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# Striking a Balance: Managing Blogs in Loosely Coupled Systems

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# ■ Striking a balance: managing blogs in loosely coupled systems

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*As the oldest implementation of Web 2.0 technologies, blogs present an opportunity to understand how community college administrators are addressing two conundrums: conundrum of control and the conundrum of adaptability. These problems arise from the need of leaders to put organizational controls in place even as these controls limit the tool's usefulness and the adaptability of the technology. The purpose of this study using a multiple case study method is (1) to further the understanding of how community college administrators and blog authors strike a balance between organizational control and adaptability when implementing and using blog technologies and (2) to create a model that will help administrators better strike this balance within a loosely coupled system of college units and individuals. The findings have implications for how organizations use other Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook and Twitter.*

## Introduction

Organizational psychologist Karl Weick (2000) first described educational organizations as “loosely coupled systems” in the 1970s and in so doing noted that the loose ties between departments can be viewed as an advantage to the educational organization. This advantage is that as new challenges or needs arise in the environment, a unit within a loose system can address this challenge without risking the entire organization, since units are relatively independent (Collins, 1983; Orton & Weick, 1990; Weick, 1976/2000; Weick, 1982a).

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The loosely coupled system model has been applied to community colleges (Johnson 2002; Mars & Ginter, 2007; Robson 1998), which Johnson calls the “most loosely coupled of all organizations” (p. 14) due to their open access and entrepreneurial approach. Mars & Ginter (2007) examined technology adoption at three community colleges, noting units were loosely coupled to each other and to initiatives originating further up the organizational hierarchy. Their findings emphasized successful sharing of innovations was fostered through structures that enabled tighter coupling, such as technology committees and strong policy structures that created consistent views of technology. Nazzaro (1987) has noted there may be higher degrees of coupling across units the further up the organizational hierarchy one moves. Vice presidents and deans may easily communicate across units in administrative meetings, but lower-level employees may not have many opportunities to directly interact with individuals from other units within the college. The planning process community colleges utilize may also introduce some degree of looseness. Organizational planning is often viewed as a rational endeavor with clear goals and measurable outcomes, but behind the formal planning documents and final reports, one finds a large degree of internal politics buffering units and molding outcomes at all phases of the planning process (Johnson, 2002; Robson, 1998).

The literature offers some glimpses of technological adaptation in community colleges in automating and moving processes like registration, library services, tutoring, and purchasing textbooks to the online world (Ayers & Grisham, 2003; Doucette, 1993; Levin, 1998; Randall, 1992; Smith, 2006). Yet, there has not been a study to examine the diffusion of Web 2.0 technologies across community college campuses. Web 2.0 tools give users the ability to directly publish, create, and contribute information across the Internet at low cost with low technological barriers (Baker & Ward, 2002; Blood, 2002; O’Reilly, 2005; Reed, 1999).

Blogs are one of the oldest examples of Web 2.0 technologies (Blood 2002, Stauffer, 2002). It is clear that community colleges have recognized the benefit of this technology as their faculty and staff have implemented blogs for a range of reasons. Several community college presidents author blogs as a means to directly communicate with students, faculty, and staff (Blobaum, 2007; Johnson, 2007). Marketing departments, public relations departments, and recruiters have used blogs as a way to reach out to prospective students (Merker, 2008). Campus marketers have also asked current students to blog about their experiences on campus (Merker, 2008, November 25). Additionally, blogs have been used by librarians

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ies (Marin, 2005; Swanson, 2006), faculty members (Downs, 2004), and public safety and police departments (Jones, 2008).

In effect, blogs create spokespeople for community colleges, which present what Weinberger (2007) calls a “conundrum of control.” This states that organizations have an inherent interest in molding and directing how online technologies are used to meet organizational goals, but the more control imposed, the less value these tools give to their users. A total absence of control presents risks, and yet, a total imposition of controls returns the creation and distribution of content to a Web 1.0 paradigm and removes the value blogs present.

The purpose of this study, using a multiple case study method, is (a) to further the understanding of how community college administrators and blog authors strike a balance between organizational control and adaptability when implementing and using blog technologies and (b) to create a model that will help administrators better strike this balance within a loosely coupled system of college units and individuals.

