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CAIS Poster: The Australian Non-Profit Sector, Knowledge Management and Social Media

Abstract

This poster presents key emerging findings from the online survey which was conducted with a large number of Australian non-profit sector units to get insight into the use of knowledge management (KM) practices as well as the use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, particularly in KM practices. The findings from the data collected during the first month of opening of survey will be presented in the poster. These findings will provide us with better understanding KM, NPO and social media landscape which will have implications and learning for NPOs operating in Canada and other countries.

Résumé

1. Introduction

Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) play a significant role in the economy (Lyons and Passey, 2006). For example, NPOs contributed around 4% to the Canadian GDP (Holoday and Veldhuis, 2013) and around 3.3% to the Australian GDP in 2000 (Lyons and Passey, 2006). In addition, NPOs' primary focus is to create value for society (Lettieri et al., 2004, p.16) through charitable and outreach work (Teegan et al., 2004). NPOs produce tremendous amounts of knowledge in the process of conducting their social work, including: identifying the community's needs; targeting key resources in the community (e.g., donors, volunteer and government resources); and, developing outreach programs for specific audiences. All of these activities reflect the fact that NPOs are knowledge-creating organizations (Renshaw and Krishnaswamy 2009) and they need to undertake KM practices to bring efficiency and effectiveness to their activities.

Technology is an enabler for KM practices (Yeh et al., 2006) and social media are an emerging paradigm for KM practices (Hemsley and Mason 2013). Social media tools offer low cost opportunities (Schneckenberg 2009) for organizations in the non-profit sector and fit well with NPOs' operational strategies from a financial perspective due to

their limited budgets (Liu, 2012; Weerawardena et al., 2010; Gregroy and Rathi, 2008). This poster reports some of the exciting findings collected from Australian NPOs through an online survey in the area of KM and social media. The findings highlight the many areas where KM approaches can provide time-saving mechanisms that can guide NPOs in becoming more efficient and effective organizations, overall.

2. Literature Review

The NPO KM domain is an emerging area of research; in the last decade some exploratory investigations have been initiated (e.g., Vasconcelos et al., 2005; Lemieux and Dalkir, 2006; Gregory and Rathi, 2008; Huck et al., 2011;). In addition, our recent research in Canada has identified a number of key themes in the Canadian context, which provide useful comparative data for the Australia data presented in this poster. This research includes Rathi et al. (2014a), which discussed the use of social media by NPOs in Canada; Rathi et al. (2014b), which identified knowledge needs of NPOs; Forcier et al. (2013a) and Given et al. (2013), which discussed the importance of the use of social media in KM, particularly engagement and storytelling among other uses; and, Forcier et al. (2013b), which presented a case study of two public libraries i.e., NPOs and their use of social media for KM. Still, the overall focus on understanding KM as a concept in NPOs as well as the use of social media by NPOs is still in infancy and requires more investigation. This poster provides some insight into KM, NPO and social media domains.

3. Research Design

An online survey using Survey Monkey was conducted with Australian NPOs, which were identified through the publicly available Connectingup.org directories (<http://www.connectingup.org/>). The Australian NPOs that responded to the survey operated in different areas such as animal welfare, health, education and research, and social services. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from over 450 respondents, covering concepts related to KM and social media, will be included in the poster.

4. Key and Emerging Findings

The key findings from the Australian dataset will be included in the poster and in some cases the findings will be contrasted with Canadian NPO data as published in Rathi et al. (2014a) and Rathi et al. (2014b). Examples of the key findings include:

- Only 51.2% of Australian NPOs responding to the survey were familiar with the concept of KM prior to completing the survey.
- Over 90% respondents rated ‘knowledge about clients/community and their needs’ and ‘expert knowledge and experience of staff and/or volunteers’ as “very important” or “absolutely essential,” while ‘document knowledge about processes and procedure’ rate highly by over 80% of NPOs.
- Australian NPOs used different tools and strategies to gather or capture knowledge, including websites, print documents, productivity software, among others
- The majority of NPOs in Australia used social media including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Pinterest and LinkedIn; Facebook emerged as one of the most popular tools, which is similar to Canadian NPOs (Rathi et al., 2014a).
- NPOs use social media for number of reasons (e.g., sharing of “success stories”, events etc.).

Other findings will also be included in the poster.

5. Conclusion

The current findings suggest that KM is not a widely known concept in NPOs, particularly in Australia. Social media is a much better understood concept and such tools are used by a large number of NPOs in Australia. By providing insight into this emerging paradigm of NPOs, KM and Social Media, this research makes a valuable contribution to future research work in this domain. Also, this work will be useful to Canadian NPOs who can learn different approaches and strategies relevant to KM and social media use from their counterparts in Australia. This poster addresses the conference sub-text theme of “Organizing People, Data, Information and Knowledge as Memory and Participation” directly as this poster’s primary focus is on KM and Social media that can document organizational memory and provide strategies for managing related repositories.

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