared norms and values among nonprofit board members and other stakeholder groups and the processes embedded in creating inclusive organizations and high performing teams. For example, high turnover on boards may cause the group to struggle to agree on shared norms and values, making the formation of group identity difficult. Nonprofit organizations may have to carefully consider the impact of groupthink on organizational performance, especially when executive directors receive little oversight from a "rubber stamp" board that does not have a culture of oversight, transparency and evaluation. Organizations may also find themselves in trouble by making

poor decisions on behalf of their constituents and other stakeholders without ensuring they have a diversity of thought on the board or in the executive suite. They may also develop organizational cultures that are unwelcoming to people belonging to traditionally under-served volunteers, staff, and clients. Overall, there is a significant opportunity for behavioral nonprofit management scholarship to develop a research agenda that engages with these theories to study the influence of group dynamics on the behavior of individual board members, managers, and staff members, their interactions, as well as the decision-making process of nonprofit organizations.

Marshalling Methods in Behavioral Nonprofit Management

Behavioral sciences often rely on systematic observation or experimentation to develop and test theories of human behavior. This includes a range of quantitative and qualitative research methods, such as surveys, experiments (lab, field, survey, and natural), controlled or naturalistic observation, case studies, and the growing use of "Big Data" observational datasets, among others. The majority of the behavioral nonprofit research that we reviewed in this article uses either surveys or experiments. Survey research allows measuring individuals' self-reported attitudes and actions, and how certain variables may be associated with their behavior (such as intention to volunteer). A large representative sample helps researchers to gain a confident estimate of relationships between various factors that can influence individual or group behavior. However, nonprofit researchers have recognized the challenges inherent in survey methodology, such as the lack of randomization, sampling errors, nonresponse and selection bias, different sampling techniques or wording of questions across datasets (Cnaan et al., 2011; Hall, 2001).

Alternatively, experiments are frequently used in psychology, behavioral economics, and other behavioral sciences. Experiments enable systematic testing of theories (Smith, 1994) and provide benefits not offered by surveys or data gathered as a result of uncontrolled processes. Well-designed experiments allow us to draw causal inferences. Random assignment of participants across treatments ensures that each observation has no systematic relationships with other observed or unobserved variables, making it possible to determine the effect of a particular intervention, thus helping to eliminate alternative hypotheses (Broota, 1989). Three types of experiments are commonly used in behavioral sciences. Lab experiments are conducted in highly controlled settings that allow for identification of causal mechanisms. In particular, economists use payments to induce participants' preferences and values that are usually not observable in real life, making it feasible to test theories (Smith, 1976). However, lab experiments often rely on convenience samples (e.g. students) and have limited external validity outside the artificial lab setting and generalizability to a wider population (Friedman & Sunder, 1994). Field experiments are carried out in real-world settings, trading control over extraneous variables for higher external validity and less bias. Survey experiments, on the other hand, can be suitable tools for researchers to measure sensitive attitudes and behavior or test causal relationships. By incorporating experimental designs within surveys, and using population-based sampling frames from survey research, survey experiments can speak to causality as well as generalizability. Online survey experiments, in particular, are comparatively cost-effective and easy to implement and replicate as they do not require in-person contact. However, survey experiments mostly measure attitudes, beliefs, values, or hypothetical decisions, rather than actual behavior that can be observed from lab or field experiments.

The use of experimental methods in the field of nonprofit, voluntary action and philanthropic studies has been slowly growing in recent years but is still limited (Kim, LeRoux, & Mason, 2021). Online survey experiments are the most popular among nonprofit researchers. For example, Kim and van Ryzin (2014) used an online survey experiment to test the behavioral aspect of the crowding-out hypothesis, and found that donations to a hypothetical arts organization fell when donors were informed of government funding for the organization. Another online experiment by Jurcevic and Fyall (2020) found that how diversity was framed by the organization had an impact on perceptions of how welcoming and inclusive a nonprofit was, offering implications for recruiting board, staff and volunteer participants, as well as clients. There is much less nonprofit research using lab or field experiments. In a lab experiment, Qu and Steinberg (2017) examined how different types of membership benefits impact members' giving behavior in a service club setting, and found that emphasizing socializing benefits of the membership may be counterproductive given its potential to crowd out donors' intrinsic motives for giving. Using a field experiment, van Teunenbroek and Bekkers (2020) tested social information theory in a large crowdfunding campaign; and they found that providing social information

to donors increased the donation amount but did not spur higher participation. Overall, behavioral nonprofit management can benefit from increased use of experimental methods to address causal effects. In particular, randomized controlled field experiments, through in partnership with nonprofit organizations, can test theories in a real-world context and provide immediate value to nonprofit organizations (Mason, 2013).

