Dissertation Research Proposal

In Blogs We Trust:
Their Nature and Nurture in Organizations
Organizational Climate, Trust, and Intra-firm Blogging

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Abstract
This is a dissertation proposal to (1) gather data on blogging practices and policies inside firms; and (2) investigate by structural equation modeling how blogging adds to models of organizational climates that promote (a) knowledge sharing and exchange, and (b) trust in peers and management. The research integrates theories of social capital, trust, organizational climate, and knowledge sharing and exchange to test claims of blogging adding value to firms.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Augmenting business activity that has been accelerated by globalization-enabling communication technology, new social information technologies provide social support for intellectual collaboration. In particular, blogs and wikis are easy-to-use tools for structuring both knowledge and relationships. They interact with the organizational climates of the firms involved and the personalities of their employees. They are promoted as ways to nurture social behavior conducive of increased productivity and job satisfaction.

Blogs have spread in cyberspace as a generally positive innovation. Individuals and groups share their thoughts, musings, pictures, new ideas, and more. In the early years of the 21st century business publications wrote as if blogs were the biggest development after the Internet itself. Businesses better start paying attention to blogs, according to a Business Week’s cover story (BusinessWeek, 2005). The theme was that customers are blogging about your firm and your competitors so you neglect blogs at your own peril. Other business publications give similar advice, saying in effect, blogging is more than a fad. Blogs serve journalism, politics, and social groups actively, but in roles different than those inside firms.

The essential features of both blog and wiki posting systems are ease of use and linking – building social networks. Users do not need to know html. The blog is a reverse chronological posting system. Each new posting goes on the front of the blog pushing the previous content down. Previous content cannot be changed except by the owner. Links recommended by the host to other sites are usually in sidebars, as well as in the text.

In contrast, wikis encourage commentary, editing, and structuring of previous entries up to and including deletion. Software facilitates rollback by the owner as required in the case of inappropriate content or deletion. Thus the wiki may be more appropriate for building documentation or organizing new knowledge. The archetype is Wikipedia.\(^1\)

Evolving commercial software products blur the distinctions between blogs, wiki’s and other online communities by combining features. Basic systems are free services on the Internet. Share-ware, open source software is also available. Moderately-priced hosting services provide

\(^1\) www.wikipedia.org
more polished presentations, control and freedom from ads. Many systems provide for Really Simple Syndication (RSS) or ATOM feeds thus eliminating the need to periodically check a blog to keep up to date. Companies such as Technorati and Google provide indexing and searching of the millions of blogs. The blogs and wikis are touted as alternatives to floods of email.

Blogs and wikis are ‘exploding’ facilities on the Internet for both personal and corporate use in posting and sharing information (Dearstyne, 2005). A Pew Internet and American Life Project survey in mid 2006 projected that 8% of internet users, or about 12 million American adults, keep a blog and that 39 percent of internet users, or about 57 million American adults, read blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Counting social networking sites such as MySpace, would include millions more. Although started in the 20th Century, only in the 21st Century have blogs been recognized as important innovations, frequently discussed in newspapers, business magazines, and professional journals. In May of 2006, Jackson and her colleagues (2007) found over 1000 articles about blogs and wikis in popular media. They are supplements to traditional news media uncovering facts and stories overlooked (Bruns, 2005; Dearstyne, 2005). Blood (2004) considered blogs as arguably a new medium, or more generally “participatory media.” It is plausible to go further than Blood and claim that the medium – the sharing, collaboration, and risk-taking – is the message in McLuhan fashion. The essential elements are overwhelmingly social, facilitated by technical innovation.

Herring, et al. (2005) disagreed that blogs are a fundamentally new or revolutionary form of communication. They describe blogs as a “bridging genre” between static HTML pages and asynchronous computer-mediated communications as represented by newsgroups.

Blogs appear to build both the socio-cultural and knowledge management (KM) resources of organizations. (Knowledge-focused blogs are also called k-logs.) Both culture and some knowledge are hard to duplicate and thus are drivers of competitive advantage. Being both useful and easy to use, they help transform work into play.

In this research I focus on the use of blogs and k-logs, while asking about wikis, for organizational purposes. Moreover, companies that encourage blogging often (to what extent is an empirical question) encourage personal postings too. Estimating the extent of participation in both internal and customer-facing blogs is a survey goal of this research. Already some firms apparently believe that blogs are easy to use and benefit the organization. Are there predictors or important consequences of such a belief? Contributing to a blog in a business setting has both
cognitive and social functions. In the cognitive domain, the blog is a means of structuring information, making connections, and preventing cognitive overload. Contributing to a blog is an act of sharing and trusting which are social functions. Previous research concerning other collaboration technologies suggests that trust is an essential factor in use (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999).

Dearstyne (2005) distinguished five classes of blogs. They are

1. Individual personal news and views. These are journals often to share views, experiences, photos, etc. with family, friends and associates.
2. News, commentary and journalism. Blogs are considered by many as legitimate news media.
3. Advertising, promotion, customer service and customer feedback. Tapping into customer views is a source of ideas and a way of building loyalty.
4. Business and professional insight. Dearstyne (2005) claimed these are the most influential business blogs, some being run by CEOs.
5. Internal information sharing and knowledge management (KM). Blogs are easily implemented on intranets most often inside the firewall. Variants may permit selective external access to key partners.

A more general classification according to Herring, et al. (2005) would be to follow a scheme attributed to Krishnamurthy that classified blogs into categories created by quadrants on dimensions of individual to community, and personal to topical. Quadrant I was labeled online diaries (personal, individual); quadrant II was support group (personal, community); quadrant III was enhanced column – also called filter – (individual, topical); and quadrant IV was collaborative content creation, e.g. meta filter (community, topical).

Proponents say that blogs can help organizations change and adapt. Many believe that the social dimension of blogging is the most important contribution. As one business consultant (admitted self-serving, but widely quoted) stated:

“. . . [T]he intelligence of the group is an emergent property of the social network that arises through group communication and collaboration. We all know that people’s abilities and contributions are uneven: but in self-organizing societies, the members judge each other’s contributions, and as a result, those who are judged to be better contributors build a reputation. In many social tools, this reputation is made tangible: in the Slashdot (http://slashdot.org) tech forum, for example it is called “karma.” I like to call it “swarmth” – a measure of social network value based on the collective judgment of your peers.
“Social tools are the most recent advance in communication and collaboration technologies. But unlike earlier solutions like e-mail, IM, and groupware, this generation of software is intentionally shifting how we interact, not just as a side effect of managing content, or structuring contexts for interaction. These tools are designed from the start to guide human behavior into new paths and patterns, to counter prevailing ways of interaction. I call these social tools: software intended to shape culture.” (Boyd, 2003)

Groups and teams are well-studied in the social science literature because of their importance in work and because they are easily assembled in the lab. The purposes and compositions of groups vary widely. Despite the huge volume of studies, groups and meetings continue to be a subject of study due to the time and resources all enterprises invest in them. Group participation is, after all, the fundamental human activity, the pace and character of which has been accelerated and altered by the Internet. Ad hoc teams, often coordinated only remotely via communication systems and media, are critical to many modern, adaptive organizations (Jarvenpaa, Shaw, & Staples, 2004).

What is it about blogging that should interest us as social scientists? These days groups increasingly gather more for the construction and sharing of knowledge rather than for the efficient production of physical goods. Social processes facilitate the building of intellectual capital to be used for competitive advantage. The study of these social processes goes on in many research streams.

In terms of knowledge management, the firm can build its intellectual resources if members trust the company enough, i.e. feel secure enough in their positions, to explicitly contribute knowledge, or on the other hand, to admit to desires and needs to fill in gaps in knowledge. In the social realm, self-disclosure about oneself such as family and hobbies, often builds useful familiarity and approachability. Companies can create effective expressions of desirable values such as openness to suggestions by allowing blogging using company resources, be they time and/or the information technology, to support blogging.

With all the attention to and alleged potential of blogs in business for social and knowledge management purposes, the proposed research raises compound research questions: What are organizations actually doing with blogs, and why, as both social and knowledge management tools? How do blogs contribute to building trust in organizations?
**Research Objectives:**

The proposed research will have two main objectives: First to collect *descriptive* data on the extent of corporate blogging in a random sample of publicly-traded firms. The second, is to test *explanatory* claims for beneficial social purposes, particularly trust-building blogs in organizations. Compared to publicly-accessible blogs, relatively little has been published about internal corporate blogs, either sponsored, or condoned. As a phenomenon being rapidly tested and adopted, there is an opportunity to gather basic facts about blogging, and test theories of communication, trust, and organizational climate.

**Descriptive Objective**

This objective is to document organizations’ blogging policies and how they relate to stated goals and objectives. I will assess the processes and configurations that produce or are perceived to produce positive results. Furthermore, I will gather data on whether firms attach special importance to blogs because of the need for virtual teams, collaboration with remote partners, network organizations, and other modes of operation driven by the Internet and globalization. Systematic data will be collected in a stratified random sample of publicly-traded firms on

- the forms (i.e., blog, k-log or wiki or combination)
- organizational purposes (e.g. specific task, evaluation and social forums)
- values concerning contribution
- allowed contributors (internal, external customers and/or partners, both)
- formal and informal policies, both pro and contra blogging
- perceived value
- future plans

I will assess perceptions of changes in the character of debate and discourse within the organization attributed to, or coincident with, blog activity. For example, can changes in communication patterns and sociality be documented? This part of the research will perform the scientific function of documenting “what is” in the world and classifying the findings in useful ways.
Although the use of blogs was widely reported in the business press, many organizations and firms had yet to adopt in 2004, according to Cayzer (2004). More recently at the end of 2006, an Edelman employee communication survey found that nearly one-third of “senior communicators” in a convenience sample of companies and clients reported that their organizations hosted, authored or supported a blog for internal communication (Edelman, 2006). The response rate was 14%, resulting in 111 completed surveys of which 75 came from Fortune 500 companies.

**Explanatory Objective**

The business role of trust in the use of blogs as information-sharing and communication tools has not been fully explored. There is a need to critically evaluate the highly-touted claims of claims of knowledge-related benefits and costs of these alleged powerful social, collaborative tools.

This second general objective is to assess if and how blogs, k-logs, and wikis are believed to contribute to, or are fostered by, an organizational climate encouraging sociality, knowledge sharing, and knowledge creation. I will examine the power (or lack thereof) of blogs & k-logs to build organizational climates, relationships, and connections.

A key component of the explanatory objective is to explore the specific role of blogs in building trust, trust in fellow employees in the immediate department, and the organization management. There may be opportunities to explore the virtuous cycle hypothesis about trust building more trust (Sutanto, Phang, Kuan, Kankanhalli, & Tan, 2005). The overall hypothesis is that the ease of use and the structure of blogs encourage social behaviors that facilitate collaboration and employee satisfaction in firms.

I suggest that in addition to thinking about classes and genres of blogs, the blog phenomenon within firms can be better understood from the perspective of building social and intellectual capital consistent with the theory of Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). That is because the blog provides structure with network ties, cognitive support, and most importantly, relational support.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

Several significant sources of theory are applicable to blogs. As a social phenomenon they can be analyzed on many levels, from the psychology of the individual blogger up to broad societal trends. This literature review starts with some important characteristics of blogs themselves. The discussion then shifts to organizational climate, an hypothesized reflexive enabler of blogging in organizations. Next, trust theory is reviewed in some detail because it is a significant part of organizational climate, theories of organizational communication, and models of employee commitment. Trust is a multi-dimensional concept and careful distinctions between levels of analysis must be made. Group theory is applicable because people generally work in groups rather than the firm at large. Blogs have potential in many aspects of group work. Examples include seeking assistance, group support, vetting ideas, and monitoring of developments in the firm and industry. Employees’ experiences of organizational climate at the group level have been well-studied in the social science literature. The discussion winds up with discourse and media theory, which shed some light on how blogs might change dialogues.