This study seeks to understand a key paradox in the postindustrial organization identified by Cameron (2000). That is, identifying and developing innovations requires loose coupling, but implementing this innovation across the organization requires tighter coupling. Organizational leaders must maintain both. They will face the challenge of maintaining stability, identity, and history in the short term but also supporting long-term adaptability. There has not been a study to examine this paradox in relation to community college technology use. Such a study is important because community colleges are tied closely to their service areas (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Blogs offer a new avenue for connecting to students and community members. They present a way to open the doors to activities, marketing, learning and a range of ideas that can increase the value community colleges bring to their service areas. The ability to adapt to changing needs in the environment and better serve students is at the heart of the community college mission. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

**Question 1:** What control mechanisms have community colleges put in place to guide the publication of information to the World Wide Web using blog technologies?

**Question 2:** How do these control mechanisms impact the adaptability of blogs to new needs that arise in the environment?

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**Question 3:** How do these control mechanisms impact the coupling between the blogging unit and the unit responsible for maintaining Web content within the organization?

## Multiple case study

This study utilizes a multiple case study approach of three community colleges. The multiple case study method was chosen because of its descriptive, practical nature that gives the researcher a holistic standpoint from which to consider how the present state of reality came into being within the specific case (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002). By examining multiple case studies, comparisons can be made between cases (Merriam, 1988). Qualitative approaches, such as case studies, provide rich, thick data that can capture nuance and degree (Creswell, 1998, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 1998), which is important in preserving the complexities of modern organizations and loosely coupled systems (Coutu, 2003; Weick, 1976/2000, 2001).

The unit of analysis for the present study is tightly or loosely coupled groupings of individuals that operate or support a community college blog. These individuals included blog administrators who are responsible for the management of the blog content, blog authors who create content, and college web managers who are responsible for managing the content of the broader college website. The web managers included members from the college's information technology department and members of the marketing or public relations department. Every effort was made to include the lead administrator from these areas who has the primary responsibility for managing web content. When this person was not available, the most senior person who was available was included.

A list of potential cases was compiled through Google and library subscription database searches using a search for "community college blogs." These searches identified a list of blogs. Once one blog was identified on a campus, it typically linked to other blogs. Further searches on the college sites led to additional ones within the sites. While searching, an effort was made to identify schools that had multiple blogs. The results of the searches consisted of a list including 35 community colleges and nearly 80 blogs.

Cases were selected for the study based on the following four criteria. First, each case must have had at least one active blog that has been posted to within the last month and been in existence for more than a year.

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Second, at least one of the blogs must have been authored by a department or program with the goal of delivering departmental/operational information as opposed to information for a class or personal reflections. Academic freedom carries a great deal of weight on many campuses, so the purpose of this criterion was to ensure that not all blogs could use this as a shield from control mechanisms. Third, size of the organization was considered. Nazzaro (1987) has noted that institutional size does have an impact on coupling. Larger organizations are more loosely coupled, have greater degrees of adaptability, and hamper innovation through administrative structures. Two larger colleges with close to 10,000 full-time equivalent students were included and a contrasting case with an FTE near 5,000 students was included. Finally, cases were selected based on the number of identifiable blogs. The cases that were selected had more than one identifiable blog. Preference was given to cases that had more administrative or departmental blogs.

For each case, one blog author was contacted and used as an “informant” (Fontana & Frey, 2005) to make contact with additional participants. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted as a test of the research methodology. The results of this pilot are not part of the final data analysis. Midwest Community College (MCC) was chosen as a sample case. MCC was chosen because the lead researcher had a contact there who was a blog author. This blog author agreed to be interviewed and to contact IT and PR administrators who would agree to be interviewed for the pilot. The interviews were recorded and transcribed following the same protocols used in the actual study.

## **Case descriptions and participants**

Case 1, Eastern Community College (ECC), is located in a former industrial center that has become economically depressed as manufacturing jobs have left the area. ECC has 5,832 full-time equivalent students. Seven blogs were identified at this institution that met the criteria for selection. Five blog authors responded to inquiries and participated in the study. One of the blog authors was also a public relations administrator and one was the college president. An IT administrator also participated.

