

Strategy in Nonprofit Organisations: A Systematic Literature Review and Agenda for Future Research

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Abstract This study aims to present the progress and development in research carried out on the strategies put into practice at nonprofit organisations. To this end, we carried out a systematic review of the literature making recourse to the *ISI Web of Knowledge* platform for the data collection process that resulted in the 62 scientific articles (published between 1981 and 2016) analysed in this review. This analysis correspondingly sets out a description of the studies, a timeframe for their respective dates of publication and details about the research methods applied. The results convey how, over the last four decades, there have been a range of studies of nonprofit organisation strategy-related themes with the greatest incidence clustered around the terms strategic management, strategic planning, strategic typology (Miles and Snow 1978), innovation strategies and the strategic management of human resources. We found that the 1980s focused on the theoretical foundations of strategy in nonprofit organisations and the 1990s showed a theoretical consolidation of strategy in nonprofit organisations. The first decade of the twenty-first century shows a focus on improving the management of nonprofit organisations, and in the past decade there has been a diversification in the strategies adopted by these organisations. We furthermore set out

suggestions for future research alongside the theoretical and practical implications of this study.

Keywords Strategy · Nonprofit organisations · Systematic literature review

Introduction

The growth in the number of nonprofit organisations and the rising level of competition for financial resource donations are trends throughout the tertiary sector (Frumkin and Kim 2001; Weerawardena and Mort 2012; Botetzagias and Koutiva 2014). Furthermore, this sector has also seen surging demand for social services coupled with a downturn in government support (Choi 2016). Choi (2016) also finds that this rise in the number of nonprofit organisations results in their need for innovations in order to remain in the market.

According to Maier et al. (2016), nonprofit organisations have experienced notable changes from the 1980s onwards, rendering them more similar to profit-making firms. Furthermore, within this same context, according to Ogliastrì et al. (2016), many organisations have continued to focus on their traditional missions of collecting resources through donation drives in order to ensure continuity for their respective activities. However, these authors also reinforce how this same scenario of greater competition and resource scarcity means nonprofit organisations need to adapt and change their approaches to management so as to continue providing services to society.

Thus, nonprofit organisations also encounter the need to undertake changes driven by the evolving demands of their own donors that themselves now attribute greater importance to organisations that adopt transparent and

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professional management practices (Lundåsen 2014). In turn, McHatton et al. (2011) emphasise the importance of strategic planning at nonprofit organisations in order to best achieve their missions and develop future plans with the objective of meeting the needs of their interested parties and stakeholders.

Therefore, in addition to the demands for nonprofit organisations to innovate, demonstrate professionalism in their management and to deploy strategic management tools, Hume and Leonard (2014) stress that these same management practices need to be subject to re-evaluation prior to their application to the contexts prevailing in nonprofit organisations.

Hence, within this context, a whole range of theoretical and empirical research has taken place since 1981 within the framework of conceptualising, analysing, understanding and identifying how strategy gets approached in nonprofit organisations. For example, in his study, Nielsen (1981) proposes a piggybacking strategy within the scope of aiding nonprofit organisations to develop new businesses able to offset the deficits registered in the core organisational mission, that is, their participating in revenue generating activities.

Furthermore, the literature review returned two existing systematic reviews on this theme (Stone and Crittenden 1993; Stone et al. 1999). The first review, by Stone and Crittenden (1993), aimed at understanding the application of strategy in nonprofit organisations over the period between 1977 and 1992. In the second review, Stone et al. (1999) carried out a review of articles published between 1977 and 1999 even while focusing exclusively on empirical studies. Both of these reviews selected only those journals they deemed the most relevant in the field of strategy.

Therefore, the literature thus far does not feature any review that seeks to grasp more generally the state-of-the-art in research on nonprofit organisational strategies, including all sectors, both theoretical and empirical studies and without any prior selection of journals. Another shortcoming the literature identifies is the sheer time lag since the last systematic review, carried out in 1999 and hence failing to take into account some 17 years (1999–2016) of research in this area.

In addition to the aforementioned gaps, another relevant question subject here to analysis arises out of the relationship between the contextual geopolitical scenario prevailing and nonprofit organisations and the respective research this issue has attracted in recent years. In increasingly competitive environments (Barman 2002), in which the fiscal incentives for corporate donations have progressively shrunk, in addition to the tighter legal framework for such transactions (Froelich 1999), there are inherent difficulties to mobilising resources that are

themselves increasingly scarce (Khieng 2014). This compounds the need for these organisations to return ever better efficiency and effectiveness levels as regards their management of resources (Tucker and Parker 2013), reflected in the greater pressures levied by financial and public entities over the performances turned in by nonprofit organisations (LeRoux and Wright 2010).

These issues tend to require these nonprofit organisations to engage in new strategies, practices and innovative methods, sourced from the profit-making sector, as a means of attracting and managing resources. And, finally, a large number of nonprofit organisations register difficulties in adapting to this new context (Ogliastri et al. 2016) even while such adaptation processes may be necessary to maintaining their own continuity and survival. Hence, analysing the strategies deployed by nonprofit organisations in order to cope with the changes ongoing over recent decades holds particular relevance.

Correspondingly, in order to overcome the shortcomings identified in the literature, this research project seeks to present the trends and evolution of research carried out upon strategy in nonprofit organisations transversally to all sectors of activity and including both the theoretical and empirical studies in all journals indexed in the *ISI Web of Knowledge*. In order to attain this objective, it correspondingly carried out: (1) the characterisation of the literature on strategy in nonprofit organisations, both by year and by the quantity of the articles published and by the number of citations, and their respective methodologies; (2) identifying, analysing and discussing the themes studied in each decade, from the 1980s onwards; (3) systematising the four decades; (4) identifying and presenting potential future lines of research on strategies tailored to this particular organisational type.

Thus, it was tried to analyse the evolution of the theme based on four decades (1980 to 2016) allowing to be noticed that there were changes regarding the research insights on the nonprofit organisations. It was verified that the 1980s is mainly focused on the theoretical foundations of strategy in nonprofit organisations, since it was the period in which nonprofit organisations began to introduce management tools and models from for-profit sector and already in the 1990s a theoretical consolidation of the strategy in nonprofit organisations is established. At the first decade of the twenty-first century, there was a focus on the improvement in the management of nonprofit organisations, and the second decade of the current century a diversification in the strategies adopted by organisations nonprofit is a tendency in the emergent literature.

The current article correspondingly adopts the following structure; following this introduction comes the literature review on strategy in nonprofit organisations. Next, we describe and detail the methodology applied in the

research, for example, the selection and exclusion of articles from the database searched and the methods deployed in analysing the articles thus identified. Finally, and after the results of the systematic review, we set out conclusions, suggestions for future research and the theoretical and practical implications, and the limitations, of this study.

Strategy in Nonprofit Organisations

Initially, research on strategy and strategic management cast its focus on profit-making organisations while attempting to verify whether its management models and tools applied to such companies. Over the years, various researchers defined the strategic term specifically within the context of profit-making organisations (Barnard 1938; Ansoff 1965, 1979; Michel 1976; Mintzberg 1979; Porter 1981; Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martin 2012).