A. Blog Research

There are many newspaper and magazine articles about blogs and blogging. The academic literature is just catching up due to the traditional lags in journal publication. Despite the millions of blogs, Herring, et al. (2005) suggest that the blog is neither fundamentally new nor unique. They place the blog as a new genre in the “ecology of the Internet.” This genre shares features with and between both media-rich web pages and the text-oriented computer-mediated communication systems in terms of frequency of updating, multi-media capability, and symmetry of exchange. Blogs can also be classified on the dimensions of personal vs. topical and individual vs. community. ((Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2004), crediting Krishnamurthy.)

In their 2003 random sample of 203 blogs, Herring, et al. (2004) found that the personal journal type blog was the dominant type with over 70% of the sample. The filter type was second with 12.6%. The filter type is one which primarily links to and comments on other sites.
Table 2-1. Types of Blogs. Source: Herring, et al. (2004, 6)

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<tr>
<th>Blog Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Personal journal</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filter</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-log</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>199</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

Overall, Herring, et al. (2004, 2005) said that the popular impression of large-scale linking between blogs is unjustified. However they concede that ease of use and the interactive character of blogs, what they saw as an incremental change has the potential to reshape the “genre ecology of the Internet.”

Blogs external to the firm are important for customer involvement and public relations, but this research will focus mainly on internal blogs, both the social blogs, the knowledge-management blogs or k-logs (Herring, et al. 2004) and ones which mix the functions. Whether or not there is a strict separation of types of blogs behind or across corporate firewalls remains to be investigated by this research. There may be a high correlation between blogging at home and blogging at work.

While internal corporate blogs may or may not be more likely to be project-centered k-logs, there is a fundamental difference compared to typical public personal blogs. It is that contributors are likely to have had some history, or prospect of interaction with each other on a company project. Even though contributors may never have worked together, they may recognize that they might work together in the future.

Another application of blogs is as highly adaptable replacements for older, dedicated, and expensive group support systems (GSS). The present-day communication and computation contexts are quite different than when GSS’s were introduced. Data compression technologies, software, and cheap bandwidth generally, and over the Internet specifically, have made video conferencing widely available. The appropriate GSS model now would be to post information to a blog, vet the issues, then meet, whether virtual or face-to-face (FTF), to make decisions, and finally to use the blog to facilitate implementation. Another factor has been the growth of globally distributed work with human knowledge resources more important than physical ones.
Wright listed his ‘top eight ways’ blogs can be used internally as:

- “Project management communication
- Internal communication and marketing
- Idea generation and vetting
- Employee involvement and connection
- Team and project communication with the entire organization
- Internal team and project communication
- Administrative communication
- Dynamic team creation” (Wright, 2006)

I would add enjoyment of work to the list above. The central task of this research is to test the application of trust and organizational climate theories to practical lists such as Wright’s.

The favorable discussion of blogging above should not imply that the author is unaware of negative aspects of blogging. Criticism of employers by employees can be constructive or malicious. A recent article entitled “Blogging: The New Computer “Virus” for Employers” outlines a number of the problems and difficulties in dealing with hostile blogs by disgruntled employees and others (Brody & Wheelin, 2005). Flynn (2006) recently published a whole book primarily giving advice on avoiding legal trouble caused by blogs.

The proportions of business and social communication in blogs are significant issues. Social Intelligence Design (SID) (Azechi, 2005) would structure the interactions, perhaps assisted by software agents, to create affordances to promote both positive identities, knowledge sharing and knowledge creation.

In an significant recent study at “Mega” corporation Jackson, et al. (2007) found that those people interviewed or surveyed reported valuable informational, social and other benefits from blogging. Mega has 20,000 employees registered at the corporate blog site. However, of the 17% of employees that had blogs, only 3% were active. Heavy and medium users’ actual social and informational benefits exceeded their expectations. Informational, social and other benefits were reported as shown in the table below.
Types of Reported Benefits from Blogging

Informational
Getting/sharing information
Journaling
Problem solving
Getting/giving feedback

Social (continued)
Building community
Gaining company pulse
Gaining perspective
Developing reputation
Self expression
Building career

Social
Engaging in dialogue
Communicating
Collaborating
Networking

Other
Managing upwards
Working efficiently
Replacing technology

Table 2-2 Reported Benefits from Blogging. Adapted from: (Jackson et al., 2007, Table 1)

Social networking and ‘building community’ benefits were reported by all levels of users. Blogging also lead to contacts outside the system, e.g. by telephone, more so for heavy users. They found support for the “kindness of strangers” phenomenon reported in the classic article by Constant, Sproull and Kiesler (1996). In that study, more ties with organizationally lower-level people, or technical people contributed significantly to getting problems solved via broadcast email.

Keeping track of developments, the going’s-on, etc. of the firm via blogs were also noted by Jackson, et al. (2007). This view is consistent with the view of the organization as the result of sense making by employees via numerous enactment-selection-retention sequences (Weick, 1979).

In a recent study at Microsoft (Efimova & Grudin, 2007) was conducted by reviewing some blogs, policies, and by interviewing 38 bloggers about uses of blogs, and motivations for blogging. Microsoft has many blogs with and without company support, and with and without external visibility. The authors found three main purposes for “employee blogging” as contrasted with official “corporate blogging.” They were communication with others, showing a human side of the company, and documenting and organizing work. The authors also found that the blogs varied in the mix of personal and business content, that mix could change over time, and that digital technologies might change organizational forms.
B. Organizational Climate Theory

Organizational climate is employees’ perception of company policies and social environment (M. Patterson, Warr, & West, 2004). It is a reflection of how employees feel they are treated by the organization (Harris, 2002). Organizational culture is, in contrast, taken to be the high level, foundational values of the organization. Culture and climate will not match if, for example, one department does not faithfully translate the company culture into congruent everyday interaction. Measurements of climate tap into the values and processes as experienced by employees. Organizational culture, particularly a knowledge-centered culture, and organizational climate are often valuable resources for firms (e.g. Janz & Prasarnphanich, 2003). Studies discussed below are motivated by understanding the conditions that promote knowledge sharing as parts of strategies of knowledge management (KM).

Patterson, Warr et al. (2004) found eight statistically significant dimensions of company culture (out of 17 after controlling for job satisfaction) that predicted productivity in the following year, controlling for previous productivity, company size and industrial sector. The eight dimensions in British firms were supervisory support, concern for employee welfare, skill development, effort, innovation and flexibility, quality, performance feedback and formalization. Some components of climate thought to be important were not significant, for examples involvement and integration. Another significant finding was that job satisfaction was highly correlated with positive elements of organizational climate suggesting that employees make some overall, global summary assessment of the company values as they experience them in daily work. The study explicitly concerned economic productivity but noted that other research had studied climate as predictors of technological innovation, gain in market share, and effects on customers. Organizational climate is a big factor in the winners of “best companies to work for” surveys, but money is not (Harris, 2002).

As comprehensive and valid as the Patterson, West et al. (2005) climate survey was, it did not cover certain concepts directly related to blogging. Communication climate – defensive vs. supportive (Harris, 2002) – is an important element of climate only tangentially addressed by Patterson, West et al. (2005). Other concepts under studied by Patterson and colleagues (M. Patterson et al., 2004; M. G. Patterson et al., 2005) were trust and tolerance of risk. Organizational climate is related to the topic of the “spirit” of technology in relation to adaptive structuration theory in groups discussed below.
Another study looked at 363 members of 12 teams in medium to large Spanish firms. The teams with involved leaders or coordinators, rewards for sharing, training for teamwork, and social events were associated with higher levels of active empathy, lenience in judgment, mutual trust, courage to express opinions, and access to help. The constructs listed accounted for significant variance but the total variance accounted for was only 20% (Zárraga & Bonache, 2003).

In the U.S., Janz & Prasarnphanich (2003) examined 27 software development teams involving 231 IS professionals in 13 firms looking at organizational climate antecedents of knowledge creation and dissemination. Their model was based on theories of organizational learning, organizational climate, and job characteristics. They theorized that a construct called cooperative learning mediated between organizational climate variables and work satisfaction and work performance variables. See the research model below.

![Figure 2-1 Janz & Prasarnphanich Research Model](image)

Positive associations of climate variables were found for support of risk-taking, rewards for achievement, warmth, and general supportive environment. Organizational climate plus group autonomy were associated with a group learning concept that in turn was linked to positive evaluations by stakeholders (an independent measure) and work satisfaction.
In their study of information professionals Janz and Prasarnphanich found that a climate including risk (an element or mediator of trust), acceptance, reward, warmth, and support, coupled with autonomy (an expression of trust) was positively associated with work satisfaction and work performance through a mediating variable, cooperative leaning.

Cooperative learning had three factors, positive interdependence, promotive interaction, and group process. Positive interdependence implies that the group succeeds together and has an identity, or group cognition. Promotive interaction was defined as the group identified individual strengths and weaknesses while helping each other advance. Social skills and “social knowledge” were said to be created by “collective actions of the group.” Finally “group” process sought to measure self-analysis by the group’s ability to for the purpose of addressing weaknesses. The authors asserted that “. . . the flow of knowledge is based on trust in both the organization as a whole and the specific individuals with whom we interact.” (Janz & Prasarnphanich, 2003, 351). The results of their structural model fitting are shown below as Figure 2-2. Their hypotheses were supported.

![Figure 2-2 Janz & Prasarnphanich Climate, Learning, Outcomes Model (Janz & Prasarnphanich, 2003)]
Another recent, significant study concerns the role of organizational climate and intentions to share knowledge. In their study in Korea, Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee (2005) found that organizational climate conditions of fairness, affiliation, and innovativeness were positively associated with a subjective norm favoring knowledge sharing and intention to share knowledge, both implicit and explicit. Note the positive contribution of affiliation, a social identity construct. Their theoretical base was the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), a progenitor of the widely-employed technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). Other positive factors were a sense of self-worth and anticipated reciprocal relationships. Anticipated extrinsic rewards – to the surprise of the authors – were negatively, but not significantly, related to an attitude of knowledge sharing. Anticipated reciprocal relationships were also significant (Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005). The empirical results of their model are shown below as Figure 2-3.
Knowledge creation is an on-going process rather than something that is primarily event driven. Lee & Choi (2003) examined perceptions in Korean firms by surveying managers concerning knowledge creation processes. Those processes included socialization, externalization, combination and intermediation. Lee & Choi (2003) developed their research model with seven enablers: collaboration, trust, learning, centralization, formalization, T-shaped skills, and information technology support. The enabler concepts of knowledge creation – components of organizational climate – were found to be statistically significant in the aggregate but less so individually. They included collaboration, trust, learning, centralization, and IT support.

