Chapter 4
Technology Design for E–Governance in Nonprofit Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Nonprofit organizations are an important sector of society working to support underprivileged citizens. The operations of nonprofit organizations differ from their organizational size, scope, and application domain. Modern computer systems are quite effective in managing organizational tasks, but the nonprofit sector lacks in technological systems concerning organizational settings. In order to foster a successful use of electronic services, it is vital that computer systems are appropriate according to user needs. The diversity of users and their work practices in nonprofit organizations make it difficult for standardized infrastructure to work optimally in diverse organizational settings. In this chapter, the authors discuss the issues and complexities associated with system design for nonprofit organizations. They analyze important open issues that need to be explored for appropriated technology design in this domain.

1 INTRODUCTION

Effective governance methodologies are required to improve the work in every sector of economy. Modern technological artifacts have huge potential to improve the governance in organizational settings. As a result governmental organizations

focus on providing of services electronically, which has led to the evolution of an electronic government. Nonprofit organizations are becoming quite important due to their support to underprivileged citizens, and not much literature exists on the e-governance initiative in this particular domain. The operations and compositions of nonprofit organizations are quite different from governmental organizations, and they are not run through standard business models (cf. Saeed et

al., 2008). Furthermore nonprofit organizations (NPOs) normally lack funding to invest in establishing technological systems. In this chapter we will argue for a specific research program to support nonprofit organizations in technology design. We will highlight the literature and also briefly discuss the results of our own projects. We will briefly outline the program and the aimed results.

The major obstacle in appropriate technology design in the nonprofit sector, are the various organizational settings, the absence of a stable organizational structure and the lack of financial and human resources. As a result it is pertinent to analyze the organizational work practices before the design of technology, so that technological systems will be well perceived by users. Although structure and working methodology of nonprofit organizations show some similarities with business and governmental organizations, there are considerable differences too. Therefore, the organizational structure needs to be investigated and the application area affecting the IT requirements of nonprofit orgnizations. Figure 1 highlights salient features of nonprofit organisations, which also affect system design. Every application domain

in which nonprofit organizations work, has different work practices, e.g. an organization dealing with human traffickers has different working practices than an organization working to help the victims of natural disasters. So this difference in the application domain is the major factor in setting up system design. Another factor is the nature of nonprofits organizations themselves, whether they work for advocacy only or work in the field. The communication and collaboration needs of both organizations differ, which also affects technological support requirements. In the case of nonprofit organizations working in field settings, office, field, donor, government and general public are major collaborators. As a result communication needs are focused on office-field-government communication, office-public communication, field-public communication and office to donor communication. In the case of advocacy companies, field settings do not play a major role, so their communication needs are mostly office-government communication, office-public communication, and office-donor communication. Another important factor affecting technological needs in nonprofit organization is

Figure 1. Parameters highlighting diversity among nonprofit organizations
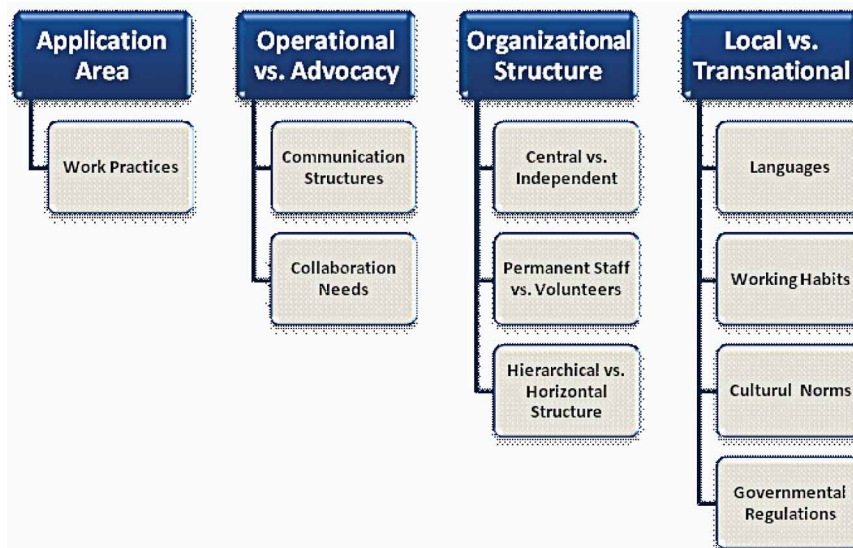
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