Hence, Ackoff (1974, p. 523), for example, stressed how “an organisation’s strategy consists of those decisions that are made by its highest level of management and that affect the organisation as a whole”. In turn, Mintzberg (1979, p. 25) proffered another definition; “strategy may be viewed as a mediating force between the organisation and its environment.

Furthermore, Bracker (1980, p. 221) defined strategic management as constituting “...the direct organisational application of the concepts of business strategy that have been developed in the academic realm. That is, strategic management entails the analysis of internal and external environments of a firm to maximise the utilisation of resources in relation to objectives”.

Nevertheless, in recent years, the context in which nonprofit organisations operate, with rising competition, the reduction in donations and growing demands from their various stakeholders (Barman 2002; Tucker and Parker 2013; Khieng 2014), may have influenced them in also defining and implementing new strategies for planning and managing their organisations. This research project correspondingly seeks to verify how this process has evolved over the course of recent decades.

According to Sharp and Brock (2011), nonprofit organisations are not focused on generating profits but rather deploy their values structured around a social mission. Akingbola (2006) corroborates how the definitions of these organisation do not extend to profits, and with Weeraward and Mort (2012) reinforcing how these organisations identify their social missions as their key focal points (Weerawardena and Mort 2012).

We would also highlight that, according to Salamon and Anheier (1997), there are many terms and structures for nonprofit organisations, ranging from tertiary sector and non-governmental organisations, foundations, philanthropic

and volunteer organisations, with the actual terminology varying from context to context. This study deploys the term nonprofit organisations. Additionally, Salamon and Anheier (1997) maintain that these nonprofit organisations undertake activities primarily interconnected with the education and healthcare sectors, with animal and environmental protection as well as issues surrounding religion, housing, agriculture, recreation and culture.

Hence, according to Akingbola (2013), the sector strategy for nonprofit organisations constitutes an integrated set of actions and processes that undergo development and implementation. Furthermore, according to the author, this enables nonprofit organisations to apply their resources while taking into consideration their respective interested parties and stakeholders, adaptations to changes in the market and correspondingly becoming more competitive and how the strategies adopted by such organisations interrelate with the complexity of their various social missions.

According to Wortman (1981), the 1980s saw strategy become one of the main themes approached by nonprofit organisations and further heightened by how they were then beginning to come to terms with strategic management. Within this perspective, diverse theoretical studies (Wortman 1981; Hatten 1982; Gruber and Mohr 1982; Ferrell et al. 1986; Bryson 1988) took place with the aim of understanding how the strategic management and strategic planning deployed in the for-profit sector might be applied, both theoretically and in practice, to nonprofit organisations. Therefore, in recent decades, a number of researchers have undertaken studies of the strategies actually deployed in nonprofit organisations (Wortman 1981; Ferrell et al. 1986; Steiner et al. 1994; Kong 2008; Bryson 2010; Tucker et al. 2013; Guillet et al. 2016).

The interest displayed in this theme, whether among the research community or the nonprofit organisation sector, may have stemmed from several factors including the growth experienced in the latter over recent years, which in turn boost the competition for the attraction of resources that have also proven increasingly limited (Khieng 2014). Furthermore, as LeRoux and Wright (2010) describe, in recent years, nonprofit organisations have encountered rising levels of pressure over ensuring more responsible and efficient levels of management, both from finance providing entities and society in more general terms.

Within this more competitive, dynamic and demanding environment, nonprofit organisations face increasing challenges just to stay in the market and have therefore deployed strategies that have in the majority undergone validation in the profit seeking private sector. This issue correspondingly reflects the challenges posed to both nonprofit organisations and to researchers within the scope of efforts to understand, analyse, verify and test how

strategies undergo replication, deployment and application by nonprofit organisations.

Systematic Review Methodology

According to Tranfield et al. (2003), a systematic review needs to implement a transparent and rigorous scientific process susceptible to replication by other researchers. Thus far, there have only been two systematic reviews on strategy at nonprofit organisations (Stone and Crittenden 1993; Stone et al. 1999).

In order to carry out this review, we applied secondary data sourced from the *ISI Web of Knowledge* database, a source already recommended and applied by other researchers for their systematic review studies (Liñán and Fayolle 2015a, b; Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah 2016).

Following this definition of the research foundations, the search terms were defined. Tranfield et al. (2003) state that the identification of these terms represents an important stage in the systematic review process. Hence, for this study, the first defined term was *strateg**. In turn, the second term dealt with the nonprofit organisation dimension and correspondingly contained a set of 11 terms (*Nonprofit; Non profit, Nonprofit, NGO, Non governmental, Non-governmental, Nongovernmental, Not-for-profit, NPO, Not for profit*), already identified and applied in an earlier systematic review study carried out by Maier et al. (2016).

Following the definition of the search terms as detailed above, we firstly carried out the search without any limitations or restrictions on publications with the first database search phase held on 15/10/2016. The criteria for the research including or excluding articles from the *ISI Web of Knowledge* database were as follows: inclusion: articles and reviews, all journals (on the researched areas);

exclusion: proceedings, book reviews, editorials and articles in languages other than English (adapted from Keränen et al. 2012).

Following the application of the keywords and the inclusion and exclusion criteria, we obtained a total of 258 articles as detailed in Table 1. This informs of how the term “*Nonprofit*” represents that most used in the literature on nonprofits as, when cross-referenced with *Strateg**, this combination returned the largest number of articles, 134 in total (see Table 1).

Subsequently, we applied the exclusion process to the 258 initially identified articles. In a first stage, this involved the removal of 56 articles due to their inclusion via repeated incidence due to the various search combinations applied (first and second terms). Following the exclusion of these repeated articles, there remained 202 articles and with each then subject to analysis by title and summary (in accordance with Albliwi et al. 2014), and resulting in the further exclusion of 128 articles as they were found not to specifically approach strategy in nonprofit organisations. Following this stage, the remaining 74 articles were fully analysed with this process leading to the exclusion of another twelve articles on the grounds that they did not specifically consider strategy in nonprofit organisations. Finally, there were thus a total of 62 articles for systematic review with this entire selection and exclusion process detailed in Fig. 1.