Organizational creativity was a key dependent variable incorporated into their model. Surveys collected from 58 firms (of 147 in the sample, and 426 of 1,425 individuals) were analyzed to test the model. Possible non-response bias was not carefully addressed. Their results confirmed the impact of trust on their knowledge creation process variables of socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization. See Figure 2-4 below.
Figure 2-4. Organizational Knowledge Management Enablers (Climate) and Organizational Performance. Extracted from Lee & Choi (2003, 209)

Many firms try to structure their organizational climates by their HR practices. For example Collins and Smith “... found that commitment-based HR practices were indirectly related to firm performance through their effects on organizational social climate and knowledge exchange and combination.” (Collins & Smith, 2006). Their analysis was by multiple regression and supported all constructs of the model below in Figure 2-5.
The values implied by commitment-based HR contributed significantly to a favorable social climate which in turn was linked to knowledge exchange and combination by employees. The particular strength of the Collins & Smith (2006) empirical research is that it tested, and found support for, the theory of social capital formulated by Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998). That theory proposed that social capital has structural, cognitive, and (especially) relational dimensions. Nahapiet & Ghoshal also asserted that effective organizations will use social capital to build intellectual capital. My research is essentially testing the idea that blogging can contribute to the formation of social and intellectual capital through trust, organizational climate, and knowledge sharing.

The above discussion supports the claim that organizational climate directly affects productivity and knowledge sharing. Firms like to be enjoyable places to work. However, their primary goals are normally to be profitable in the process. In this era of declining importance of manufacturing, intellectual capital’s importance is increasing. New ideas are the new products. Better delivery of services and happy customers are also essential. Blogging by its nature is a communication process suited to discussion of ideas and inviting participation. Blogging may help firms mobilize their people and their ideas. The study of how organizations take advantage of their intellectual resources is often called knowledge management (KM). KM also involves capturing the tacit knowledge of experts. In the next chapter, research hypotheses, I illustrate...
how blogging would fit into recent studies of organizational climate and KM or knowledge sharing. Organizational climate is defined in several ways as noted above. That cited research provided a number of plausible alternatives for measurement scales. Specific choices are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Obviously blogging is not a necessary or sufficient condition for effective knowledge management. Blogging is one of several communication tools available for helping organizations and teams communicate effectively. In the next chapter I propose to test the claim that blogs positively affect organizational climate, knowledge sharing, and trust. From the above review, the proposed research can reasonably predict that blogs contribute to a positive organizational climate. The degree to which that climate is a necessary or sufficient condition is a research question. Trust may be a necessary condition of a productive organizational climate and it is the subject of the next literature review section.
C. Trust Theory

Open virtually any popular business magazine, whether general or specific to C-level executives and you will find trust discussed. Trust is clearly important to dealings internally and externally to the firm. We read about trusting employees, building trust with departments or executives and suppliers. We must not forget customers. Everybody knows what trust is but when it comes to research, the investigator quickly discovers that there is a deep structure to trust.

Trust has many definitions. For example, Fukuyama (1995) considered trust, a form of social capital, to be more important than physical or financial capital and defined it as “... the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behavior based on commonly shared norms on the part of members of the community” (26). Mayer, Davis & Schoorman remind us that trust involves at least one of the parties accepting exposure to risk (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

The complexity and importance of the trust concept were illustrated by the following study which noted both the trustworthiness of others (potential trustees) and trustor attitudes and behaviors. Employing interviews in 20 organizations (13 for profit, 7 non-profit), Abrams, Cross, Lesser & Levin (2003), summarized their findings and advice on successful knowledge-sharing networks this way.

“From our interviews, we learned that those who are seen as trustworthy sources of knowledge tend to: (1) act with discretion; (2) be consistent between word and deed; (3) ensure frequent and rich communication; (4) engage in collaborative communication; and (5) ensure that decisions are fair and transparent. Under organizational factors, we identified two ways to promote interpersonal trust: (6) establish and ensure shared vision and language; and (7) hold people accountable for trust. Under relational factors, there is some overlap with the trustworthy behaviors mentioned above, but we also identified two new behaviors: (8) create personal connections; and (9) give away something of value. Finally, under individual factors, a person’s own judgment of his or her abilities (self efficacy) also matters, a trust-promoting behavior identified in our interviews which we characterize as (10) disclose your expertise and limitations.” (Abrams et al., 2003, 65-66) [footnotes omitted].

The close connection of trust and knowledge is illustrated by a relatively simple trust model in a telemedicine research project. Paul & McDaniel (2004) conceptualized and looked for four kinds of interpersonal trust namely, calculative, competence, relational, and integrated.
Trust is particularly important in medicine because of the risks to the patients and providers’ reputations.

Briefly, calculative or rational trust is trust based on ‘cost-benefit’ considerations, i.e. “Am I better off by collaborating?” Competence trust is the evaluation that the collaborator has the knowledge and experience to provide good advice. Relational trust, also called benevolent trust or normative trust, is the feeling that the parties want to help each other. Relational trust is based on personal goodwill. Finally, integrated trust is a general summation of the three previously-mentioned types of trust. See the model below.

### Interpersonal Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Interest</th>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Integrated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figure 2-6. Paul & McDaniel (2004) Model of Trust and Virtual Collaborative Relationship Adapted from (Paul & McDaniel, 2004 Fig. 1)**

Paul and McDaniel (2004) examined the association of interpersonal trust with virtual collaborative relationship (VCR) performance. Trust enabled collaboration as a means of complexity reduction, and virtual collaboration extended face-to-face collaborative relationships by substituting technology for collocation. Their study consisted of 74 interviews in 3 health centers concerning 10 specific projects and thus 20 relationships 10 each way. (That is remote practitioners’ perceptions of the health center experts were gathered with health center experts’ perceptions of the remote practitioners.)

Through qualitative analysis of interview data, and by a complicated\(^2\) facet analysis, Paul & McDaniel (2004) found that the impact on remote site health care delivery of VCRs was monotonically associated with each of the individual types of trust and integrated trust.

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\(^2\) They were forced to tease out explanatory classifications because of their small sample size.
Significantly, however, they discovered that without the competency trust, the overall trust was negative.

For future research Paul & McDaniel suggest, *inter alia*, determination of whether integrative trust is a new kind of trust or just a mixture of the other types of trust. Additionally, they recommended addressing how the different types of interpersonal trust interact and the temporal relationships between these types of trust.

In less life-critical settings employees often choose to seek advice from less competent but more likeable (and therefore trustworthy – more benevolent, less risky to self-esteem) colleagues (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005). They conducted surveys of social networks and interviews in a Silicon Valley firm, an IT multinational, a U.S. university and a Spanish office of a global luxury goods manufacturer. They pointed out that sometimes facts alone are not sufficient to accomplish a task. Brainstorming and follow-up with a competent jerk might be difficult. They wrote, “... [I]n order to learn, you often have to reveal your vulnerabilities, which may be difficult with the competent jerk – especially if you are afraid of how this might affect your reputation in his eyes or in the eyes of others to whom he may reveal your limitations” (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005). These issues concern one individual trusting in another, risking being vulnerable.

Both individual and organizational forces are at work with trust concepts. Trust is treated in the literature as an environmental (sociological perspective) variable as in organizational climate, as a cognition about a trustee (social psychological perspective), and as an individual personality variable (psychological perspective) (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). The many types of trust may not be comparable from one piece of research to the next. Although Mayer, et al. (1995) entitled their article “An integrative model of organizational trust,” and convincingly sorted out the three levels of analysis, they limited their applicability claim to dyadic relationships as for example between a junior employee and mentor. (The model has since been extended to teams as discussed below.) Particularly appealing about the Mayer and colleagues' model are the feedback loop and the perceived risk moderator shown in the figure below. It lacks the organizational climate construct hypothesized in this proposal.
Trust is a well-studied concept in social science. However many of the studies mix definitions and levels of analysis. Some have dubious reliability in my opinion – because of short scales, for example – but are published. (Mandelli (2002), for one, has some very interesting observations about trust but her short scale addressed trust only indirectly.) Early work has been replaced by much more careful research. Several types of trust have been distinguished. McKnight, et al. (2002) found 15 types of trust in their literature review in preparation to build new scales. In addition to trust in collaboration methods, there is a great deal of research interest in trust and e-commerce because of e-commerce’s expanding share of business transactions. In this study I concentrate on conceptualizations of trust more related to collaboration while taking advantage of refinements in the conceptualization and operationalization of trust fostered by e-commerce research.

McKnight & Chervany (2002) provided another influential, frequently-cited trust model bringing together the concepts of trust at different levels of analysis and built in large part on Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995). They explicitly extended the model for e-commerce but the
general principles apply. Below, as Figure 2-8, I suggest how blogging could fit in the McKnight & Chervany theoretical framework. McKnight & Chervany recommended that their model be tested with trust-related behaviors, i.e., go beyond the trusting intentions expressed in their experiment. Blogging could be the explicit trusting behavior.

**Figure 2-8. Blogging’s Hypothesized Fit into the McKnight & Chervany Trust Model. Adapted From McKnight & Chervany (2002, 42).**

A subsequent article, McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar (2002) presented the details of the validity of the concepts as found in an e-commerce experiment. At the individual level, disposition to trust included faith in humanity -- competence, benevolence, and integrity – as well as trusting stance and personal innovativeness.

At the institutional (sociological) level, the measures were related to the institutions of e-commerce and situational normality of benevolence, integrity and competence plus a general perception. For example, in the organization a question might be “I am comfortable relying on the company to meet its obligations.” There can also be structural assurances of safeguards.
Organizational Climate, Trust, and Intra-firm Blogging

Chapter 2: Literature Review


Trusting beliefs (social psychological effects) in the context, economic factors, and institutions contribute to trusting intentions that then may correlate with other behaviors. Social-psychological factors work at the team level, a feature of many modern organizations (Edmondson, 2004). Blogging policies whether written, or just part of the culture, are forms of structural or institution-based trust.

Trust involves the creation of interdependencies as well as vulnerabilities. In learning communities, Suthers (2005) asserted that their effectiveness is improved by deliberate exposure of weaknesses in order to move forward. He said that knowledge-building communities expand their boundaries by collectively, that is by social interaction, reflecting on the “limits of their understanding and choosing actions that address these limitations...” (Suthers, 2005). He called it “meaning-making.” This blogging research will indirectly elaborate on Suthers’ symbolic interactionist view of the process.

In other words, collaborators must trust each other enough to reveal weaknesses and make explicit the need and resources to improve conditions, e.g. knowledge sharing. The affordances of blogs and their asynchronous use could facilitate discussion of matters before they became urgent while raising questions without explicit impressions of ignorance. We should ask if there can be trust in a group – a sort of halo effect – beyond trust between individuals?

To address the question, Serva, Fuller & Mayer (2005) conducted a field experiment and demonstrated an effect for reciprocal trust among interacting teams. In doing so they extended the theoretical model of Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995) from dyads to teams. Senior undergraduate college business students took roles of software developers for one team and were the managers for a third team. They interacted during one semester in a setting fairly comparable to project teams working in a business setting. Serva, et al. also explicated the feedback loop shown by Mayer, et al. (1995) finding evidence for reciprocal trust. Their measures were considered as good alternative scales for use in this study.

Trust thus involves both giving and receiving. Blogs often involve both. Some people share what they know while others ask for help. As noted above, organizational climate can promote sharing. The addition of trust constructs to organizational climate would an extension of the model and perhaps would prove to be parsimonious. An informative extension beyond intention to share knowledge would be actual behavior in contributing to blogs and replication in another culture. We must ask if there were some cultural or industry-specific dimensions that
would affect generalizability of a claim that blogs produce a gain in knowledge sharing. At Mega Corporation the most active bloggers posted much more frequently on sites other than their own (Jackson et al., 2007).

