Special Issue on Information Systems and Information Technologies Issues in Nonprofits

Oscar Gutierrez, University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA
Kieran Mathieson, Oakland University, USA
Wei Zhang, University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA

This is the special section that focuses on Information Systems/Information Technologies (IS/IT) issues in nonprofits. The nonprofit sector has become a substantial part of the US economy, and its importance only grows as the overall economy suffers from lack of growth. Although the penetration of IS/IT into nonprofit organizations has been increasing, nonprofits overall still lag behind the private and public sectors with respect to IS/IT adoption and usage. While some nonprofit organizations benefit from new advances in IS/IT, many struggle to build, manage, and utilize their technical infrastructure given their constrained budgets and limited access to technical resources. How can nonprofits best take advantage of IS/IT thus becomes not only an academically interesting but practically important research topic.

The publication of this special section represents the efforts from IS researchers to address this challenge. The special section includes two articles. The first article, “Exploring Barriers to Coordination between Humanitarian NGOs: A Comparative Case Study of two NGO’s Information Technology Coordination Bodies” by Louis-Marie Ngamassi Tchouakeu and coauthors, studies Information Technology Coordination Bodies, a phenomena that is seldom seen in the for-profit world. IT Coordination Bodies are organizational structure that pool limited IT resources from different NGOs together to provide them with information services and promote inter-organizational information sharing in a cost-effective way. The authors analyzed the mandate, behavioral, and structural barriers to effective coordination among NGOs. Some of their findings are expected (e.g., the existence of most identified barriers), some surprising (e.g., there was no evidence for competition for resources as one of the barriers). Most interestingly, this research highlighted that the inter-organization relationships between nonprofit organizations are different from those between for-profit organizations: while IS/IT collaborations between NGOs are mostly voluntary, the relationships between
for-profit organizations are contractual. This study explores the implication of this important difference.

The second article, “Technology Acceptance: Are NFPs or Their Works Different?” by Geoffrey Greenfield and Fiona Rohde, addresses technology acceptance by workers in nonprofits. Using the popular Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this research examines whether technology acceptance can be different for workers of different roles in the nonprofit context. Although the technology acceptance is well studied in for-profit organizations, similar studies in nonprofits are still limited. The results indicate that in nonprofits, workers providing social services and those performing typical business functions such as marketing treat technologies differently and the underlying mechanisms that motivate them to use technologies are different. These findings illustrate the complexity of deploying IS/IT in nonprofits, suggesting that nonprofits do present a different context for IS research than for-profit organizations.

The first article applies a well-known theory to a well-studied topic, but conducts the research in the nonprofit context. The second article studies a phenomenon more or less unique to the nonprofit context. Both made findings that are not only academically interesting, but also, perhaps more importantly, practically important and socially useful. Taken together, they demonstrate why it is important to study IS/IT issues in nonprofits and illustrate how IS/IT research in the nonprofit context can contribute to IS/IT research in general.

Oscar Gutierrez
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Wei Zhang
Guest Editors


Kieran Mathieson is an Associate Professor of Information Systems with the Department of Decision and Information Sciences in the School of Business Administration at Oakland University. His main research interest is using information systems to make ethics easier. Dr. Mathieson has published extensively in journals, including Information Systems Research, Information and Management, Journal of End User Computing, Communications of the Association for Information Systems, and International Journal of Volunteer Administration.
Wei Zhang is an Associate Professor of MIS in College of Management at the University of Massachusetts Boston. He received his B.E. in Computer Science from University of Science and Technology of China, M.E. in Management Information Systems from Renmin University of China, and D.B.A. in Management Information Systems from Boston University. His research interests include knowledge management, innovation process, cultural and cross-cultural issues in IS, and information systems education. He has published research papers in journals including Journal of the AIS, Communications of the AIS, Behavioral & Information Technologies, Journal of Information Systems Education, Journal of Knowledge Management, and Social Works.