After completion of the database search process, the selection and exclusion of the articles, we individually and integrally analysed the 62 remaining articles before codifying them for data analysis. This latter process involved a first phase with the description of the studies by (1) a temporal framework according to the article publication date and the respective quantity of articles published, the number of citations, and the research methods applied; and

Table 1 *ISI Web Knowledge* research process

No.	Terms searched			Web of science
	First term searched for	and	Second term searched for	
1	Strateg*	and	Nonprofit	134
2	Strateg*	and	Non profit	27
3	Strateg*	and	Non-profit	26
4	Strateg*	and	NGO	25
5	Strateg*	and	Non Governmental	12
6	Strateg*	and	Non-Governmental	12
7	Strateg*	and	Not-for-profit	8
8	Strateg*	and	Nongovernmental	6
9	Strateg*	and	Third sector	5
10	Strateg*	and	NPO	3
11	Strateg*	and	Not for profit	0
	Total of articles			258

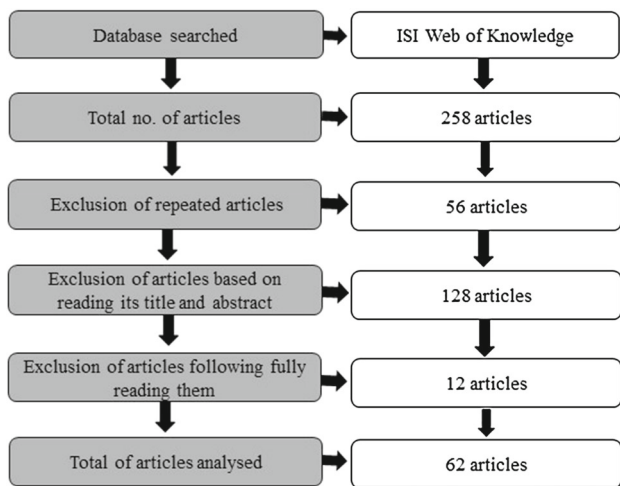


Fig. 1 Process of article selection and exclusion

(2) analysis of the articles published in each decade. We set out below the results and findings of this analysis.

Results of the Systematic Review

Description of the Studies

This section details the research studies undertaken on strategy in nonprofit organisations in terms of their time-frame, the quantity of publications and citations per year and their respective research methods. The findings (Fig. 2) display how studies on the strategies applied in nonprofit organisations date back to the 1980s but with the greatest concentration of articles published in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

The number of publication peaked in 2014 with six articles. Our study also incorporates the 2016 number of publications even while here emphasising that this research took place on 15/10/2016 and thus with the corresponding

Fig. 2 Number of publications and citations by year and by decade

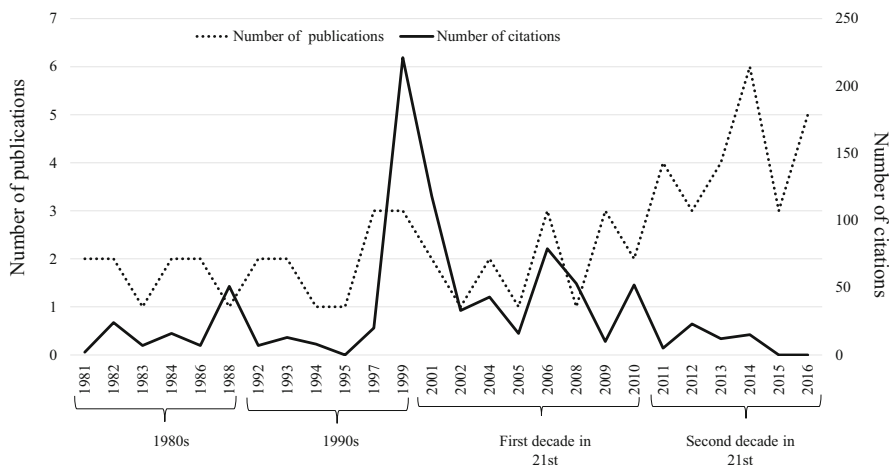


Table 2 Types of research

Type of research	Freq	Freq. rel (%)	Freq. accum (%)
Qualitative	26	42	42
Theoretical	18	29	71
Quantitative	12	19	90
Qualitative and quantitative	6	10	100
Total	62	100	

scope for new research to come out in the remaining months of 2016. We would also note that there has been a rising trend in the number of articles dating back to the 1980s.

The first decade of this century saw the largest number of citations, with 404 and the publication of 15 articles. Meanwhile, there were 10 articles that gained 107 citations in the 1980s before surging to 269 citations from the 12 articles published in the 1990s. Thus far, this decade has registered a total of 25 published articles and generating 55 citations. The articles published in 1999 were those reporting the largest number of citations, 221, while a single article by Froelich (1999) is the most cited, on 141 occasions. Hence, the 62 articles incorporated into this systematic review have already received 835 citations. Figure 2 displays a summary of the temporal scope, the quantity of articles published and the number of citations.

The articles analysed were then segmented according to their respective methodology: Quantitative Empirical Research; Qualitative; Qualitative and Quantitative; and Theoretical Research as set out in Table 2. It can therefore be reported that 29% of these articles were theoretical in nature with 71% adopting empirical approaches with 42% of the latter applying qualitative empirical techniques.

Table 2, in turn, reports how 29%, that is 18 of the articles analysed in this systematic review, take theoretical approaches (Wortman 1981; Hatten 1982; Gruber and Mohr 1982; Nutt 1984; Ferrell et al. 1986; Stone and

Table 3 Summary of 1980s published research articles

No.	Author(s)	Journal	No. citations	Country of research	Type of study	Sector of research	Theme
1	Nielsen (1981)	<i>Sloan management review</i>	2	USA	Qualitative	Diverse	Piggybacking strategies
2	Wortman (1981)	<i>Computers, Environment and Urban Systems</i>	0	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic management
3	Hatten (1982)	<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	24	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic management
4	Gruber and Mohr (1982)	<i>California Management Review</i>	0	USA	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic management
5	Carper and Litschert (1983)	<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	7	USA	Quantitative	Healthcare	Economic orientation
6	Nielsen (1984)	<i>Long range planning</i>	2	USA	Qualitative	Diverse	Piggybacking strategies
7	Nutt (1984)	<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	14	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic planning
8	Nielsen (1986)	<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	7	USA	Qualitative	Diverse	Piggybacking strategies
9	Ferrell, Madden and Legg (1986)	<i>Journal of health care marketing</i>	0	Unspecified	Theoretical	Healthcare	Strategic planning
10	Bryson (1988)	<i>Long range planning</i>	51	USA	Qualitative	Public v. Healthcare NGO	Strategic planning

Crittenden 1993; Goold 1997; Boyd et al. 1997; Froelich 1999; Mulhare 1999; Stone et al. 1999; Brown and Moore 2001; Kong 2008; Bryson 2010; Akingbola 2013; Omar et al. 2014; Newcomer and Brass 2015; Guillet et al. 2016).

We may also note that these theoretical studies tend to reflect epistemological positions based upon relativism and critical rationalism. For example, studies such as those by Mulhare (1999), Brown and Moore (2001) and Boyd et al. (1997) engage in reflections around nonprofit organisations that take into consideration the cultural dimensions and the prevailing political structures in which they deploy the already existing models and tools. In this way, we may understand how these authors adopt a theoretical trend more focused on relativism (including leading researchers such as Feyerabend 1975 and Kuhn 1970); hence, there may be no absolute truth or absolute validity. Hence, the very characteristics of the nonprofit sector make analysis of the context of these organisations relevant and especially prior to implementing any new management tool or model as processes of adaptation are very frequently necessary due to the tools originating in the for profit sector. Furthermore, in the social sciences field, the cultural and human factor tends to impact on this process as detailed by Mulhare (1999).