Wasko and Faraj (2005) applied theories of collective action and social capital to study knowledge contribution in electronic networks of practice. They evaluated the frequency and helpfulness of postings. The significant constructs predicting knowledge contribution were reputation (perceived enhancement of), centrality (dense strong ties) and tenure in the field (a law specialty). Non-significant constructs were enjoyment of helping, self-rated expertise, commitment (to the network) and, to the authors’ surprise, reciprocity norms. Trust was not studied. Their findings do not contradict aspirations for blogs because the inter-organizational context and technical focus minimized the social aspects. It appears that trust is less important when working relationships are well-structured (Jarvenpaa et al., 2004).

Experiments have also shown that trust can be increased before and during an online series of tasks by the exchange of personal information, and by specific behaviors. Jarvenpaa & Leidner (1999) provided one of the first and most frequently cited studies of trust-building in virtual teams. Teams of globally dispersed students worked on projects and were compared on level of trust initially and at the end of the project. The researchers examined communication and relationship behaviors that seemed to distinguish the groups early and later in the projects. Positive associations with trust were found early for social communication and enthusiastic communication. In addition, the groups with high initial trust tended to cope well with uncertainty and show individual initiative. Later in the completion of projects, substantial, frequent and predictable communication was associated higher levels of trust. On the relationship side, high trust was associated with transition to focusing on the work, positive leadership, and “phlegmatic response to crises” – i.e. they did not panic.

Experimental designs produced the same general results. Zheng, Veinott, Bos, Olson & Olson (2002) created five conditions of social activity before engaging in a social dilemma task in which cooperative bidding produced bigger rewards. The five conditions were face-to-face, social chat (text messaging), posting of a picture, posting of a personal information sheet (similar to a resume), and nothing. The task was a multi-trial version of the prisoner’s dilemma task involving simulated day-trading on the stock market. The pairs of paid players were rewarded for cooperatively investing but did not know the exact amount the other invested due to
simulated stock market fluctuations. Trust was measured by the amount of money cooperatively invested. After every five trials the pairs of participants were allowed to communicate via an internet chat program. The trust was between (or relatively not) the partners of a pair.

Photo, chat and FTF conditions produced statistically significant, and socially meaningful, higher payoff scores than the nothing condition. The questionnaire evaluations of trust produced similar results. By the end of the 30th simulated day, all groups produced more cooperation.

Open questions remain about the importance of visual personal information (media effects), how the trust would be created in non-laboratory tasks, and temporal effects (Zheng et al., 2002). In the experiment the participants did not know each other. In an organization, the participants would often be at least acquaintances and would understand that they might work together in future tasks. Thus the details of the form and amount of social online exchange in organizational blogs are of both theoretical and practical value.

Beranek (2005) experimented with relational and trust training on 48 virtual teams of 3 – 4 students over eight weeks of work on three tasks. Trust training (communication protocols, timely and substantial communication) and relationship training (social information and enthusiasm) proved to be virtually interchangeable in terms of trust in other members as measured at three times. Both were significantly better than the no-training condition and a “double dose” of both was not significantly better.

Weblog technologies include comments facilities that permit readers – subject to access rules – to engage easily in a discussion about particular blog entries (Efimova & de Moor, 2005). The socio-technical system affordances matter. They create flexibility in the way people interact and leave varying traces of those interactions, including say notes on phone calls. Interestingly, blogger.com, for one example, allows phone calls to be attached – and of course podcasts. For another example, Efimova & de Moor studied two socio-technical context elements of blog conversations. “(1) Rhythm and media choices: activity levels over time, uses of posts vs. comments to add a contribution, indications of other media used. (2) Linking practices: linking and quoting, linking in summaries, links to one’s own weblog.” (Efimova & de Moor, 2005)

In business settings both social control and legal requirements constrain interactions on blogs. This is in distinct contrast to anonymous bloggers where that is permitted. As suggested
below, contributors could rate and be rated on, the dimensions of Habermas’ theory of communicative action (TCA). For example, “So and so was only trying to make the point that we follow our norms for discussion . . .” The United States’ Sarbanes-Oxley financial accountability legislation requires preserving instant messages in some firms. Blogging also preserves comments for as long as the firm’s policy dictates. Examples of anonymous intra-firm blogging are unknown (Charman, 2006) but probably exist for companies wanting uninhibited candor.

Mandelli (2004) pointed out several important considerations concerning online communities. Using a transaction cost approach, she argues that firms must recognized that maintaining social connections is not “free.” That is it requires resources. I propose to survey the degree to which firms recognize this and as one measure, commit resources to blogging. Azechi (2005) provided an informational humidity model claiming that “wet” systems provide personal specification (which could include trust) and personal identification elements that are suited to tacit-to-formal knowledge creation. That could correspond to the organizational blog. “Dry” systems with no personal information, he asserts, are suited for community members to convert formal knowledge to their own tacit knowledge. Azechi recommended that dry and wet systems be isolated to reduce (unproductive) “flaming.” This claim could be tested by looking at the ratings of blogs that mixed personal and business matters compared to blogs that kept the matters separate – pure k-logs.

Azechi stated that a pilot study showed that the “dry” community enhanced the motivation of community members to present and obtain information. This runs counter to the research discussed above in which conditions for “wetness” may improve collaboration – as contrasted with the transfer of “facts.” Of course in practical business problems neat divisions of type of community may be difficult to realize. However, Azechi’s higher goal is to point out such concerns for the discipline of social intelligence design (SID). “. . . SID is defined as a design that clarifies what features are needed for systems that mediate communities and improve their knowledge-creating activities.” (Azechi, 2005, 110-111).

“Wetness” appears to foster the affect-based trust described by McAllister (1995). While McAllister documented through factor analysis that affect-based and cognition-based (“dry”) trust are distinct, reliable constructs, only affect-based trust was significantly related to organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) and performance ratings.
Costigan, et al. reported a similar finding of trust by supervisors. Affective trust was more important than cognitive trust (Costigan et al., 2007).

Another important function of trust is to facilitate delegation (Mandelli, 2004). People delegate more substantial or significant projects to other people they trust. This promotes efficiency.

A combined blog & wiki service provider noted that services like his (See www.socialtext.com) promote “letting go” or delegation:

“. . . We spent a lot of time developing physical infrastructure, and now we have to develop the social infrastructure on top of it. The earliest adopters of the Internet were the geeks and hackers who were using the web for social purposes. Out of all that social interaction they realized that if they could find a way to let go of a tiny bit of control, they could invent whole new models of production. They could encourage common-goal production, rather than production driven by markets or companies.”(Mayfield, 2005)

Note however that some employees may see “over trust” or excessive delegation as abdication of responsibility (Jarvenpaa et al., 2004). Sutanto, Phang, Kuan, Kankanhalli, & Tan (2005) independently reinforced Jarvenpaa, Shaw & Staples’ findings of the importance of structure, assignment of roles, coordination and shared mental models in virtual teams. Otherwise they said, a virtuous circle can turn into a vicious circle. An example of vicious circle behavior would be status-driven vertical communication between two members and not shared with the group. Kramer and Cook (2004) raise the question of how trust works in the context of power relationships.

Trust is an important component of social capital, and is in fact the basis of networks within organizations. Those networks need resources and maintenance to be effective for knowledge creation and management (Huotari & Ivonen, 2004). I am not proposing studying trust in general, for example online trust in e-commerce, but rather trust within organizations and groups as promoted (or not) by blogs as networking tools. Social capital provides a general framework for my research.

Personality Theory of Trust

Brown, Poole & Rodgers (2004) proposed that in online collaboration, propensity to trust is most usefully considered as a relatively stable part of personality and constructed differently
than in models such as Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995). Brown, Poole & Rodgers (2004) apply an interpersonal circumplex model (ICM) as the theoretical basis. In the ICM model respondents are classified on the basis of location relative to orthogonal dimensions of dominance vs. submissiveness and affiliation vs. hostility. For example, the model predicts that persons high on dominance and hostility will be mistrusting while those who are moderate on dominance and affiliation will provoke trust. They illustrated their propositions with the work of Jarvenpaa and Liedner (1999) in which virtual collaborative groups with low initial trust did not make an effort to get to know each other before tackling the tasks. Such behavior would be explained by personality variables and could be overcome or at least mitigated by actions structured by the affordances of the technology.

In the context of e-commerce, McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar (2002) made reliable but different measures of disposition to trust. Disposition to trust is a psychological trait of individuals. Sub-concepts include faith in humanity, trusting stance, faith in competence of others, and faith in the integrity of others. Their e-commerce focus of institutional, structural trust would need modification for applications outside of e-commerce.

Thus we have different formulations of what constitutes propensity to trust. However the test of which formulation has better predictive power in organizations is beyond the scope of this research.

D. Modes of Interaction

Group Theory

Progress in Internet technology has not only made more options available for group support but it has also changed the way firms are organized and do business. Globalization and increased outsourcing are prima facie evidence that the network society has changed the way we all work and live (Castells, 2000). Fulk and Collins-Jarvis (2001) cited studies that showed managers spending 25 to 60% of their time in meetings which are increasingly virtual. Improving the efficiency and quality of meetings by appropriation of technology offers a challenge and an opportunity. Blogs may reduce the need for formal meetings whether face-to-face and/or on-line.
Meetings automatically signal group behavior. As a much-researched field of sociological study, group theories may provide insights on where to look for prior conditions and effects of blogs. Waldeck, et al. (2002) in introducing new areas for group research, classified the field into four major perspectives, namely functional theory, symbolic convergence theory, group structuration theory, and the bona fide group perspective. I briefly outline the key elements of each according to Waldeck, et al. (2002) and the research opportunities suggested by the authors that may be viewed as being significant for group support system (GSS) research in general, and in blog research specifically.

“The basic premise of functional theory is that group performance depends on how well communication functions within the context of a group to satisfy requisite conditions for successful group problems solving and decision making.” (Waldeck et al., 2002). The elements of the theory include critical requirements of a task, enablement of group members in terms of interests, resources, processes, obstacles, interventions etc. in the context of certain assumptions. Blog research may help contribute to functional theory by studying natural groups, clarification of central constructs such as trust, and isolating specific communication processes. Group member communicator characteristics related to blogging may predict the effectiveness of group decision making and problem solving. Blogs can help present, formalize, document, and discuss the functional elements listed above by their documentation of “conversations.”

Symbolic convergence theory (SCT) was developed in the 1970’s with roots in work by Bales in group communication (Waldeck et al., 2002). They stated, “The basic assumption of SCT is that humans, by nature, interpret and give meaning to the signs, objects, and people they encounter. SCT scholars argue that when groups of people share and interpret human symbols, or messages, they create a common consciousness, or shared reality” (Waldeck et al., 2002).

SCT talks of rhetorical vision

“. . . or a composite drama that draws people into a common symbolic reality . . . Three primary master analogues drive rhetorical visions: righteous analogues (right and wrong, proper and improper, superior and inferior, moral and immoral, and just and unjust) . . . social analogues (containing relational factors such as friendship, trust, caring comradeship, compatibility, family ties, brotherhood, sisterhood, and humaneness . . . or pragmatic analogues (stressing “expediency, utility, efficiency, parsimony, simplicity, practicality, cost effectiveness, and minimal emotional involvement” (Waldeck et al., 2002).
SCT researchers use methodological tools such as Q-sort analysis and content analysis in addition to observation. Some of the SCT constructs are useful in describing the changes observed by structuration. Blogs are hypothesized to contribute to the identities of contributors and strengthen identification with the analogues of the firm – the stories, mission, vision, etc.

