CPAR Chinese Public Administration Review

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Special Issue on "Blockchains and Public Administration"

Chinese Public Administration Review

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Overview

The field of public administration has only recently begun to consider blockchain applications for public and nonprofit organizations. Blockchains are ledger technologies that offer unprecedented openness, transparency, and immutability to record and share information (De Filippi and Wright 2018), through cryptographically sealing series of ledger updates in blocks, and typically, distributing this ledger across many computers. The first widespread application of blockchain technology was Bitcoin, the first truly peer-to-peer e-currency (Nakamoto 2008). The initial studies of blockchain highlighted its disruptive potential to redefine profit-maximizing organizations, as distributed ledgers enable contracting without reliance on governments or firms (Berg, Davidson, and Potts 2019). Since then, a robust complementary research agenda has focused on the governance of blockchains.

The first generation of blockchain governance studies considered the ways in which blockchains are governed, including governance both international to blockchains (relations among miners, developers, and programmers), as well as the polycentric features of blockchains (De Filippi, Mannan, and Reijers 2020). From this view, blockchains are nested, complex enterprises that confront governance dilemmas much like any large, complex organization (Alston et al. 2022). A distinct emergent focus in blockchain governance studies instead considers governance by blockchains (separate from the governance systems within which blockchains are situated), including how blockchains can enable self-governance by private and nonprofit organizations and enable greater autonomy for commons-based peer production communities (Rozas et al. 2021). Considerations of use of blockchains by public and nonprofit governments is an emergent area of inquiry.

Aim

The unique governance features of blockchain are not limited to for-profit organizations in the private sector, such that realm of public administration scholarship could also benefit from consideration of this innovative technology. This special issue considers the deployment of blockchains for public sector application.

Topics

The following topics represent some of the themes of interest for the special issue:

- How do blockchain technologies enable governments and nonprofits to better respond to crises and emergencies? The recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia has been accompanied by substantial use of blockchains by nonprofits, including to transmit large levels of donations. The coronavirus pandemic also raised the potential role for blockchains for managing public health crises in terms of contact tracing and recordation of sensitive health data. Thus, analysis of how blockchains address classic dilemmas of governments and nonprofits in responding to crises, including coordination crisis response, are especially timely.
- How have nonprofits responded to new opportunities presented by cryptogiving? Nonprofits are increasingly willing to accept cryptocurrencies. At the same time, such acceptance has varied, as have the benefits from adoption. Key questions include understanding why some nonprofits pivoted to crypto, perceptions of nonprofit leaders on cryptocurrency, and the consequences of cryptocurrency for nonprofit performance.
- To what extent do blockchain deployments reduce corruption and improve efficiency of public procurement processes? The hollowing out of the state has led to increasing attention to contracting out services. The necessity of public procurement has resulted in substantial concern with corruption. This topic surrounds the experience of public organizations in adopting blockchains for public procurement, the experience and consequences of such adoption, and stance of political elites and public officials about the success of such deployments.
- What has been the experience of public organizations adopting blockchains to improve record-keeping, including identification of citizens, recording of property, and vital records? Blockchains are a novel ledger. Governments have increasingly deployed blockchain pilot programs for traditional record-keeping functions, though their efficacy and scalability is far from clear. This topic explores whether blockchains are indeed a superior technological solution for public record-keeping, and if so, in what areas. As more public sector actors consider using the technology, a clearer track record of the successes and failures of its application in public sector contexts in particular is warranted.
- How can blockchain technologies be deployed by indigenous governments to ensure sovereignty? One of the ongoing challenges with indigenous peoples in various contexts is reliance on national governments for basic administrative functions, including provision of currencies. This topic explores how blockchains can unlock the potential for indigenous people to self-govern, including through adoption of indigenous cryptocurrencies, use of blockchains to administer transfers from national to indigenous governments, and the use of blockchains for public administration by indigenous governments to facilitate transparency and restrain corruption.
- How do blockchains address challenges posed by increasing data and knowledge available to governments and nonprofits? Knowledge is subject to challenges with governance much like any valuable resource (Madison, Frischmann, and Strandburg 2010). Accordingly, an emergent question is whether blockchains can address challenges of knowledge governance.

Authors are encouraged to consider the classic dilemmas confronting government that blockchains can address; challenges with deployment of blockchains; and issues related to deployment of blockchains.

Deadline, submission, and review process

We are inviting abstracts (max 250 words) for this CPAR special issue. Selected abstracts will be invited for submission of a full article, which will then undergo CPAR's peer review process. Authors will have an opportunity to present papers at a virtual workshop on "Blockchains and Public Administration," hosted by the Center for Governance and Markets at the University of Pittsburgh.

The submission date for the abstract is Aug 31st, 2022, and for the full paper is December 31st, 2022.

Abstracts and any inquiries should be sent to the guest editors:

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