**Table 1. Case 1 participants**

Participant	Official title	Blog	Started blog
Primary library blog author/library blog administrator	Library systems coordinator (faculty position)	Library blog	2002
Secondary library blog author		Library blog	2002
Primary author president blog	College president	President's higher education blog	2009
Innovation champion A	Professional development coordinator/professor	Reaccreditation blog	2009
PR blog author	Director of public relations	ECC public relations blog	2009
Innovation champion B	Director of national technology center/ professor	Information technology center blog	2005

Case 2, Northwest Community College (NCC), is located in an urban area of 200,000 people in the Pacific Northwest. NCC has 9,185 full-time equivalent students. Three blogs were identified, of which two blog authors agreed to participate in the study. The college's chief information officer and public information officer also participated.

**Table 2. Case 2 participants**

Participant	Official title	Blog	Started blog
Blog author art department	Archivist/administrative assistant	Art department blog	2007
Blog author massage therapy program	Massage instructor	Massage program blog	2008
Chief information officer	Chief information officer	None	---
Public information officer	Public information officer	None	---

Case 3, Southwest City College (SCC), is located in an urban area of 200,000 people in the Southwestern United States and has 15,811 full-time equivalent students. Five blogs were identified, of which three blog authors agreed to participate in the study. The college's director of IT infrastructure and systems and director of marketing also participated.

**Table 3. Case 3 Participants**

Participant	Official title	Blog	Started blog
Library blog author	Library director	Library blog	2006
Director of marketing	Director of marketing	None	---
IT manager	Director of information technology, infrastructure and systems	None	---
Blog author and department chair	Professor of sociology and department chair	Sociology blog	2006
Dean	Dean of educational programs	Dean's blog	2010
Faculty learning center blog author	Director of instructional technology/codirector of faculty learning center	Learning Center blog	2001

## Data analysis

This study drew on three types of data for its analysis. The first was interviews with participants, the second was documents that guide the use of technology on each campus, and the third was a content review of the blogs themselves for evidence of control mechanisms impacting blog content.

The data analysis was ongoing starting with the first interview. Interview notes were reviewed within a week of each interview. The recorded interviews were transcribed, put into chronological order, and printed. Each interview was given an initial reading along with the notes taken at the time of the interview. A second reading was then given, labeling with themes from the initial codebook by hand. After all interviews within the case were given this initial analysis, a third, more detailed analysis was performed by hand. Once all interviews for a particular case had been given a third review, the interviews were loaded into the Altas.ti qualitative data analysis software where they were given a fourth round of coding, this time in the software. The codes were organized into thematic clusters based on concepts highlighted in the data. Each case was developed and analyzed independently. Then a cross-case analysis was conducted in order to see broader themes that may contribute to a representative model.



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## Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the interviews of participants necessarily report back their perceptions that may or may not represent external reality (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Merriam, 1988). As noted, the goal of this study is to explore the couplings between the blogging department and departments involved with supporting and controlling technology. In some cases, participants commented on their perceptions of coupling with other departments. The study design did not attempt to capture an objective measure of coupling campus wide. Since coupling is largely a social connection between people, this is a case where perception may be reality. However, participant perceptions should be recognized as such.

Second, as a case study, this study aims for a holistic, detailed exploration with the recognition that this will not be generalizable across the entire class of community college blogs. As such, the study findings are not intended to be predictive in nature (Crewswell, 1994; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002). Third, the exploration of loose systems is inherently political and, therefore, will more than likely be biased by campus politics (Merriam, 1988).

Finally, this study assumes a degree of loose coupling within the cases based on the literature. It does not attempt to measure the degree of coupling across each campus as an independent measure. Such a measure would require a separate study beyond the present focus on blogs.

## Findings

The three case studies reported in the current article provide a glimpse into the creation, management, and conceptual understandings of blog technology in community colleges. From these glimpses, one can view the loose connections between individuals and departments and consider how technological innovation takes place. Despite the facts that these cases represent very different schools and blogs that serve a range of purposes, a great deal of similarities exists between cases. While the points of difference are equally as important, there is a greater degree of agreement in the implementation and management than difference.