Giddens’ structuration theory explains why the actions of a group (or other social entity) influence each other recursively. Structuration theory has been useful for explaining processes and changes but not so for predicting specific outcomes (Waldeck et al., 2002). Thus there are research opportunities in demonstrating the recursive action and structure changes created by appropriation of blogging technology. The structural changes in groups can be correlated with documentation of the initial conditions, group socialization activities, etc.

There is an opportunity to integrate structuration theory with functional theory by taking a process view (Waldeck et al., 2002). For example, changes in structure can reinforce the functional requirement of appropriate rules for interaction. This is exactly the kind of research applicable to GSS, or blog: process improvement in theory and practice. Furthermore, I speculate that blog popularity is a confirmation of the model-driven view of group support research (Morton, Ackermann, & Belton, 2003) that emphasizes decision processes rather than events.

In particular, the Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) looks at how the “appropriation” of technology restructures the group using communication technology. Researchers look at a number of dimensions on three levels of analysis such as the micro, ‘global’ and institutional corresponding to individual speech acts, the meeting, and multiple groups in the organization (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). AST has been proposed as a bridge between the European-centered model-driven perspective and the U.S.-centered technology-driven group support research described by Morton, et al. (2003).

“AST can also enhance our understanding of groups in general, not just those using technology. The major concepts of AST... cover the entire input process → output sequence that [2 papers cited] advocate as an organizing paradigm for group research. AST provides a general approach to the study of how groups organize themselves, a process that plays a crucial role in group outcomes and organizational change.” (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994, 143)

Their paper invoked the multi-dimensional concept of “spirit” to characterize a GSS. The dimensions of spirit proposed are:
• “Decision process: The type of decision process that is being promoted, for example consensus, empirical, rational, political, or individualistic …,”
• “Leadership: The likelihood of leadership emerging when the technology is used, whether a leader is more likely or less likely to emerge, or whether there will be equal participation versus domination by some members ….
• “Efficiency: The emphasis on time compression, whether the interaction periods will be shorter or longer than interactions where the technology is not used .
• “Conflict management: Whether the interaction will be orderly or chaotic, lead to shifts in viewpoints or not, or emphasize conflict awareness or conflict resolution . .
• “Atmosphere: The relative formality or informal nature of interaction; whether the interaction is structured or unstructured” (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994, 127), (references omitted).

Spirit appears to be similar to organizational climate. The “spirit” of organizations promoting blogging is hypothesized to be different than those not blogging. Blogging is inherently reflexive in accordance with structuration theory through processes of appropriation and adaptation of this new technology.

The fourth major theory described by Waldeck, et al. (2002) was the bona fide group perspective (BFGP). The key concepts are permeable and fluid boundaries of the group, and interdependence with context. This view of the group recognizes the real nature of mostly stable groups embedded in organizations. BFGP offers rich opportunities for understanding group processes by capturing references to outside groups. Blogs certainly facilitate permeable and fluid boundaries if they are open. Many have a closed membership.

While Waldeck, et al. (2002) make only a brief reference to network theory of groups in their theoretical overview, many including this researcher believe that the social network perspective is a rich research area deserving specific attention. It fits with the BFGP. Analysis of blog links could, for example, document the need for a group to improve (alter, etc.) its members’ network connections. Blogging is a social networking tool.

Argument and Communication Interaction in Groups

Regardless of the theoretical perspective used to analyze group functions, the injection of new social technology should induce changes in patterns of interaction. One of this research proposal’s approach to argument concerns speculations on the application of Habermas’
communicative action to collaborative systems. The argument approach has a tradition focusing on argument as rational, convergence producing, decorous and verbal (Meyers & Brashers, 2002). Both activist groups and governments use some non-traditional argumentation approaches such as slogans and chants, vilification of opponents, expressions of anger and visual argument (Meyers & Brashers, 2002). One would expect that organizational groups would overwhelmingly use traditional argumentation conforming to Habermas’ theory of communicative action in trusting environments, but multi-media elements are increasingly used. Constructive disagreement may be facilitated by blogs while in a concurrent change grandstanding and flaming may be reduced compared to email exchanges.

Barge (2002) made a case for a new “language game” of group deliberation that he called dialogue rather than the traditional functional group theory of discussion or debate. He claimed that traditional debate concentrates too much on shortcomings and deficits. The alternative language game of dialogue – “what should be” – would focus identifying and creating positive resources for change.

A few GSS projects, both practical and research-driven, used the general concept of Habermasian ‘ideal speech’ according to Sheffield (2004). He designed GSS interactions for a large regional planning effort based on making explicit the validity claims (plus intelligibility) of competing community interests according to Habermas’ theory of communicative action (TCA). In brief, the three claims are sincerity or truthfulness of a speaker, (social) rightness or consistency with norms, and objective truth. Communicative action is complex. As Habermas noted,

“...[A]n actor who is oriented to understanding in this sense [rationality potential] must raise at least three validity claims with his utterance, namely:
1. That the statement made is true (or that the existential presuppositions of the propositional content mentioned are in fact satisfied);
2. That the speech act is right with respect to the existing normative context (or that the normative context that is supposed to satisfy is itself legitimate); and
3. That the manifest intention of the speaker is meant as it is expressed.”

(Habermas, 1984).

A Wittgenstein language game is a form of specialized discourse among members of a community that reflects their underlying view of reality and shared understanding.
Blogs, via their reflective nature should create a trusting social climate. They encourage challenges to validity claims.

While accepting the richness claim of an interpretivist approach to blogs, it should be possible to validate the claims of interpretivist and critical theory – e.g. Habermas’ TCA – approaches using empirical techniques. Specifically, the degree of compliance with validity claims could give a reliable measure of GSS or blog success when compared to output measures and structural changes. Sheffield (2005) spent a lot of energy over years of effort to conclude that his GSS processes based on a Habermasian perspective produced insights into the effectiveness of some regional planning concepts. Such efforts are economically justified for billion-dollar public works projects and important issues in large corporations. These days modern blogging technology would have saved time and money compared to working with transcripts of public hearing testimony. “Everyday” decision processes have to be much more efficient, cost effective, easy to implement, and “good enough.” Hence collaboration engineering has emerged as an applied, practical social science discipline (Briggs, de Vreede, & Nunamaker, 2003). Internet-hosted solutions are likely to be affordable and better than “good enough.” Organizational blog policies are hypothesized to predict how communication changes from TCA mode to Habermas’ more confrontational discourse mode.

Sheffield first designed the regional planning process using TCA concepts and then evaluated it using observation and interviews with participants. If TCA is more than just philosophy, it should be confirmable in by blog-collected (example, on-line commenting tools) survey data from participants. As a practical matter, the TCA-validity claims theory, if it is valid, should be translatable into more rapid decision making and collaboration than a complicated urban planning consultation and decision.

Shortcomings and inconsistencies in Sheffield’s (2005) evaluation – agreement on certain facts but voting for another solution – illustrate confirm a limitation of TCA. Habermas limited TCA’s applicability to situations where the parties are focused on reaching understandings. In contrast, strategic actions are social actions but are success-oriented and not dependent on mutual understanding but rather “exerting influence” or power claims (Habermas, 1998).

An underlying goal of, or reason for, communicative action is rationality. While examination of the validity of a rationality concept is debated by critical philosophers, few would challenge the idea that rationality is desirable in organizations. As Habermas said, “In these
validity claims communication theory can locate a gentle but obstinate, a never silent although seldom redeemed claim to reason, a claim that must be recognized de facto whenever and wherever there is to be consensual action.” (1979, 97)

The importance of studying interactions in groups was emphasized by Suthers (2005) who called for creating interpretations as well as knowledge-sharing through interaction in learning communities. That interaction would also involve disagreements from time to time. Part of the knowledge, an “interactional epistemology,” would be those interactions. That social view of knowledge is entirely consistent with the idea popularized by Senge that modern, successful companies are learning organizations (Harris, 2002).

Organizations may benefit from healthy disagreements (the concept needs definition) by attracting more people into debates and refinement of the ideas expressed. Pascale & Sternin (2005) promote the positive deviance model in which the community is the guru. “Only when people feel safe enough to discuss a taboo and when the community is sufficiently invested in finding solutions can the prospect of an alternative reality appear.” (Pascale & Sternin, 2005). Blogs may help positive deviants to emerge.

Psychological safety is a group or team concept closely related to trust (Edmondson, 2004). She distinguished it from trust by three factors: the object of focus, time-frame, and level of analysis. In psychological safety the individual considers whether others trust him (trustee), whether he will be given the benefit of the doubt. The individual considers how others will act in the role of trustor. Psychological safety applies to a specific time and action. Will duty, or saying or doing the right thing overcome any tendency for embarrassment? Finally, Edmonson proposed that team psychological safety is a sociological factor rather than a personality trait. Team psychological safety may work in the larger context of, or be institutional trust (McKnight & Chervany, 2002).

Similarly, Michael A. Roberto warns about the importance of constructive conflict in his book Why Great Leaders Don’t Take Yes for an Answer (Roberto, 2005). The benefit to the firm comes from a balance between consensus and conflict, and coming to resolutions and decisions after periods of conflict.

Systems of collaboration are the heart of network organizations. But technology is not the key element – it is necessary but not sufficient. The key element is “mentality” – networking inside and outside the firm (Castells, 2000). Fukuyama (1995) claimed that the most important
interaction concept is “spontaneous sociability” because it provides a capacity to form new associations and work within the rules of a new group.

Ba (2001) also noted the importance of sociability. Socializing helps build, and later sustain, information-based as well as the regularity or normality requirement of sociologically-based trust. Ba used game theory to show that community-based trust will be effective provided that the parties within a community have repeat transactions, fixed identities, and the previous history of transactions is common knowledge. These are exactly the conditions of a fostered by a blog with postings and comments being by identified individuals.

Field Theories and Group Processes

An older view of the network was the concept of positive interdependence among group members as the basis of achieving group goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1997). They went on to observe that social interdependence theory originated from Kurt Lewin’s field theory that was formalized by Lewin’s student Morton Deutsch. Field theory is an approach to adding up psychological and social forces (tensions) acting on individuals in a “phase space.” Lewin may be credited with breaking down sharp divisions between the proponents of psychological and social theories. Socially constructed tensions can move the individual to satisfy needs thus reducing tensions (Lewin, 1951).

Robert Bales (1999) is one of the important expanders of the field theory with a system for rating group effectiveness. Bales’ system has a “vector” of 26 dimensions which correspond approximately to the 27 cells in a three dimensional cube. (The center of the volume is neutral.) The dimensions are U-D, values on dominance (Up) and values on submissiveness (Down); P-N, values on friendly behavior (Positive) and values on unfriendly behavior (Negative); and F-B, values on accepting task-orientation of established authority (Forward) and values opposing task-orientation of established authority (Backward). The optimum locations in the 3-dimensional space for groups, according to Bales, are moderately in the U, P, and F directions. Interactions in email or on the corporate blogs could be analyzed according to Bales’ system. That is probably impractical and unnecessary on frequent basis. However a group “taking stock” in its relationships could use such a classification.
Such evaluations are available on a service basis. Bales and associates have a commercial consulting firm, SYMLOG, which helps organizations improve the interactional values of their members by rating themselves and each other on the 26 scales and comparing them to the “ideal.” “Trust in the goodness of others” is one example and such individuals would be high on the D (Down) and P (Positive) rating scales. “Ideal” is a scale rating near the average of previous groups evaluated to have preformed well. Firms and individuals receive counseling following the evaluations. The firms hope to improve their group practices and individual performances.

