

Requirements: Need to define blog to a) reduce limitation to one technology; while b) being more specific for the purpose of clarifying exactly what is being studied.

a) Reducing limitation to one technology

Discussion

For the first requirement, my research findings will be more useful theoretically and practically if they are not tied to one technology configuration or software implementation. Social media, participatory media, collaborative media, and Web 2.0 tools may be among the descriptors that would be more inclusive than “blog” but share common elements.

Other researchers have overcome similar problems. Tomsic & Suthers (2006) appeared to be addressing possible technology constraint because they used the following terms within their paper to describe their system to support (and study) the introduction of new software used for booking arrestees in the Honolulu police department:

- Online discussion tool
- Web-based discussion tool
- Computer mediated collaboration
- Asynchronous discussion tool
- Computer supported social network

All of the terms were used essentially interchangeably. It’s a reasonable inference that they (properly) wished to isolate their findings from a specific technological implementation. Also their system had the characteristic of being “public in a persistent medium.” Public in their application meant public among police officers. Blogs would appear to fit the within the technology or “tools” described and they too are public in a persistent medium.

In contrast, Schmidt (2007) in proposing an analytic framework for blogs, used this definition:

“Weblogs, or “blogs,” are frequently updated websites where content (text, pictures, sound files, etc.) is posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order. Readers often have the option to comment on any individual posting, which is identified by a unique URL.”

Some degree of public visibility is implied. Schmidt argues blogs can be analyzed by three structural dimensions of rules, relations, and code that are constantly (re)produced in social action. As a result, “communities of blogging practices” emerge—that is, groups of people who share certain routines and expectations about the use of blogs as a tool for information, identity, and relationship management (Schmidt, 2007). The Jackson, et al. (2007) paper about Mega Corp supports Schmidt’s assertion of blogs as tools for information, identity and relationship management although he seems to have overlooked it while citing the HICSS 2007 paper below.

The Efimova & Grudin (2007) paper on blogging in Microsoft decided to let the author or host decide what constitutes a blog. They also provided a useful distinction between corporate blogging and employee blogging at Microsoft saying:

“Some people define a blog as writing designed for a wide public audience. We use the term more inclusively—if an author considers it a blog that suffices—and consider here any blog that touches on worklife [reference omitted]. We use the term ‘employee weblog’ instead of ‘corporate blogging’ which suggests action that is authorized, acknowledged, or in a formal way associated with an organization” (Efimova & Grudin, 2007).

The distinction in type of blog is useful, but I would say that employee blogging is usually authorized or acknowledged, or tolerated – if known. The important distinction is more whether or not an employee blog represents the official voice of the organization. Good or bad, the product of employee blogs belongs to, or is associated with, the organization. It is also important to allow the definition of blogging to be left to the eye of the beholder because blogs vary in their implementations mixing varying degrees of freedom to comment, linking, searching, being more wiki-like than blog-like, etc.

In their book *Uses of Blogs* collection of articles, Bruns & Jacobs observe that blogging is so broad a term that it is of limited value:

“Beyond the basic definition of “blogging” as the reverse chronological posting of individually authored entries that include the capacity to provide hypertext links and often allow comment-based responses from readers, then, the term “blog” now has little meaning unless a descriptive qualifier can be attached. In the future it is likely that we will come to speak primarily not of blogging per se, but of diary blogging, corporate blogging, community blogging, research blogging, and many other specific sub-genres that are variations on the overall blogging theme.

...

“Yet it is the specific implementation of a blog that determines its value: its operational structures and response mechanisms, as well as the style of writing and method of recording ideas, commentary, and institutionally relevant information, all influence the significance, reputation and success of a blog. . . . The use of blogs in generating competitive advantage, and their application as knowledge management tools, is crucial to understanding the relevance of blogs for a range of professional organizations as well as community groups (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006, 2-3).”