## Themes

Four thematic clusters emerged from participant interviews: *control mechanisms, innovations, disintermediation, and coupled relationships*.

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## Control mechanisms

The control mechanisms—policies, budgets, participation rules, and organizational culture—were poorly defined around blogs across all cases. These controls were more formally developed for the colleges' standard 1.0 website than they were for the blogs. There was strong evidence that blogs were an avenue around using the 1.0 website. The massage department blog author made it clear that the use of the blog was partly a way for them to bypass the structure around the standard website. When asked why she chose to use the blog as opposed to the 1.0 website, the massage department blog author said,

Well, honestly, this is a more direct way for us to [build a site] within the program. Were we to use the college IT to do something like this there would be a lot of lag time between our realization that things needed to be posted and it happening. Sometimes we want things to happen immediately. So, it gave us a lot more freedom and flexibility in that sense to sort of have this thing that we control.

In all cases, the processes for initiating and operating a blog were informal, relying to a large degree on the organizational knowledge of the blog initiator. The policies that addressed web technology did not directly address web 2.0 and offered little guidance. The low cost of blogs removed them from formal approval processes. None of the blog authors had written department-level policies to guide their use. There were no examples of misuse of the technology by staff members. There was a general sense that since no problems had arisen from the campus blogs then there was no need to formalize the rules around them. Participants also emphasized that the organizational leaders needed to place a degree of trust in the blog authors to appropriately use the technology.

## Innovations

These cases offer a nuanced view of how blog technologies spread and adapt across the organization. Cases 1 and 3 show clear connections between bloggers as one person helped another initiate a new blog, thus re-inventing the technology. In these two cases, blog authors showed a high degree of awareness of each other's blogs, which is an indication of how easily the innovation has spread. In case 1, the diffusion of the idea of a blog and the actual adaptations of this technology can be traced clearly from the initial implementation of the library blog and the technology center blog, through the training of innovation champion A, and to the initiation of the college president's and PR administrator's blogs. Figure

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1 outlines this diffusion process. Beyond this example, three blog authors also discussed their involvement with the diffusion of blog technology to uses at other community colleges.

In cases 1 and 3, the bloggers were administrators or faculty who are active in the governance of campus and thus have a strong awareness of the unwritten rules or the organization. In contrast, the blogs in case 2 are not connected to each other or any other individual on campus. One blog author is in a support staff role and the other teaches in a noncredit program on a secondary campus. The ideas for these blogs came from off campus, and the blog authors provided no evidence of helping to spread the technology on campus.

