



Georgia Tech Scheller College of Business

Ray C. Anderson Center for Sustainable Business

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS INSIGHTS

RESEARCH BRIEFS FOR PRACTITIONERS

SOCIAL PERFORMANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS SERIES

How Can a DIY Paradigm Help Nonprofits Maximize Impact?

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» Research Questions Addressed

Under what circumstances is it most beneficial for nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to use do-it-yourself (DIY) as a design strategy? What drives an NPO to partially complete services and products? How should an NPO optimize its offerings after adopting the DIY paradigm?

» Primary Findings

The paper sheds light on participatory design in action. Beneficiaries can be empowered to be executors of their own dreams by being given partially complete templates. DIY designs can unlock value for recipients and society by drawing out the unique preferences of individual beneficiaries.

The DIY strategy can be especially helpful where demand exceeds supply. Traditionally, organizations that struggle to meet demand use rationing—either serving a limited number of people, providing a fraction of what is needed to more people, or delaying provision until supply can catch up. This paper argues for an alternative approach: NPOs could provide unfinished products or services that recipients can complete according to their own preferences and abilities. The result is that an NPO can serve more individuals with more appropriate solutions.

» Keywords

- DIY
- Incomplete products
- Nonprofit operations
- Product design

» Relevant Sectors

- Architecture and building construction
- Nonprofit organizations (NPOs)
- Operations management
- Services operations

» Firms/Industries Appearing in Research

- Daya
- Elemental
- Nonprofit service providers





Villa Verde in Constitución, Chile, by Elemental

» Topic Overview

NPOs face a common challenge: serving beneficiaries with very different needs while operating under budget constraints. Some NPOs have adopted an innovative solution: providing partially complete products or services to beneficiaries. Simply put, a partially complete offering is an invitation to the NPO's recipients to finish the DIY product or service in line with their needs. The paper: 1) describes what drives an NPO's choice of partial completion as a design strategy, and 2) explores how an NPO can optimize its offerings by adopting the DIY paradigm.

» Highlights

Partial completion is not a compromise solution to budget limitations. Rather, it can be an optimal strategy for NPOs under a wide range of **circumstances** (even in the presence of ample resources).

Partial provision is particularly valuable when beneficiary needs are highly diverse.

DIY can actually be a fairer approach to allocating scarce resources than providing complete products to a subset of people.

The findings are relevant not only for NPOs but for any organization.

» Implications for Sustainable Business

NPOs with a mission to serve individuals facing extraordinary challenges often operate under severe financial (and other) constraints. When the need is high and circumstances are urgent (think: individuals fleeing from abusive relationships or cities devastated by natural disasters), an NPO's ability to optimize its products and services can have a critical impact on the wellbeing of individuals and the resilience of communities. The paper provides insights on how social value can be created by providing clients with products and services that are intentionally unfinished.

» Link to Article

Zhang, C., Atasu, A., & Ramachandran, K. Partial completion as a nonprofit strategy. (2021). Forthcoming at *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management*. <https://pubsonline.informs.org/doi/10.1287/msom.2021.1031>

» Related Links

Atasu, A., Ramachandran, K., & Zhang, C. (2021, August). How NGOs can help more people with DIY solutions. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/08/how-ngos-can-help-more-people-with-diy-solutions>

Non-profits with varied client needs can do more by doing less. (2021, November 10). Duke Fuqua Insights. <https://www.fuqua.duke.edu/duke-fuqua-insights/can-zhang-non-profits-varied-client-needs-can-do-more-doing-less>

Ramachandran, K. (2021, November 19). *Applying a DIY paradigm in any organization*. *Scheller Lunchtime Live*. [Webinar]. <https://youtu.be/189ENJPioUs>

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