**Media Theory and Interactions**

The Internet collaborative technologies including blogs can be considered mass as well as personal media. A major theoretical perspective on media is uses and gratifications. As media blogs have uses and gratifications. Matsumura, et al. (2005) found three factors or constructs in on-line exchanges in Japan’s 2channel, the largest on-line community. The first factor consisted of two types of discussion. The one called chitchat type consisted of people who joined a community to just chitchat, i.e., they did not have a specific topic to discuss. The chitchat discussion was conducted for the sake of interpersonal communication. The other discussion type was conducted by people who join a community to discuss a specific topic they share with each other. This discussion type was threaded and goal-oriented.

The second factor was type of anonymity, which could be nameless anonymity (the most prevalent), or handle anonymity using screen names. The existence of corporate anonymous blogging is doubtful except in whistleblower and customer feedback applications.

Thirdly, there was the relative use of jargon, emoticons. ASCII character combinations [☺], deliberate misspelling and other forms of expression.

A clever use of clues in the text allowed machine encoding of eight indices. Of those content length and interaction predicted discussion type communication while speed and activity in a thread predicted chitchat communication.

Managing the flow of information to reduce overload on the one hand, or boredom on the other are important technology goals. To increase the possibility of creative emergence and enhance group creativity are important goals for social intelligence software. Specifically, the idea is to provide cognitive and intelligent stimuli while minimizing distractions in the process of
communication among group members. Evaluating exactly what is optimal remains a topic for future research (Miura & Shinohara, 2005).

Blogs are not usually real-time chat tools. As such they definitely control the rate of information flow in discussions. Various commercial variants incorporate instant message functions. Briggs, et al. (2003) claimed a multidimensional benefit to managing cognitive load in collaboration systems.

Stafford, Stafford & Schkade (2004) found a social gratification for the Internet that adds to process and content gratifications many researchers have found for television and other mass media. In this research respondents indicated their perceived level of importance on 45 descriptive traits that described potential uses and gratifications for the Internet. The scale was a seven-point semantic differential anchored by “very important” and “very unimportant.” They found three factors, process gratifications, content gratifications and social gratifications. The concepts or traits in the social category were chatting, friends, interaction, and people.

As technology made possible by Internet technology, blogs appear to constructively add a desirable social dimension to content and process functions. Purveyors of blog software make the claim! Both content and process are said to be important to, i.e. provide competitive advantage, organizations.

Kelleher and Miller recently validated the concept that organizational blogs provide a “conversational human voice” compared to comparable material on a web site. Applying the approach to public relations, they also found that conversational human voice and communicated relational commitment correlated significantly with the relational outcomes of trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

The voluntary nature of most blogs leads us to believe that the uses and gratifications perspective can also be employed. And in particular, I hypothesize that organizational culture and organizational climate influence, if not determine, blogging behavior. Blogs raise fundamental issues of self-presentation in accordance with the theories of Goffman (1959).

E. Networks

While the technical details are beyond the direct scope of this research, implicit in much of the research discussed is the concept of the social network, the building of community. Networks are the ever-present mechanism through which social capital is gained or expended.
The concept of social capital has been defined in several ways. One of particular merit for evaluating blogging is one of Lin's: “Social capital . . . [is] *investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of instrumental or expressive actions*” (2001 17-18, italics in the original).

Strong ties in knowledge worker teams were significant predictors of knowledge creation capability and new product introduction (Smith, Collins, & Clark, 2005). The finding of the importance of strong ties -- remembering the crucial role of constructive dissent -- complements the classic findings on the importance of weak ties made by Granovetter (1973) and may be a consequence of the nature of the tasks involved. Weak ties bring in contacts and ideas from outside the employee’s immediate work group. There is a complementarity, a balance, of weak and strong ties (Burt, 2001; Reagans & McEvily, 2003; Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001). That balance may be fostered by blogs and other communication opportunities.

Strong ties promote sharing of knowledge through social cohesion. Social cohesion refers to strong third-party connections surrounding individuals who may share knowledge (Reagans & McEvily, 2003). The third-party connection create the norms measured by Bock, et al. (2005).

Cohesion is the concept of network closure. In network closure the alter parties with strong ties to ego have strong ties with each other. That form of social capital in the form of parents knowing each other is cited by Coleman (1988) in reducing high school dropout rates.

Burt cites numerous studies showing that for individuals, the “structural hole” form of social capital, that is connections to outside contacts not duplicated in one's own group, is more important than network closure for job evaluation, team achievement, early promotion, large bonuses, and salary. Ideally social capital includes strong ties within the group and members with non-redundant links to outside contacts who may provide different knowledge and perspectives (Burt, 2001).

The popularity of social and business networking services on the Internet has never been higher. Witness the popularity of MySpace, FaceBook, YouTube, and the more professional LinkedIn.

F. Comparison of Key Theories and Articles
Blogging can be approached from several theoretical perspectives. The principal ones for this research are summarized in the table below. All of them have organizational climate or culture constructs. Trust or trust-related variables such as autonomy are prominent variables in each model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Key Theory or Paradigm</th>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Mediating variables</th>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bock, et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Knowledge-based view of the firm; theory of reasoned action (TRA); motivation; economics: extrinsic reward; social psychology: anticipated reciprocal relationships; sociology: fairness, innovativeness &amp; affiliation</td>
<td>Anticipated Extrinsic Rewards Anticipated Reciprocal Rewards Sense of Self-Worth Organizational Climate: *Fairness *Affiliation *Innovativeness</td>
<td>Attitude toward Knowledge Sharing Subjective Norm</td>
<td>Intention to Share Knowledge: *Explicit knowledge *Implicit knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In summary, a wide range of middle level theories can be applied to blogging. Each of them raises many interesting questions and provides guidance on changes to look for as new social technologies are introduced. A host of related questions emerges concerning the practical application of those theories. How do the communicative traits of a person carry over from the blog to a physical or virtual meeting? Do blogs make up for language or cultural barriers? Some researchers as previously noted believe that there must be challenges and disagreement -- at least moderate degrees of dissatisfaction -- to facilitate innovation. In Lewin’s perspective that would be a force or a need. To what extent are these present, or facilitated by, organizational blogs? What are the communication situations, or conditions or affordances in which a group (re)structures itself so as to expand its knowledge absorption capability? The important questions to be researched as a consequence of this proposal also have the attraction of being a line of research that has many unanswered questions.
Chapter 3: Research Hypotheses

This chapter narrows the scope of my research into two parts. The first is a fact-gathering, documentary and descriptive part concerning blogging policy and participation. This part requires a survey of high-level corporate individuals who set and/or enforce blogging policy. The second is an exploratory and hypothesis-testing part concerning blogging and variables of trust and organizational climate. The separate climate, trust and blogging survey of students and employees will be administered to test for associations between variables looking also for clues as to causality. Overall, data will be gathered for descriptive statistics – the extent and nature of the phenomenon -- and to test specific hypotheses about blogging’s influence by, and of, trust and organizational climate.

Documentation and Exploration of Corporate Practices

Research Question 1: How do organization’s blogging policies vary in relation to corporate goals and objectives? This will be based on a random sample of publicly traded firms. Previous studies have relied on convenience samples. From the sample I will document organizations’ blogging policies and how they relate to goals and objectives. The study will assess the rules, approval processes, and hardware / software configurations that produce or are perceived to produce positive results. Related questions follow:

- How do firms encourage participation?
- How do firms discourage participation in blogs, that is their policy?
- What are the specific policies? How can they be classified?
- How much monitoring is done?
- Do firms attach special importance to blogs because of the need for virtual teams, collaboration with remote partners, network organizations, and other modes of operation driven by the Internet?
• Are the corporate purposes more to provide aids to cognition – knowledge sharing and management -- or to focus on values and spirit to get people to interact, to socialize, or for other purposes?

The research question will be addressed by new questionnaires, drafts of which are in the Appendices.

**Hypothesis and Relationship Testing**

Strong ties in knowledge worker teams were significant predictors of knowledge creation capability and new product introduction (Smith et al., 2005). The finding of the importance of strong ties -- remembering the crucial role of constructive dissent -- does not negate the classic findings on the importance of weak ties made by Granovetter (1973) and may be a consequence of the nature of the tasks involved. Weak ties bring in contacts and ideas from outside the employee’s immediate work group. Strong ties promote sharing of knowledge through social cohesion. There is a complementarity, a balance, of weak and strong ties fostered by blogs and other communication opportunities (Reagans & McEvily, 2003).

**Research Question 2**: If and how do blogs and wiki usage correlate with a positive organizational climate encouraging innovation, knowledge sharing and knowledge creation?

Related questions are

• What is the direction of causality of blogs and trusting organizational climates and trusting behaviors?
• Are certain organizational climates associated with use of blogs for important for strategic purposes?
• How do links develop between those people inside and outside the immediate work group?

**H1**: Business blogs by task-oriented groups will be perceived by individual participants to be more successful if they build both weak and strong ties within the firm, i.e. they bring in people outside the primary task group as well build local cohesion.

A whole host of interesting research questions flow from potential organizational climate effects such as: What are the company culture variations in the use of blogs and wikis? What is
the company climate on contributing to blogs? Do firms perceive that blogs & wikis work because of the knowledge content or promoting sociality? To what extent are blogs used for building common ground? For agenda setting?

H2.1 A positive organizational climate positively correlates with the adoption of blogs.
H2.2 A positive organizational climate positively correlates with the use of blogs. (Reading of, posting to, number of blogs.)
H2.3: Contributors’ positive evaluations of their company leaders’ blogging policies increases blog usage.
H2.4: Contributors’ positive evaluations of their company leaders’ blogging policies increase the perception of blog quality and/or utility.

Trust-building activities in advance of formal collaboration can build social capital. Social capital is “. . . networks of strong, crosscutting personal relationships developed over time that provide the basis for trust, cooperation and collective action” (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, 243). In other words the social functions of blogs would be promoted before the need for employment on specific projects. There would be building of trust through social networks and social exchange. (“I know remote colleagues better because of the blog.”) The literature reviewed in the previous chapter studied trust perceived by individuals embedded in organizations. We should look for both organizational effects and individual personality effects.

Research Question 3: How do psychological, sociological, and social-psychological trust in individuals in organizations foster blogging behavior for both social interaction and knowledge sharing activities?

Trust levels and type will be assessed with validated instruments in the articles cited above. A final set of measures will be determined in pilot testing in conjunction with the final sampling population.

The key general hypotheses of this research are:
H3.1: Organizational trust positively affects the adoption and use of blogs.
H3.2: Organizational trust is affected positively by the adoption and use of blogs.
In addition, if both of those hypotheses are true, trust and blogging form a virtuous circle.

Chapter 2 reviewed several recent research papers connecting desirable organizational climates with beneficial outputs for the firm. This study of blogging proposes that trust in peers and management is mediated by the technology and by the corporate environment. These benefits included increased productivity, job satisfaction, knowledge sharing, and innovation, to name a few. Each of the papers addresses differently the general question of relating organizational climate to productivity. I briefly review the key variables of each in turn.

**Climate as Antecedents of Effective KM**

![Diagram of Organizational Climate and Cooperative Learning Model of Janz & Prasarnphanich (2003) with Hypothetical Addition of Blogging.](image)

In the Janz & Prasarnphanich (2003) model (above, Figure 3-1), blogging could influence both organizational climate and cooperative learning. Their model is built on theories of organizational learning, including cooperative learning, autonomy (self-direction, empowerment), organizational climate (risk taking, rewards, warm and supportive environment), and cooperative learning (individual and group performance, social skills, knowledge application and evaluation thereof). Granting of autonomy implies trust. In their conclusion, they note that
in their study cooperative learning and autonomy were predominantly face-to-face phenomena. They suggested that knowledge management in a “wired,” virtual context should be investigated. Blogging would be one element in a virtual context. Also for future study they recommended a process view of “learning as evidence of knowledge.” They also believe their data support the positive impact of cooperative learning on worker satisfaction, a key variable in increasing worker retention.