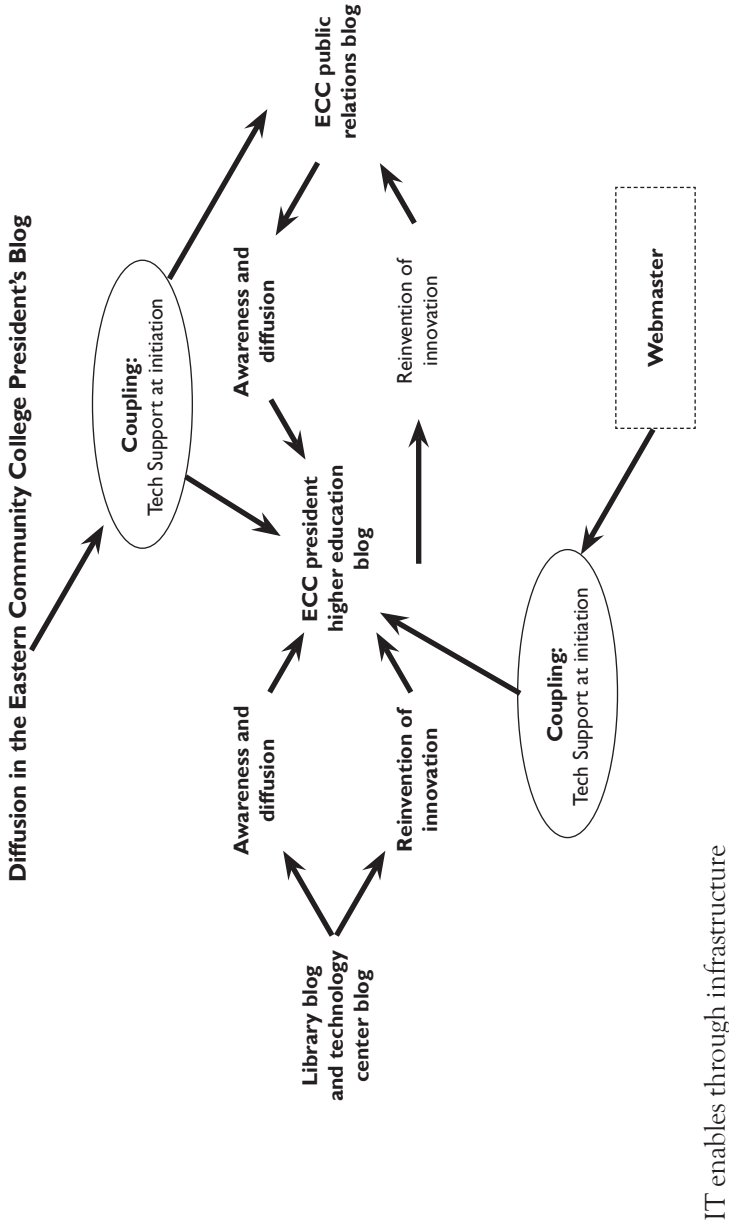
Case 1 was made up of the closest knit group of bloggers when compared with the other two schools. The case 1 bloggers were all aware of each other, they read each other's blogs, and there was a path of diffusion between blogs as the technology spread. Case 1 was also the smallest of the schools, but it is difficult to clearly attribute this closeness to institutional size. The role of the first innovation champion in case 1 seems to be a more significant factor. She clearly was an advocate for blogs and ran workshops that helped to spread the technology. She then provided technical support to anyone interested in setting up the blogs. In contrast, participants from case 2 did not identify such a champion on their campus. The library blog author and the faculty learning center blog author in case 3 definitely played a role in spreading the technology on their campus, but they did not organize training and, therefore, did not have the reach of the innovation champion from case 1.

All blog authors indicated they felt free to make changes to their existing blogs. They provided examples of adaptations they had made in terms of design, content, and the use of related technologies along with their blogs. Several blog authors noted that any future adaptations requiring budgetary resources may be an obstacle to future change, but some blog authors felt that they would be willing to contribute budget money if needed.

There were two primary limits to the adaptability of this technology that emerged from the interviews. The first and most significant was the unofficial nature of blogs on these campuses. In each case, there was not a single department officially charged with supporting or spreading blog technologies. The result of this is that all innovation was from the bottom up, which meant department level staff members had to recognize the benefits of the technology, have the knowledge of and seek help from

those who are using blogs, and have support from department leaders to initiate the blog. The second innovation champion noted that some staff members may be fearful to use blogs since the organization didn't set clear expectations for use (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Innovation Champion A**



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## **Diffusion in the eastern community college president's blog**

He said,

I think a lot of people are afraid to even start. They are afraid that they might post the wrong content, or they're going to post something that is at least . . . You know, I read a lot of technical stuff. You're going to post something that is technically incorrect. Somebody is going to jump on you, because you made a mistake. There's a lot of that kind of fear going on. That happens but you can't let stuff like that bother you.

The art department blog author from case 2 echoes these remarks, "Maybe more departments should have blogs, but without that technical support, you know, it just doesn't happen."

The second limitation, which was related to the first, was the staffing limitations across the campuses. All of the IT administrators made it clear they did not have the staff to support blogs. The blog authors accepted this as a fact of life. The library blog author from case 3 noted that blogs are not viewed as mission-critical systems and, therefore, are not supported. He said,

IT in some ways is static. You know, because, they are already doing as much as they can with what they have. So, to be pushing forward is a little bit difficult for them because they have lots of other projects that have higher priority. And so, they're not always able to, um, meet that need. Now, we have a faculty resource center, which is supposed to help faculty with technology and that has a staff of, like, three people. And, in theory, they should be the people assisting and pushing this sort of technology, but again, they too are more focused on supporting the official college-supported software.