In relation to the adaptation process for models and tools, we also verify how various studies have cast their attention on just how nonprofit organisations apply and deploy the various models of strategic planning, strategic management, decision making, human resource strategic

management (Hatten 1982; Gruber and Mohr 1982; Nutt 1984; Akingbola 2013). In this case, we may report that the proposed models require testing and this tends to adopt the critical rationalism approach (as proposed, for example, by Popper 2005).

Analysis of the Studies by Decade

This section provides a description of the studies published in each decade and correspondingly portrays the evolution of this theme over time.

Analysis of the 1980s (1981–1990)—Theoretical Foundations of Strategy in Nonprofit Organisations

In the 1980s, research predominantly focused on clarifying, presenting and conceptualising how strategic management might best get implemented by nonprofit organisations (Table 3). In this timeframe, theoretical research incorporated 50% (five articles) of the studies undertaken with the remainder empirical (40% qualitative and 10% quantitative). It is also possible to highlight the predominance of studies approaching healthcare related nonprofit organisations (Carper and Litschert 1983; Bryson 1988). Furthermore, all of the studies published in this period featured cases of nonprofit organisations operating in the USA.

In this period, the studies on such organisations focused on strategic planning (Nutt 1984; Bryson 1988; Ferrell

et al. 1986; Tucker et al. 2013), strategic concepts, theories and management models for nonprofit organisations (Wortman 1981; Hatten 1982; Ferrell et al. 1986; Gruber and Mohr 1982; Madden and Legg 1986), economic orientation (Carper and Litschert 1983) and piggybacking strategies (Nielsen 1981, 1984, 1986).

In this period, researchers fundamentally sought to grasp how strategic management got applied in nonprofit organisations and how such tools might undergo adaptation and implementation in nonprofit sectors. Correspondingly, the three most cited studies in the 1980s sample (Hatten 1982; Nutt 1984; Bryson 1988) all carried out adaptations to models already in effect in profit-making sectors. The articles by Bryson (1988) and Nutt (1984) propose strategic planning models for implementation by nonprofit organisations and furthermore detailing the methods applicable and the requirements for attaining success in strategic planning. In turn, Hatten (1982) sets out a strategic management process for nonprofit organisations made up of a constant cycle and divided into three stages: firstly, defining the strategy; secondly, ensuring its validation before thirdly engaging in the re-evaluation of the strategy defined.

The articles were published in a number of journals with the *Strategic Management Journal* containing the single largest number of publications on this theme (three articles published). Richard P. Nielsen, professor at Boston College, USA, was among those with the most publications on strategy in this period with three articles published (Nielsen 1981, 1984, 1986). These publications detail the piggybacking strategy.

According to Nielsen (1984), “piggybacking” represents an investment in and/or the development of a new institution that may not have its mission interrelated with the original institution but with the goals of the new activities launched providing the means to at least partially subsidise the mission of the main activity. In his first study, Nielsen (1981) explains and highlights how nonprofit organisations should engage in an evaluation of the respective scope for acquiring or developing a business to help achieve their core organisational mission. In his other two publications, Nielsen (1984, 1986) presents examples of both profit and nonprofit organisations actually deploying this piggybacking strategy.

Analysis of the 1990s (1991–2000)—Theoretical Consolidation of the Strategy in Non-profit Organisations

Over the course of the 1990s, we may report (Table 4) a continued trend for theoretical studies accounting for 50% (six articles) of those published. The empirical studies making up the remainder divided equally into 25% (three

articles) of qualitative studies and 25% (three articles) of quantitative studies. There was also diversity in the range of journals publishing these articles while once again the healthcare sector stood to the fore in terms of the study area (Parry and Parry 1992; Judge and Zeithaml 1992). Furthermore, as in the 1980s, those research articles identifying the locations of the nonprofit organisations studied once again returned a majority of USA-based cases.

We also verify that there was diversity in the research community approaching this theme in this decade. They include Stone and Crittenden (1993) and Stone et al. (1999) who published theoretical studies featuring systematic reviews of the literature on strategy in nonprofit organisations. In the first systematic review, the authors Stone and Crittenden (1993) focus on utilisations of strategy by nonprofit organisations over the period between 1977 and 1992 and to this end grouped articles identified into five clusters (Formulation of strategy; Content of strategy—activities defined; Implementation of strategy; Performance and evaluation of strategic management; Governance of nonprofit organisations within the framework of strategic management).

The other systematic research project, carried out by Stone et al. (1999), provides a review of the publications made between 1977 and 1999 but with its sample limited to empirical studies. In order to organise, analyse and identify the strategic management processes in nonprofit organisations, they divided the studies into three broad categories: determinants, results and performance. This research has thus far received 61 citations. Both these systematic reviews (Stone and Crittenden 1993; Stone et al. 1999) selected and applied only those journals identified as the most relevant to the field of strategy.

Another theoretical study in this decade, by Froelich (1999), centres on strategy in nonprofit organisations and has attained the highest number of citations (141). This author thus analyses the effects of the strategies deployed for capturing resources by nonprofit organisations based upon resource dependence theory. These resources might come from three different sources: private contributions, government funding and commercial activities. The study findings emphasise how each revenue source incurs its own demands and that the diversification of income streams tends to result in greater challenges and complexities. Thus, nonprofit organisations need to evaluate the benefits and the potential difficulties for each adopted revenue source. This author concludes by stressing the lack of depth to the literature on this aspect. Furthermore, this study by Froelich (1999) serves to continue those by Nielsen (1981, 1984, 1986) that had already found in favour of strategies for the diversification of the revenue sources generated by nonprofit organisations, specifically piggybacking strategies.

Table 4 Summary of 1990s published research articles

No.	Author(s)	Journal	No. citations	Country of research	Type of study	Sector of research	Theme
1	Parry and Parry (1992)	<i>Health Care Management Review</i>	0	USA	Quantitative	Healthcare	Miles and Snow—strategies
2	Judge and Zeithaml (1992)	<i>Health Services Research</i>	7	USA	Quantitative	Healthcare	Strategic decision-making processes
3	Martinsons and Hosley (1993)	<i>Journal of Systems Management</i>	2	China	Qualitative	Unspecified	Strategic planning
4	Stone and Crittenden (1993)	<i>Nonprofit Management and Leadership</i>	11	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Systematic literature review
5	Steiner et al. (1994)	<i>Administration in social work</i>	8	Unspecified	Qualitative	Diverse	Strategic planning
6	Adeyemi-Bello (1995)	<i>Psychological reports</i>	0	USA	Quantitative	Religious	Strategies and performance evaluation
7	Menefee (1997)	<i>Administration in Social Work</i>	18	USA	Qualitative	Diverse	Strategic management—Trends and challenges
8	Goold (1997)	<i>Long Range Planning</i>	1	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic management
9	Boyd et al. (1997)	<i>Technical communication</i>	1	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic planning
10	Froelich (1999)	<i>Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly</i>	141	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Resource capturing strategies
11	Mulhare (1999)	<i>Human organization</i>	19	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic planning
12	Stone, Bigelow and Crittenden (1999)	<i>Administration and Society</i>	61	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Systematic literature review

Finally, there is an argument that the research on nonprofit organisations approaches a series of different thematic dimensions (strategic management, evaluation and performance strategies, and resource generating strategies) even while the majority turn their focus to strategic planning (Martinsons and Hosley 1993; Steiner et al. 1994; Boyd et al. 1997; Mulhare 1999).