In the Bock, et al. (2005) model (Figure 3-2) below, blogging could affect, or be affected by, the organizational climate, the subjective norm on knowledge sharing, and attitudes toward knowledge sharing. Their key variables include sense of self worth (not shown below but also significant), anticipated reciprocal relationships, and organizational climate. Their elements of organizational climate included “. . . fairness (a trusting climate), innovativeness (a climate that is tolerant of failure and within which information freely flows), and affiliation (a climate characterized by pro-social norms.)” (Bock et al., 2005, 91).

![Climate and Intention to Share Knowledge](image)

**Figure 3-2** Bock, et al. (2005) Organizational Climate and Knowledge Sharing Model with Hypothetical Addition of Blogging.
Similar plausible blogging effects would be found by investigating the consequences of blogging in the model of Lee & Choi (2003) shown simplified below as Figure 3-3. Their statistically significant KM enablers – we may apply the term organizational climate – were collaboration, trust, learning, centralization, and IT support. The relationship with centralization was negative, as expected. That would be similar to the autonomy variables in Janz & Prasanphanich (2003).

**Figure 3-3. Simplified Lee & Choi (2003) Organizational Climate Model with Hypothetical Addition of Blogging**

The above are suitable organizational climate models into which we could insert blogging. However I have selected a fourth one that also could be augmented so as to demonstrate the effects of blogging. Recall from Chapter 2 the Collins & Smith (2006) model that linked HR practices to firm performance through organizational climate and knowledge sharing. I will focus on the central links of that model as depicted below inside the dashed-line rectangle.
Figure 3-4. Collins & Smith (2006) HR, Social Climate, Knowledge Exchange, and Firm Performance Model Showing Elements for this Blogging Impact Research.

They have a compact, practical set of measures with sufficient reliability to which blogging variables could be added. I propose to omit the HR variables – but note the policy part of this study -- and focus on social climate, blogging, and knowledge exchange and combination shown within the heavy dashed line rectangle. Firm performance would be optional for future work, facilitated by use of public firms that necessarily publish financial data.

The trust measures used concerned employees' trust of each other. The theory was that employees who trust each other will exchange and combine information more in productive ways. I hypothesize that trust in management also influences organizational climate and knowledge sharing positively. Thus I propose to measure both forms of trust.

Collins & Smith analyzed their data by regression analysis and found statistically significant results. I plan to replicate the Collins & Smith (2006) findings starting with a reanalysis of the correlation matrix using structural equation modeling. With my data, I intend to work with the actual measurement model throughout – individual scores -- rather than using company averages for certain variables. Collins & Smith properly use a firm HR practices average based on the firms’ HR practices being uniform within the firm and satisfactory statistical consistency of perception within the firm. Breaking out the trust variable, it accounts for (adds) about 10% of the variance between HR practices and firm performance in regression.
analyses. Overall, 50 – 59 % of the variance relating HR practices to new products and services, or to sales growth, was explained by social climate. Knowledge exchange and combination added over 20% of variance accounted for. Recasting the center of Figure 3-4 as structural and measurement model produces one as in Figure 3-5 below.

Figure 3-5. Middle Constructs of Collins & Smith (2006) Recast as a Structural Model

This research will replicate the model and then extend it by asking what blogging can add by expansion. As previously noted, several models could serve as the basis for testing the contributions of blogging. Collins & Smith (2006) have a parsimonious set of validated, theoretically-based measures. Parsimony is particularly consequential because I must ask additional questions of respondents about blogging.

Several theory-based alternatives could be applied. Omitting the measurement model at this point, helps focus attention on the structural model displaying the key conceptual relationships. In simplest form, is Figure 3-6 below representing the central hypothesis if this research. Namely, blogging produces beneficial effects on knowledge sharing while increasing trust in management and peers. The model below represents the commitment for this research.
Beyond that complexity, the model becomes significantly less practical, less theoretically supported, and “nice to have” rather than essential.

Figure 3-6. Essential Structural Model for Examining Blogging Impact

Trust in peers can be broken out explicitly in the model shown below as Figure 3-7 below. In addition new or alternative paths are shown between climate and trust in management, and trust in management and knowledge exchange.
Other models on the same order of complexity as Figure 3-7 are plausible. For examples, the climate measures may be split into two, or the job satisfaction variable added. Recall that job satisfaction has a demonstrated positive effect on firm productivity and other firm performance variables.

On the more complex side, Figure 3-8, also showing the measurement model, represents the most complex model that can practically be attempted within the scope of this research.

Figure 3-8. Full Blogging, Organizational Climate, Trust, Work Satisfaction, and Knowledge Exchange Model.

In addition to adding blogging, the model of Figure 3-8 adds work satisfaction. It also adds trust in management on the output side. Note that the trust variables are shown with double-headed arrows indicating tests of virtuous circles with respect to trust. Since work satisfaction is well-documented as a predictor of productivity (M. G. Patterson et al., 2005), I added that variable as well since it would be an important justification for company blogs. The model provides the basis for testing my hypothesized relationships.

The above model represents the maximum research model complexity. Data collected may or may not permit testing of such complex models. Of course the models can be segmented so as to look at parts of more complex models. Social outcomes, including social networking, are important consequences to be looked for in blog studies.

It is important to note that blogging behavior is not the only intervening variable but may only be a moderator. Alternative models may give better fit to the observed data. Such models will be proposed and tested based on theory and the first round of data collection. (See the data analysis section below.) Survey data will be collected from blog contributors (potential and actual) on general organizational climate, individual trust attitudes, perceptions of blogging...
policies, attitudes toward knowledge sharing, and reports of blogging behavior. In other words, data will be gathered on the state of blogging in the organization and attitudes and perceptions that are predicted to influence attitudes and behaviors related to blogging.

Research Question 4: How do blogs change the patterns of communication and discourse in firms? How do perceptions of, and changes in the nature of debate, patterns of interaction, and discourse within the organization attributed to, or coincident with, vary with blog activity. Many aspects of organizational communication may be affected by blogging.

- Will increasing the effectiveness of online collaboration be rated as a crucial objective for organizations to remain competitive in the Internet era?
- Do employees perceive that blogs help creativity?
- Do employees perceive that they challenge each other more with blogging? Does blogging reduce groupthink?
- Does blogging beforehand make meetings more productive?
- Do corporate bloggers perceive that it is time well spent? And why, or why not?

Many proponents of blogging as an effective business practice provide claims that I will test on a second priority basis:

H4.1 Employees in organizations using blogs will report less email overload.
H4.2: Employees will rate the amount of project or task-related email as less with blogging in use.
H4.3 Organizations with higher levels of trust will favor blogs over email for project coordination.
H4.4 Use of blogs will stimulate the use of phone contacts. (This is a partial replication of the Jackson, et al. (2007) finding.)

Research question 4, while very interesting, is supplemental to the main research questions. In summary, several practical and theoretical questions will be addressed by this research.
Chapter 4. Research Methodology

Case studies, surveys, and laboratory experiments are ways to investigate the questions and hypotheses of this research. In some cases, the questions dictate the approach. In others, there is a variety of tools that would be suitable. I discuss each briefly below.

General case studies of the blogging of specific firms, mainly concentrating on public relations issues, have been done. For example see the book *Naked Conversations* by Scoble & Israel (2006), and more are undoubtedly in work. Wright’s (2006) book, *Blog Marketing*, does devote substantial space to the benefits of intrafirm blogging. Detailed case studies of specific firms and the changes introduced by blogging would be of great interest but best left to others at this time.

Laboratory experiments could be practical. If carefully done with respondents assigned randomly to treatments. If drawn from appropriate populations, experimental data would overcome challenges to generalizability. Experiments would test hypothesis from survey research demonstrating associations. The key goal would be to get findings on causality.

One approach would be to use an actor to present alternative blogging policies to a group of subjects. The policies could vary on degree of control, scope of the audience, organizational support, and management participation, for examples. The participants in the different treatment groups would complete organizational climate and trust surveys based on their experience and perception of the policies. As noted previously, Kelleher and Miller (Kelleher & Miller, 2006) experimentally compared differing perceptions of a firm produced by blogs and a conventional web site.

For future work, for example, online videos of typical alternative blog policies could be shown as different experimental treatments. These would be followed by manipulation checks and a questionnaire. The hypothetical blog policies would vary in the degree of responsibility and control given to employee bloggers.

I have chosen to do two types of survey research because they are adequate to provide useful answers in the context of validating and extending an existing model. Some clues as to
causality will be inferable because of variation in blogging experiences – time, quality, and quantity variations – and the use of structural equation modeling.

A. Survey of Corporate Blogging Policies

The first survey will be on corporate blogging policy and goals. Data will be obtained from corporate spokespeople and by examining written documents. I must clearly understand the organizational unit for which a blogging policy maker provides information. Ideally all units of analysis must be sampled randomly. That is individuals, divisions and firms should be randomly sampled unless 100% samples could be obtained. There may be some practical compromises but random or stratified random samples must be the goal. However, its practicality depends on access to firms in an unbiased manner. Several approaches varying widely on randomness come to mind. These include

- Contacts through professional organizations and associations such as chambers of commerce, IT professionals, etc. The Pacific Telecommunications Council is one example. Another could be the Hawaii Telecommunications Association or the local chapter of the Association of Information Technology Professionals would be other examples. Such organizations are likely to provide sympathetic introductions however there is an element of self-selection.

- Academic contacts. Some professors may have on-going research to which this could be joined, or other forms of access facilitated. They may also have students who would be willing to complete questionnaires.

- Selection from lists or directories of businesses. For example in Hawaii basic contact information on each registered business is available from the State in digital form for five cents per listing. Selection criteria facilitate elimination of useless contacts such as inactive firms. A related approach would be culling of websites from digital versions of telephone directories. National listings are also available, for example publicly listed firms. Stratified random sample can be done from lists of businesses. (I have the Wilshire 5000 on hand.) A criterion could be those that have public web sites based on the idea that if there is a public web site there is a better chance of having a blog than if no public web site.
Automated searching of Internet sites. Sorting the “wheat from the chaff” in such an approach is non-trivial and beyond the scope of this research.

Some geographical – and business -- diversity beyond Hawaii is highly desirable. Large U.S. West Coast cities are candidates. The San Francisco Bay Area is a geographically accessible area.

Choices must be made in parallel with other research requirements, such as human subjects clearances and finalization of more precise research questions. Time and money are practical considerations. A sample from which generalizations could be made would be an important contribution as much of the past blog research has been ethnographic in nature based on small “representative” samples. Resource people within UH Manoa will be consulted on ways to approach firms or possible cooperation with existing research projects.

A rough estimate of the number of firms desirable is about 100 – 150. Ideally, accompanying the policy study would be a sample of 20 to 50 persons in each firm in a workgroup to which the policy applied. (In a large firm with many divisions there is the risk of the ecological fallacy of uniform application of policy. I avoid that in all cases by asking about individual perceptions of blogging policy.)

Blogging policies will likely vary significantly between industry and firm size. Larger, more diverse samples will help resolve that claim.