Other methods may also be useful to study individual and group level behavior. Qualitative research, usually through interviews, has been used to study how couples make their charitable giving decisions (Einolf et al., 2018). Social network analysis may be able to help scholars trace the influence of an individual or group's networks on the choices that they may make. Action research in partnership with organizations (Adelman, 1993) can support understanding of how the implementation of new structures, processes, and practices may influence individual or group behavior. Finally, the growing use of computational social sciences (Lazar et al., 2009), such as machine learning (Monroe-White & Lecy, 2022) and natural language learning, can help develop and analyze larger observational datasets (Ma et al, 2021) for both theory building and testing in behavioral research. Individual attitudes and emotions can be measured from linguistic properties and organizational behavior can be observed in unstructured, big data. Researchers may also identify natural experiments from these datasets that allow for causal inference. Like other research methods, scholars should pay close attention to the issues of appropriate context, rigorous design, as well as ethics and representation in how data are collected and analyzed (Kim & Raggo, 2023, Lazer et. al, 2020).

Although these tools can help advance behavioral nonprofit management research, nonprofit scholars should also heed some common problems that plague behavioral science more broadly. Specifically, nonprofit scholarship should carefully avoid the problems of *p*-hacking and bias in choosing what to present. There is evidence across social sciences that researchers are chasing statistical significance results, leading to false positives (Meyer et al., 2017). They may also ignore null results, which may be equally interesting for understanding human behavior (DellaVigna & Linos, 2022). Ironically, null results may be particularly important to creating useful knowledge that can be implemented by nonprofit managers. If scholars and practitioners are unaware of things that do not work, they may continue to waste valuable resources on attempting ineffective interventions that lead to bad decisions. Another concern is the lack of transparency and replicability (Open Science Collaboration, 2015). Data is often not available for interested parties to replicate, and the choice of what to replicate and how to replicate a study may be affected by false positives and inflated effect sizes (Camerer et al., 2018). A recent meta-analysis of experimental public administration studies published in top public administration journals shows that the field is not solely based on selective reporting of significant results, suggesting the importance of raising awareness and adopting sound practices (e.g. conducting high powered studies, pre-registering studies to further increase reliability and validity of experimental research (Vogel & Xu, 2021). In addition, nonprofit scholars must also contend with the more familiar challenges of cross-cultural replication and sample selection, including the generalizability of certain populations often used for study, such as MTurk or college students in lab experiments, to the wider populations (Henrich et al., 2010; Arechar & Rand, 2022). As an increasing number of nonprofit scholars engage with behavioral research relevant to our field, it is imperative we must take these concerns into consideration in the design, implementation, and presentation of our work. Not only for publications in nonprofit journals, but also to ensure that nonprofit practitioners have the most rigorous and relevant research behind their decisions.

Conclusion

This article outlines the extant literature and future lines of inquiry in developing an explicit research agenda in behavioral nonprofit management. We have reflected upon the leading themes of behavioral research in the field of nonprofit, voluntary action, and philanthropic studies. We also identified key gaps where additional research can be undertaken, particularly as it relates to individuals other than donors and volunteers, as well as group processes and behavior. We suggest that nonprofit scholarship would benefit from using a behavioral approach to develop and test not only micro-level theories of charitable giving and voluntary action, but also meso-level theories of organizational processes and behavior, and macro-level theories of societal outcomes and impact. Behavioral nonprofit management research should also feature more use of experimental methods, particularly lab and field experiments, to identify causal mechanisms underlying individual and group behavior in nonprofit organizations.

Ultimately, the behavioral approach to nonprofit management provides micro-perspectives of nonprofit organizations that are tasked with serving those in need and providing opportunities for people to express shared values and beliefs. Through understanding how and why individual actors in nonprofits think and behave individually and collectively, the behavioral approach to nonprofit scholarship can help nonprofit organizations become more efficient and effective, better serve their communities, and have greater impact in meeting their goals for their constituents and for society as a whole. Opportunities abound for developing the field of behavioral nonprofit management to better understand what makes these organizations tick and how they can better work in the public interest.

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