As regards these strategic planning studies, Martinsons and Hosley (1993) explain how strategic planning got implemented by a hospital in Hong Kong, and evaluated as a successful case study. Steiner et al. (1994) additionally set out a description of the strategic planning process illustrated by three practical case studies that implemented strategic planning.

Boyd et al. (1997) present the gains stemming from designing a strategic planning process. Finally, Mulhare (1999) questions and explains the utilisation of planning from a more critical perspective, concluding how planning in nonprofit organisations may represent a means for demonstrating how the entity is taking a long-term approach even while poor strategic planning may impact on the credibility of nonprofits whenever not deployed in an appropriate fashion. This furthermore stresses the need for taking into consideration the organisational culture as a

very important dimension to this process of deciding on whether or not to make recourse to strategic planning.

Analysis of the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century (2001–2010)—Focus on Improving the Management of Nonprofit Organisations

In the first decade of this century (Table 5), there were a total of 15 articles published. Of these, 33% (five articles) were qualitative studies, 27% (four articles) quantitative studies, 20% (three articles) theoretical studies and with the remaining 20% (three articles) adopting a combined quantitative and qualitative methodology. The findings also portray how some 67% (ten articles) of the articles in this decade focused upon nonprofit organisations located in the USA of America.

There was again diversity in the researchers engaged in this field and with the journals accounting for the most publications being the *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, with three publications and the journals *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* and *Public Administration Review*, both with two articles each.

New trends and themes that emerged over this decade contrast with those of preceding years with research studies

Table 5 Summary of research articles published in the first decade of this century

No.	Author(s)	Journal	No. citations	Country of research	Type of study	Sector of research	Theme
1	Frumkin and Kim (2001)	<i>Public administration review</i>	63	USA	Quantitative	Diverse	Strategy positioning
2	Brown and Moore (2001)	<i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>	55	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Reporting accounts and strategic organisation
3	Barman (2002)	<i>Social Forces</i>	33	USA	Qualitative	Diverse	Differentiation strategies
4	Reeves and Ford (2004)	<i>Health care management review</i>	8	USA	Quantitative	Healthcare	Strategic management
5	Brown and Iverson (2004)	<i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>	35	USA	Quantitative and qualitative	Diverse	Miles and Snow—strategies
6	Fenwick (2005)	<i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	16	Australia	Qualitative case study	Social action	Strategic management of human resources
7	Kumar and Malegeant (2006)	<i>Technovation</i>	52	USA	Qualitative	Unspecified	Strategic alliances between firms and nonprofit organisations
8	Akingbola (2006)	<i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	21	Canada	Qualitative and quantitative	Diverse	Miles and Snow—strategies
9	Golensky and Mulder (2006)	<i>Administration in Social Work</i>	6	USA	Quantitative	Human services	Strategic management
10	Kong (2008)	<i>International Journal of Management Reviews</i>	53	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic management
11	Rumsey and White (2009)	<i>Public Relations Review</i>	7	USA	Qualitative	Unspecified	Strategic alliance between firms and nonprofit organisations
12	Harris et al. (2009)	<i>Public Administration and Development</i>	3	USA and UK	Qualitative	Humanitarian aid	Strategic planning
13	Boboc (2009)	<i>Metalurgia International</i>	0	Romania	Qualitative and quantitative	Diverse	Innovation strategies
14	LeRoux and Wright (2010)	<i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>	40	USA	Quantitative	Diverse	Strategic decision making—performance measurement.
15	Bryson (2010)	<i>Public Administration Review</i>	12	USA	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic planning

correspondingly now approaching strategic alliances between companies and firms and nonprofit organisations (Kumar and Malegeant 2006; Rumsey and White 2009), deploying innovation and differentiation strategies (Barman 2002; Boboc 2009), the strategic management of human resources (Fenwick 2005), strategic organisation and reporting accounts (Brown and Moore 2001), strategic positioning (Frumkin and Kim 2001), the strategic typology based on the 1978 study by Miles and Snow (Brown and Iverson 2004; Akingbola 2006) and strategic decision making and measuring performance (LeRoux and Wright 2010).

The question of strategic planning had already been subject to study in earlier decades by other researchers and with this new decade seeing studies published on this theme by Harris et al. (2009) and Bryson (2010). In the 1980s, Bryson (1988) had already put forward a strategic planning process for adoption by nonprofit organisations and called for new research on this facet in keeping with how such a tool remained only at an initial stage of development and implementation whether by the public or nonprofit organisations. Thus, in a study in this latter decade, Bryson (2010) set out an optimistic position as regards the importance of applying strategic planning by nonprofit organisations and emphasised how this tool was a

practice common to government entities and nonprofit organisations in the USA.

In turn, the theme of strategic management at nonprofit organisations was also subject to study in the preceding decades with continuity in this century coming with the article by Kong (2008) on the prospects for the applicability of strategic management through means of SWOT analysis, industrial organisation analysis, the resource and core competences-based perspectives, the knowledge-based vision, the Balanced Scorecard and intellectual capital approaches. In turn, Golensky and Mulder (2006) study strategic management through means of a comparative exploratory study with the objective of identifying the strategies adopted by the leaderships of nonprofit organisations driven by changes in their external environments and analysing their impacts.

In this decade, Brown published two articles with different co-authors. The first, Brown and Moore (2001), details the importance of reporting and accounting for the effective implementation of the strategies defined. In the second, Brown and Iverson (2004) categorise 132 nonprofit organisations in accordance with the typology set out by Miles and Snow in 1978.

Analysis of the Second Decade of the Twenty-First Century (2011–2016)—Diversification of Adopted Strategies by Nonprofit Organisations

As detailed in Table 6, even while the second decade of this century is far from over (with this study spanning only studies published in the last 6 years and with 2016 not having yet closed), we may report that the largest number of articles published on strategy in nonprofit organisations dates to this decade with a total of 25 such publications thus far.

From 2011 onwards, there has been a predominance of qualitative studies with 56% (14 articles) applying this methodology, 16% quantitative (four articles), 16% theoretical (four articles) and with 12% (three articles) jointly applying quantitative and qualitative approaches. There is, however, a greater level of diversity in the geographic locations of the nonprofit organisations subject to study even while the USA continues to prevail in overall terms. In this period, the journals *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* and *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* all stood out for their focus on this field and with each publishing five articles.

The article authors also display a significant level of diversity with Tucker the only author with two publications and with different co-authors (Tucker and Parker 2013; Tucker et al. 2013). These two articles drew upon the same Australian research context. In the first study, Tucker and Parker (2013) deploy the qualitative methodology by

means of interviews with CEOs and senior executives at thirty-two Australian nonprofit organisations that sought to capture the ways in which control systems influence their strategic management processes (formulating and implementing strategies). According to these authors, the results identify how the relationship between strategy and control in nonprofit organisations tends to resemble those in place at for-profit companies and firms.