The concepts of organizational climate and trust are applicable to organizations beyond businesses. For example, blogs are a method of citizen involvement in schools and civic organizations.

Given the options available, I made the choices described below. The first element of the research is collection of blogging policies including written policies and survey of policy makers. A random sample of firms in the Wilshire 5000 will be contacted by phone and email to find out about their internal and external blogging policies. In addition annual reports will be searched for blogging policies, and commitment-based HR policies. The contacts initially will be through firm communication offices. The important criterion for use of publicly traded firms is that financial performance data are available. An essential part of this research will be the interviews of key policy-making individuals concerning the use and trust in employees for internal blogs.
The proposed surveys of firms and organizations concern the existence and uses of blogs and the levels of organizational support for blogging.

Furthermore, the interviews will provide opportunities to ask for access to the employees of firms for blogging surveys. Or in some cases they firms may have data that they are willing to share in deidentified form. Draft interview scripts are in the Appendices. Two hundred firms is the proposed sample size. Analysis of financial data and the relationship to blogging will be available for future research.

Time permitting, the second part of the blogging policy survey will be of the “Best Places to Work” firms. The proprietary employee survey used for selection (from firms that nominate themselves) is known to have a significant trust component (Fulmer, Gerhart, & Scott, 2003). Thus comparison of the “Best” with a comparable or random group on blogging practices will be informative. A drawback of the group is that many are not publicly traded and therefore financial data will be largely unavailable.

B. Surveys of Individual Blogging, and Perceived Organizational Climate, and Trust.

In an ideal research design, random samples of individuals from a random selection of firms and work groups within firms would be surveyed. Furthermore, a longitudinal design would better support practical and theoretical claims of causality but that must be left for the future. Challenges to validity will be addressed concerning the compromises required to make this study practical.

I propose to study two populations. The first consists of MBA students from business schools in Hawaii. The second is the individuals in at least one work group in one firm with substantial blogging participation among employees.

Use of MBA Students

The use of students is frequently a source of criticism of social science research. MBA students however are not a bad choice because they represent a wide range of industries, age, and experience. Many are employed while attending school. Many MBA programs require that students have business experience. Many are international students. MBA students are quite computer-savvy. I expect that some of them have a range of blogging experience both personal and at work. I will attempt to survey students from all the MBA programs with substantial in-
person components in Honolulu. Each draws from somewhat different populations and is not
selected on the basis of blogging experience.

**Convenience Sample from Firms**

Surveys within a few firms will limit generalizability. Special conditions for blogging in
one firm could differ significantly from others. A random sample of employees drawn from a
large number of firms would be ideal. Working down from that ideal, the achievable will be a
small convenience sample across a broad range of industries. The commitment for this research
proposal is to do a good survey of employees in one firm gathering enough data to test the
model. As the survey will be online, adding a few more firms will be practical. Even a small
sample of firms, as proposed, will provide valuable comparisons among themselves and with
MBA students.

The data from each group, and collectively will be compared using the models discussed
in Chapter 3.

**C. Variables and Their Measures**

Surveys of individuals will be conducted online using one of the good survey systems
such as SurveyMonkey.

**1. Blogging Experience**

The blogging experience and perceived effects and value of blogging will be surveyed
using a questionnaire similar to that shown in the Appendices. Experience questions will ask
about how long the person has blogged, the level of blogging per day or week, and personal
versus business blogging. For business blogging, questions will probe the perceived personal
value and the understanding of the objectives of the firm in allowing and/or promoting blogging.
New questionnaire items, drawn from the recent blog literature e.g., Jackson, et al. (2007), and
my hypotheses, will be pilot-tested before the main surveys. Subscales may range from
operationalizations of Habermas’ TCA to Fukuyama’s spontaneous sociability. However the
most important consideration after essential validated scales is to limit the number of question so
that respondents don’t give up before completing the questionnaire.
2. Trust

There are many trust measures in use. The challenge is to select one set which has the best balance between validity, reliability, and brevity. Serva, Fuller & Mayer (2005) focused on reciprocal trust between development and management teams. It is built on good theory but would require significant rewriting. Lee & Choi (2003) is another good set.

I will use, wherever justified, the scales used with prior research related to the model being expanded. Thus, trust in peers will be evaluated with the Collins & Smith (2006) scales – 12 items total, four each for competence, benevolence, and integrity -- adapted from the well-known Mayer, et al. (1995) theory and the Meyer & Davis (1999) empirical research. The latter also supplies the items for trust in management.

Those scales may be improved by more explicitly considering the risks created by blogging. That is risks to the company and the risks to the bloggers.

For future work I will adapt the excellent scales of McKnight, D. H., Choudhury, V. & Kacmar, C. (2002) on disposition to trust. The e-commerce focus of institutional, structural trust will need modification. This study will however follow the recommendation of McKnight & Chervany (2002) that their model be tested with trust-related behaviors, i.e. go beyond the trusting intentions expressed in their experiment, to blogging.

The trust scales are shown in the Appendices.

3. Organizational Climate

Organizational climate is a multi-dimensional concept. “Climate refers to a contextual situation at a point in time and its link to the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of organizational members.”(Bock et al., 2005) Climates exist for various desirable behaviors and may be considered as the manifestation of higher organization cultural values – including of course management theories.

“These climates represent employees’ perceptions of organizational policies, practices, and procedures, and subsequent patterns of interactions and behaviors that support creativity,
innovation, safety, or service in the organization.” (M. G. Patterson et al., 2005) The concepts are frequently described as “structural assurances.”

Several recent and well-validated measures are available. Selection must involve careful choices. Ones used should be those accounting for the most variance while being consistent with the theoretical perspective. The list below shows the range of potentially applicable published scales considered and does not reflect an attempt to use many of them.

- Autonomy
- Integration
- Involvement
- Supervisory support
- Training
- Welfare
- Formalization
- Tradition
- Innovation & flexibility
- Outward focus
- Reflexivity
- Clarity of organizational goals
- Efficiency
- Effort
- Performance feedback
- Pressure to produce
- Quality

- Fairness
- Affiliation
- Innovativeness
- Attitude toward knowledge sharing
- Anticipated reciprocal relationships
- Subjective norm – on sharing
- Sense of self-worth

- Reward
- Warmth
- Support
- Risk (tolerance)
- Autonomy
The last and best choice for this project is Collins & Smith (2006) because of its direct theoretical fit and parsimony. In addition to the trust scales mentioned above we will use the measures for

- Cooperation
- Shared codes and language

Furthermore, the Collins & Smith (2006) measures for knowledge exchange and combination will be used. Along with organizational climate, those measures appear in the Appendices.

**D. Data Collection**

In the case of policy makers, rather than a survey on the Internet, interviews, by phone or in person are essential to producing better response rates, and ease the approvals of employee participation. Large scale data collection will be by web survey for general employees and for any students. The software tool is SurveyMoney which provides SSL encryption and other adequate security measures. Some of the surveys in the Appendices are printed from the SurveyMonkey facility.

**E. Data Analysis**

**Descriptive Data**

This analysis of the descriptive data requires two basic types. The first is simple tables and cross tabs such as

- Industry vs. blog type
- Firm size by number of internal and external blogs (if any).
- Etc.

The second type consists of analysis and classification of blogging policies according to industry, firm size, etc. based on survey (or interview) data and features off written blogging
policies such as moderation, or not, no negative blogging, etc. In all cases each of the distributions will be examined for defects such as coder bias.

**F. Relational and Potentially Predictive Data**

**Reliability and Validity**

Each of the scales will be subjected to scrutiny of the distribution for skewness, outliers and other defects. Transformations to more nearly normal distributions will be made where such transformations are consistent with retaining validity. Reliability and confirmatory factor analysis results must be examined for consistency with the variable definitions.

Correlation data will be presented with scatter plots where that will aid interpretation and understanding.

Summary statistics:

- Distributions and plots. Near normal distributions are particularly important to support the assumptions of structural equation modeling.
- Reliabilities – Cronbach alpha
- Correlation matrix – for each scale and sub-scale.
- Factor loadings. Each scale such as trust, and organizational climate are multi-dimensional concepts and each will be dissected to determine if the results are consistent with previous research.

**G. Model Testing**

Finally the data analysis would reach the prime questions related to the mutual influences of trust, organizational climate, and blogging. The test is whether an effect for blogging can be found as an addition to a model linking trust and organizational climate to knowledge sharing and combination. I will also look for virtuous (or vicious) circle in those variables.

As expressed in the simple summary model, multiple regression and path analysis are satisfactory for testing the predictive power of variables. However for comparison of competing models, especially where some variables are latent, structural equation modeling (SEM) is the correct but more mathematically complex approach. Technically SEM is the analysis of
covariance structures. Covariance structure modeling is a combination of confirmatory factor analysis and multiple regression but if not used with care and with theoretical justification, many alternative models can appear to be satisfactory (Breckler, 1990). For this research, which is somewhat exploratory, modeling would be based on further examination of the theory combined with tentative hypotheses developed from data collected. Full attention to the technical issues of reliability and identification in SEM must be given before collecting data. I will be guided in reporting the results by McDonald & Ho (2000). Structural equation modeling will be done with AMOS.

Sample Size

Structural equation modeling is a large-sample technique. Kline offered that over 200 cases could be considered “large.” Sample sizes from 100 to 200 could be considered medium (Kline, 1998). Therefore the number of cases should be 200 or more.

Number of Observations

The number of observations is not the sample size, also called the number of cases. The number of observations does not change with sample size. Informally, the number of observations is the number of variances and covariances among the observed variables. The central part of the original Collins & Smith model had 33 items total in the questionnaires, so the number of observations was 33*34/2 = 561.
Chapter 5: Research Findings

TBD

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Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

To be based on the results

VII. Potential Contributions to Research

This research could contribute to knowledge of an important social phenomenon by

- documenting the extent and purposes of blogging in organizations
- collecting and categorizing blogging policies
- examining the use of blogging in relation to organizational climate
- examining the perceived and desired relationship of blogging to knowledge management
- examining the association of blogging with trust in organizational climate
- examining a potential link between a trusting organizational climate and actual contribution to blogs
- examining personal dispositions to trust and their relationship to blogging behavior.

Practical contributions

The research may provide some guidance to firms on making the best use of blogs to build and reinforce company values and increase performance by mobilizing people, building relationships, and increase knowledge building and sharing.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Depends on the conduct of the research, the results and the adequacy of the sample. Financial comparisons related to blogging will be available for the public firms, the focus of this research.
List of Appendices

Committee on Human Studies Approval
Consent form
Survey of Corporate Spokespeople and Blogging Policies
Trust scales
Organizational climate scales
Individual blogging behavior and perception survey

Administrative Matters -- Proposed Schedule

2007

Spring 2007
- Recruit committee members, refine proposal
- Draft web questionnaires; possible interviews with those in firms responsible for blogging policy.
- Submit draft instruments and design to Committee on Human Studies. Approved April 17, 2007 with exempt status.

Summer 2007
- Revise interview scripts of spokespeople on blogging policies
- Revise the questionnaires
- Post Web-based questionnaires

Autumn 2007
- Defend proposal
- Gain access to firms for surveys.
- Gather data

Spring 2008
- Analyze data
- Write up data
- Defend
- Graduate
Budget

Surveys on the web and phone interviews are inexpensive. For example, the Survey Monkey Professional service is $20 per month. Draft survey instruments are posted. The key ones are printed for the appendices. Some duplicating budget for any respondent wanting a paper survey would be a prudent contingency. Letters of introduction may require some mailing expense.
References