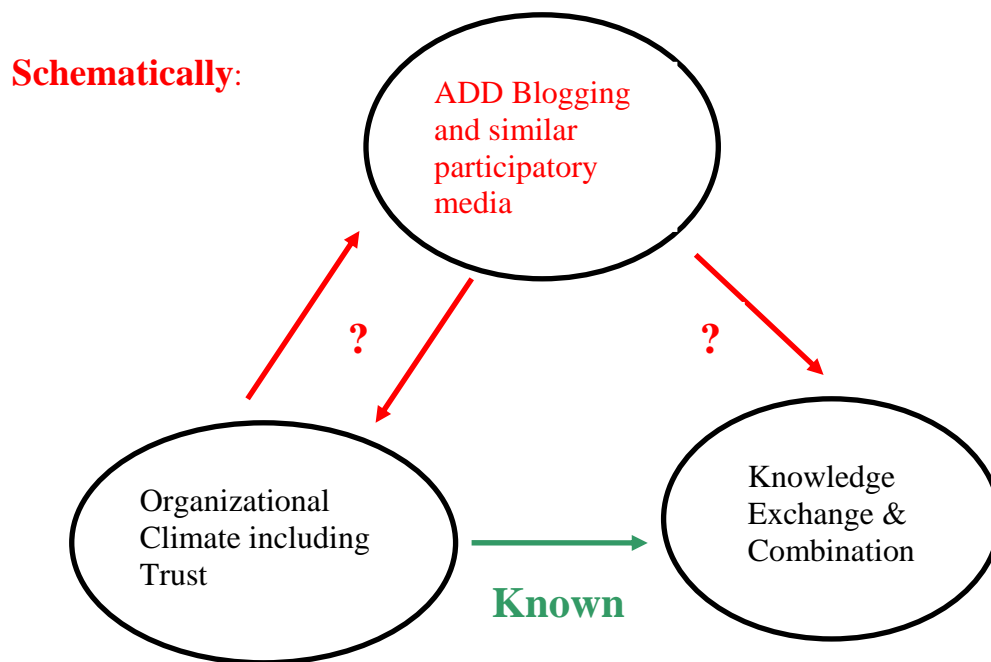
My hypothesis is that the social value of blogs, inclusively defined perhaps as a social, participatory, networking medium, is significant in organizations regardless of any knowledge enhancement. My questionnaire does try to get at social dimensions with a few items.

Action

Therefore a more general but sufficiently focused title for my research is:

“Intra-organization participatory media, organizational climate and knowledge sharing”

(Cute subtitles may possibly be allowed back in, in proportion to the strength of the findings.) Each of the concepts in the title has several dimensions to be included in the model as noted in the proposal. The revised title does not talk about causality but I do reaffirm the requirement to test the hypotheses implied by the schematic below:



b) Being more specific for the purpose of clarifying exactly what is being studied.

Discussion

The schematic above reflects a focus on research questions 2 and 3 and the specific hypotheses derived from them as well as the model-building:

H1.1 and H1.2 on network benefits

H2.1 through H2.4 on organizational climate

H3.1 and H3.2, the reciprocal hypotheses about trust.

Action

The question then arises, “What constitutes blogging?” in the model above? The unit of analysis is the employee who will have a *blogging index* designed to capture the frequency and intensity of blogging and use of other participatory online media. That index will be based self-reported

Experiences – reading, posting, hosting

Practices – frequency and time spent with the media, and

Attitudes about blogging and perceived utility for informational and social purposes.

The survey probes for participatory social media at work beyond blogs. Among the questions asked is what other collaborative media do you use at work beyond, or instead of blogs? Such usage will be included in the index. The blogging index will be rounded out with some data about personal, non-job-related blogging, and a firm blogging environment variable from the policy survey discussed below.

Is it a Blog, or Something Else?

D. Smith 10/5/07

Clarification-2

The use of a social capital perspective leads me to a broader set of questions than Collins & Smith's (2006), but their questionnaire is already long. Never-the-less, I have worked in a few questions inspired by social capital theory and the findings at Mega Corp (Jackson et al., 2007) while shortening the (online) survey by generally taking out non-Collins & Smith items. See it (or take it) at:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=tnkURYgVA033PieZX0D2dw_3d_3d

The policy survey (research question 1) discussed in the proposal will be down graded but basic data gathering continues to be necessary to locate firms for the organizational climate study and keeping in contact with policy options and employee blogging developments. Policies will be requested for more detailed study at a later date. Similarly, the research question 4 on modes of communication and discourse must be severely limited.

In terms of any kind of survey, detailing the output helps assure that the right questions are asked. Therefore a revised, shorter policy interview script and proposed reporting tables has been drafted. (File name: Policy Survey Questions&tab-06Oct07.doc) There are probes for collaborative tools other than blogs.

References

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