In the second study, Tucker et al. (2013) applied a quantitative method with the objective of exploring the relationship between control systems and strategic management processes (formulating and implementing strategies). The results of this research testify to how the relationships between control systems and management processes in nonprofit organisations are broadly in keeping with those in effect at profit-making entities.

Another finding for this period encapsulates the diversity in the themes subject to research while simultaneously rendering continuity to some of those studied in earlier decades, such as innovation strategies approached by Boboc (2009). In this decade, Weerawardena and Mort (2012) have sought to study innovation and differentiation strategies in nonprofit organisations within the social entrepreneurship perspectives with this article receiving the largest number of citations in this period. In turn, Choi (2016) studies 258 social service centres in South Korea and proposes that in such increasingly competitive markets, innovation becomes a necessary option for the survival of nonprofit organisations providing human services.

Akingbola (2013) sets out a strategic management model for human resources at nonprofit organisations within the scope of providing a model enabling managers to grasp the strategic management context for human resources across various levels of the organisation. Another study by Akingbola (2006), published over a decade ago, seeks to portray human resource management by nonprofit organisations based upon the typology advanced by Miles and Snow (1978).

This study stresses the lack of alignment between human resources and strategy given that the model proposed in 2013 might have provided a feasible solution to this lack of alignment despite this not getting referenced in this study. The other authors making analytical approaches to the strategic management of human resources were Merlot and De Cieri (2012) and Walk et al. (2014).

The authors Lorgnier and Su (2014) and Omar et al. (2014), respectively, study the deployment of cooperation and nonprofit–business collaborations. In turn, Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. (2014), Powers (2016), Hume and Leonard (2014) approach the application of communications strategies. The study by Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. (2014) deals with adopting Facebook as a communications strategy with the research results identifying how recourse to

Table 6 Summary of research articles published in the second decade of this century

No.	Author(s)	Journal	No. Citations	Country of research	Type of study	Sector of research	Theme
1	Sharp and Brock (2011)	<i>Administration & Society</i>	0	Israel	Qualitative	Social welfare	Strategic planning
2	McHatton et al. (2011)	<i>Nonprofit Management and Leadership</i>	2	USA and Canada	Qualitative	Educational	Strategic planning
3	Harris (2011)	<i>Administration and Society</i>	3	USA and UK	Qualitative	Humanitarian aid	Strategic planning and organisational identity
4	Yanyan (2011)	<i>Asian Journal of Social Science</i>	0	China and Japan	Qualitative case study	Diverse	Definition of growth strategies
5	Sosin (2012)	<i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>	5	USA	Qualitative	Unspecified	Strategic choice theory
6	Weerawardena and Mort (2012)	<i>Journal of Public Policy and Marketing</i>	13	Australia	Qualitative	Unspecified	Innovation and differentiation strategies
7	Merlot and De Cieri (2012)	<i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	3	Diverse	Quantitative and qualitative	Diverse	Strategic management of human resources
8	Tucker and Parker (2013)	<i>Nonprofit Management and Leadership</i>	2	Australia	Qualitative	Diverse	Management control systems and strategic management processes
9	Swanson (2013)	<i>Nonprofit Management and Leadership</i>	3	Canada	Qualitative and quantitative	Educational	Stakeholder and social capital
10	Tucker et al. (2013)	<i>Nonprofit Management and Leadership</i>	2	Australia	Quantitative	Diverse	Management control systems and strategic management processes
11	Akingbola (2013)	<i>Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations</i>	5	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Strategic management of human resources
12	Walk et al. (2014)	<i>Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations</i>	2	Germany	Qualitative	Human services	Strategic management of human resources
13	Lorgnier and Su (2014)	<i>European Sport Management Quarterly</i>	2	France	Qualitative	Unspecified	Coopetition strategies
14	Hume and Leonard (2014)	<i>Public Relations Review</i>	2	South Africa	Qualitative	Diverse	Communications strategies—internal communications
15	Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. (2014)	<i>Public Relations Review</i>	1	Colombia	Quantitative	Diverse	Communication strategy—social media
16	Zhu et al. (2014)	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	0	Canada	Quantitative	Diverse	Strategic decision-making processes and organisational performance
17	Omar et al. (2014)	<i>VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations</i>	8	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Nonprofit–Business Collaboration
18	Rhine (2015)	<i>The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society</i>	0	USA	Qualitative	Arts	Strategic planning
19	Jeong and Kearns (2015)	<i>VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations</i>	0	South Korea	Qualitative and quantitative	Diverse	Stakeholders and reporting accounts

Table 6 continued

No.	Author(s)	Journal	No. Citations	Country of research	Type of study	Sector of research	Theme
20	Newcomer and Brass (2015)	<i>American Journal of Evaluation</i>	0	Unspecified	Theoretical	Unspecified	Performance measurement
21	Powers (2016)	<i>The International Journal of Press/Politics</i>	0	Diverse	Qualitative	Diverse	Communications strategies—advertising
22	Ogliastri et al. (2016)	<i>VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations</i>	0	Ibero-American countries	Qualitative	Diverse	Strategy and organisational structure
23	Bucher et al. (2016)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	0	Diverse	Qualitative case study	Business development	Market orientation
24	Choi (2016)	<i>Nonprofit Management and Leadership</i>	0	South Korea	Quantitative	Human services	Internal marketing, customer orientation and innovation strategy
25	Guillet et al. (2016)	<i>Biodiversity and Conservation</i>	0	France	Theoretical	Surrounding environment	Strategic management

social media by nonprofit organisations still remains scarce. However, Powers (2016) does strive to grasp the motives why nonprofit organisations still make regular and frequent usage of publicity and advertising rather than turning to new technological means.

Finally, Hume and Leonard (2014) study the strategic management of internal communications within the context of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) with the results demonstrating how these organisations fail to manage their internal communications strategically and that implementing such procedures might aid INGOs in overcoming various difficulties while the sustained non-utilisation tends to impact on their organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

As regards citations, the results show that articles published in this decade have not obtained high numbers of citations but justifiable by the date of publication still being only very recent.

Systematising the Four Decades of Research

Figure 3 puts forward a systematic overview of the evolution in the themes studied over the last four decades, from the 1980s onwards.

Thus, it is possible to report how in the 1980s (1981–1990), the research strove to understand just how strategic management might be introduced into nonprofit organisations (Wortman 1981; Hatten 1982; Gruber and Mohr 1982). Other articles, meanwhile, approached the utilisation of strategic planning (Nutt 1984; Ferrell et al. 1986; Bryson 1988) and the piggybacking strategies adopted (Nielsen 1981, 1984, 1986) in this sector with these constituting the other two most commonly studied themes and each accounting for three publications.

Economic orientations (Carper and Litschert 1983) were also clearly on the research agenda in this period.

Furthermore, in the 1990s (1991–2000), some of these facets came in for continued study, such as strategic planning (Martinsons and Hosley 1993; Steiner et al. 1994; Boyd et al. 1997; Mulhare 1999) that was again prominent in terms of the number of articles published. The strategic decision-making process (Judge and Zeithaml 1992) and the application of strategic management (Goold 1997; Menefee 1997) both came in for further research. However, there were also new trends emerging in this period, such as analysing the strategic typology (Miles and Snow 1978) of the strategic management profiles adopted (Parry and Parry 1992), the evaluation and performance strategies (Adeyemi-Bello 1995), the deployment of strategies for resource capturing strategies (Froelich 1999), and two systematic literature reviews (Stone and Crittenden 1993; Stone et al. 1999).

These two decades saw research that prioritised the development of strategies, originally sourced from the private, profit-making sector, to sustain nonprofit organisations. The utilisation of these strategies may stem from the nonprofit organisations having grasped their surrounding contexts (such as the rise in number of nonprofit organisations, the reduction in funding, beyond the success these tools had provided the for-profit sector). In other words, these two decades had a more theoretical focus, on the demand of the use of strategy by the nonprofit organisations. On the other hand, research carried out in the first and second decades had mainly focused on the management of nonprofit organisations and also on the diversification of strategies in nonprofit organisations. For instance, the first decade of this century (2001–2010) brought only two further articles on issues relating to strategic planning

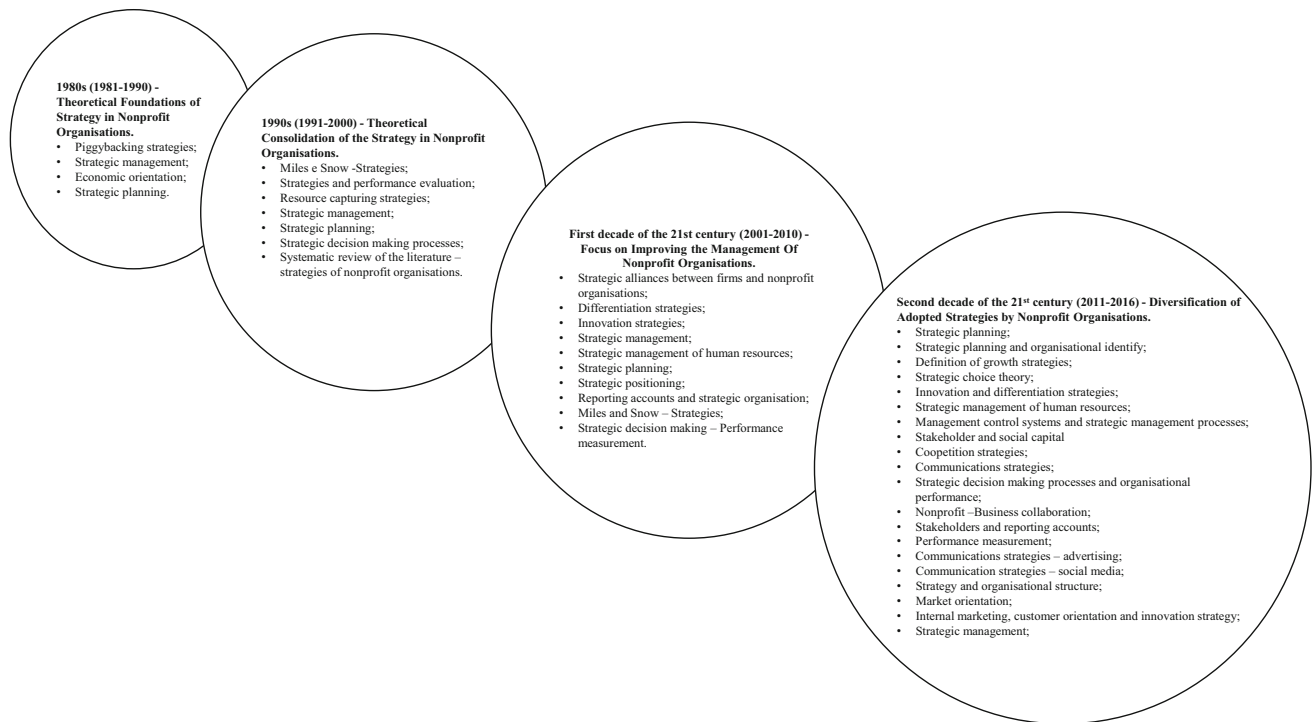


Fig. 3 Evolution in the studies on strategy in nonprofit organisations

(Harris et al. 2009; Bryson 2010) despite this area having been one of the most studied over the previous two decades (1980s–1990s). However, in keeping with these decades, strategic decision making (Leroux and Wright 2010) and strategic management (Reeves and Ford 2004; Kong 2008; Golensky and Mulder 2006) were also again subject to research and investigation. There were also new themes emerging on the research agenda, such as deploying the typology proposed by Miles and Snow in 1978 (Brown and Iverson 2004; Akingbola 2006), the importance of both innovation (Boboc 2009) and differentiation strategies (Barman 2002).

The first decade of the twenty-first century also saw emphasis placed on new research facets such as the relevance of the strategic positioning of nonprofit organisations (Frumkin and Kim 2001), understanding their human resource management strategies (Fenwick 2005), the relevance of reporting accounts and strategic organisation (Brown and Moore 2001) and finally also approaching the engagement of nonprofit organisations in strategic alliances with their profit-making peers (Kumar and Malegeant 2006; Rumsey and White 2009).

The current decade (2011–2016) registered the largest number of articles on this theme with a total of 25 published. In line with the three preceding decades, strategic planning (Sharp and Brock 2011; McHatton et al. 2011; Harris 2011; Rhine 2015), strategic management (Guillet

et al. 2016), decision-making processes and organisational performance (Zhu et al. 2014) and the performance measurement (Newcomer and Brass 2015) were all once again recipients of research attention.

Again in keeping with the earlier decade (2001–2010), researchers also returned to themes such as strategic management of human resource (Merlot and De Cieri 2012; Akingbola 2013; Walk et al. 2014), innovation and differentiation strategies (Weerawardena and Mort 2012), marketing orientation (Bucher et al. 2016) and strategies for internal marketing, customer orientation and innovation strategy (Choi 2016).

We may also grasp how new themes have emerged over the course of the current decade (2011–2016), such as the utilisation of communications strategies (Hume and Leonard 2014; Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2014; Powers 2016), the importance of taking stakeholders into consideration (Swanson 2013; Jeong and Kearns 2015), strategic choice theory (Sosin 2012), nonprofit–business collaboration (Omar et al. 2014), and coopetition strategies (Lorgnier and Su 2014). In addition to these themes, this also identifies how research studies have striven to understand how strategy and organisational structure may influence nonprofit organisations (Ogliastri et al. 2016), the importance of management control systems and strategic management processes (Tucker and Parker 2013; Tucker et al. 2013) and finally the study by Yanyan (2011) that emphasises the

relevance of defining growth strategies for nonprofit organisations.

We thus encounter how the majority of the studies from these two decades analyse the strategies actually deployed by nonprofit organisations and that tend to interconnect with growth, efficiency and effectiveness as well as their respective organisational performance standards. As regards the studies dealing with the growth incentives for nonprofit organisations, we may highlight those studies focusing on setting up strategic alliances (Kumar and Malegeant 2006; Rumsey and White 2009), on innovation, internal marketing and market orientation strategies (Boboc 2009; Yanyan 2011; Weerawardena and Mort 2012; Bucher et al. 2016; Choi 2016), communications strategies (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2014; Powers 2016) as well as cooperation and co-competition strategies (Omar et al. 2014; Lorgnier and Su 2014), intellectual capital and SWOT analyses (Kong 2008).

Furthermore, many studies turn to evaluating the importance of analysing the efficiency and effectiveness of nonprofit organisations as regards their financing, attraction of resources and reporting and accounting (Frumkin and Kim 2001; Brown and Moore 2001), whether they attain efficiency and effectiveness through means of their adopted strategies (Golensky and Mulder 2006), and as well as on the importance of internal communications (Hume and Leonard 2014) human resources and leadership in ensuring the effectiveness of the strategy adopted (Akingbola 2006; Rhine 2015).

Various studies also base their analysis on studying the performance levels of nonprofit organisations in terms of their decision-making processes, performance evaluations, their application of the balanced scorecard method and the organisational structures adopted (LeRoux and Wright 2010; Zhu et al. 2014; Newcomer and Brass 2015; Ogliastri et al. 2016).

Based upon the systematic portrayal of the trends and developments in the research on strategy in nonprofit organisations, we may testify to the progress in this field of research, where there was both growth in the number of articles published alongside the diversification of the themes under study. This also tends to conclude that for nonprofit organisations to remain in the market, they are increasingly adopting and applying strategies that were hitherto designed and formulated specifically for profit-making organisations.

The Way Forward

This study sought to present the trends and evolution of research on strategy in nonprofit organisations. We may correspondingly state that such research has been ongoing

since the 1980s. Nevertheless, and despite the almost four decades of research into this theme, the field remains under construction and a significant proportion of the studies adopt a theoretical and exploratory approach (qualitative research).

The trend in terms of the quantity of articles getting published over these four decades broadly reflects a rising level of academic interest in studying the strategies of nonprofit organisations as well as among these same organisations in applying and adopting strategic management practices.

Hence, and despite the aforementioned four decade track record of research, the studies thus far undertaken have mostly been theoretical (29%) and qualitative (42%) in their approach, which serves to convey how strategy in nonprofit organisations still remains a relatively recent theme and with scope for new research. Thus, future research might focus on quantitative approaches as only 19% of the studies identified took this option. Furthermore, of the 42% of qualitative studies, many dealt with case studies applying to specific contexts (Fenwick 2005; Yanyan 2011; Bucher et al. 2016).

Another suggestion for future research, within the scope of qualitative methodologies, stems from the work by Ogliastri et al. (2016) that focuses on the context of Ibero-American countries but did propose that their study be replicated in other contexts in addition to replication through a quantitative study.

Some authors, such as Choi (2016), seek to test for a relationship between the internal marketing, customer orientation and innovation strategies while furthermore stressing that the existing scales and those applied were originally from the for-profit sector, which thus requires new studies purpose developing and defining scales for nonprofit organisations. Many of the scales already applied in studies of the latter do indeed get sourced from the profit-making private sector, which again reinforces the need for future empirical research able to validate these scales for this specific nonprofit sector.

Additionally, Hume and Leonard (2014) detail how the management practices developed for the for-profit sector need re-evaluating prior to their implementation within the contexts specific to nonprofit organisations. This also generates scope and opportunities for future research, for example analysing how the organisational mission influence the strategies of nonprofit organisations. Comparative studies might also serve to verify the perceived differences and difficulties in applying specific strategies in for-profit and nonprofit contexts.

Of the 62 articles analysed, 13 approach strategic planning in nonprofit organisations, but no article includes any attempt to grasp the factors for success, the difficulties and benefits obtained following the implementation of

strategic planning in these organisations and clearly also representing another potential target for future research. Another suggestion would be dealing with the internal and external communications processes and their importance to the development of strategy and the difficulties identified within this scope. Furthermore, research might also attempt to verify the strategies formally defined and adopted by nonprofit organisations and whether or not these are perceived in the same way by the respective participant stakeholders.

A broader reaching understanding and deeper reflection on the utilisation of strategy in this sector still remains necessary to verify, and for example, whether the strategic management models are appropriate to the nonprofit sector. Another issue revolves around whether there is potential conflict between interested parties and stakeholders as regards the deployment of these new management models and tools in this sector. This might also analyse the perceptions of donors as regards the professional practices in the sector, for example, as regards the deployment of tools and models sourced from the for-profit sector. The influence of the cultural factor in the implementation and adoption of new management models and tools also requires ascertaining. In order to carry out such research, we would recommend the application of qualitative methodologies, such as participant observation or ethnographic studies in order to verify these themes in detail.

Finally, another suggestion for future research encapsulates bibliometric analysis of this theme or a systematic review of the field with recourse to meta-analysis. This might also extend to applying ANOVA in order to identify any possible differences in the four decades researched.

As regards the limitations of this study, the first refers to its utilisation of only one database, the *ISI Web of Knowledge*, for collecting the research sample even while this is generally deemed the leading database source. Hence, future research may make recourse to and cross-reference other databases. The second stems from the selection of not only the keywords, as there are potentially others that were not included in the search made here but also in terms of the filters applied, which stipulate only articles and reviews, published in English. Thus, theses, books, dissertation, minutes to conferences and other scientific events fell beyond the scope of this review.

As a theoretical contribution, this project sought to portray the advances in research on strategy in nonprofit organisations and whether these extend to offsetting the shortcomings identified in the literature. Furthermore, there had been no overall systematic review of the literature on the state-of-the-art in research on strategy in nonprofit organisations for the last 17 years with the most recent systematic reviews carried out by Stone and Crittenden (1993) and Stone et al. (1999). A further theoretical

contribution emerges from the suggestions made for future research most susceptible to returning advances to our understanding of the role of strategy in nonprofit organisations.

In terms of practical implications, the results of this systematic review may aid managers at nonprofit organisations through raising their awareness as to the research trends in strategy in their sector ongoing for the last four decades. Such may assist these managers to verify just what practices the nonprofit organisations studied have been implementing in this scenario in order to differentiate and maintain their positions in increasingly competitive markets featuring sliding levels of private and government donations compounded by rises in the numbers of nonprofit organisations in operation.

This research may also supply nonprofit organisations and their respective managers with information about how their peer entities are applying and developing their strategic management of innovation, the options over market orientations, over the importance of stakeholders in the process of strategic management and communication processes, and the relevance of strategically managing human resources. It would also be relevant to evaluate the ways in which significant proportions of nonprofit organisations are adopting strategic alliances and cooperation processes and that might hold importance to both the continuity and the growth of this sector.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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