These three cases presented evidence that the blogs increased the broader adaptability of the campus by sharing information between departments. Cases 1 and 3 provided the best examples of departments sharing knowledge across their campuses. Case 2 provided evidence of blogs sharing information within the department, but less clear evidence that they spread information across the campus. By making college staff members aware of projects and initiatives undertaken in other departments, blogs raise awareness and foster change.

Participants in all cases viewed blogs within the context of other technologies. It was clear their understanding of web 1.0 and e-mail set the context for how participants understood the blogs. Additionally, they

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also connected the blogs to other 2.0 technologies, especially Facebook and Twitter. When questions about misuse, resocialization, or termination were asked, experiences with these other technologies were often used to highlight problems or approaches from their campus.

## **Disintermediation**

The theme of disintermediation—bypassing traditional systems of communication—had several dimensions. The first was college employees bypassing traditional media outlets and communicating directly to the public. The second was departments bypassing college channels to communicate directly to the public. All blog authors recognized their blogs were public and they had some responsibility in terms of how they represented the college. The college president from case 1 noted, “We spend a lot of money on marketing. I view it as part of our public marketing and information campaign, so I think that these things [blogs] have value.” Interestingly enough, despite a desire to have a participatory exchange with their audience, almost all blog authors reported very few comments or feedback from readers.

The marketing and public relations administrators tended to be the most concerned about who the public saw as representing the official voice of the college even though almost all participants saw this as a potential problem. The marketing director and dean from case 3 made the strongest arguments that the “official” college voice was not a major concern and empowering employees to reach out and provide information outweighed this concern. She said,

The reality was that it was going to be hard to control it so instead, don't fight it. You know, and I'll probably get 90% of the people who want to come to the party, and there's always going to be 10% that don't. So don't focus on the 10% and fight them in meetings. Get the 90% that your public's going to see. So that's kind of where I left it.

## **Coupled relationships**

When compared with the standard 1.0 websites, the blogs across these cases were largely decoupled from other units. In fact, authors in cases 2 and 3 noted that they initiated their blogs in order to bypass some of the requirements placed on the 1.0 websites. There were a few cases of support from IT or marketing when initiating blogs, but for the most part, the blogs were implemented and operated with little to no support

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outside of the department. As the art department blog author in case 2 noted,

I appreciate the fact that I can do this blog and just do it. I didn't have to ask anyone's permission, you know, from IT. So, I appreciated that. That hands-off attitude is nice. On the other hand and in some other contexts, you wish that there was more technical support . . . It would be nice to have someone who could help set up blogs.

The blogs in case 1 are the most tightly coupled example with the innovation champion working with blog authors to set up and manage their blogs, but even in this example, the publication of content through the blogs is looser than it would be if it was accomplished using the standard college website.

There was very little evidence of vertical coupling across cases. Many blog authors indicated they did not need to seek input from above in the organizational structure. The library blog author in case 3 noted,

There's no need to go beyond library walls to get permission to do this sort of thing. Right now, I am in the process of redoing the library site again, because it's been, you know, three years or whatever, so . . . I am going to switch blogging software and maybe make a few interface tweaks. But, again, you know, there is nobody that I need to consult with on this.

Some blog authors did seek approval from immediate supervisors, but there is no evidence that approvals went further than that. The fact that the blogs are low cost removed them from the formal approval process.

## **Policy review**

None of the policies directly addressed blogs or web 2.0 technologies. The policies tended to address strict legal concerns like harassment or intellectual property and not offer guidance to the posting of content to the web. When policies did address content, it was done in a general way that did not link the technology to the larger purpose of the school or offer a means to submit content for review if there was a question. Thus, gray areas exist between strictly illegal acts and those that may not be deemed an appropriate use of the technology. In all cases, web policies tended to be more concerned with design requirements than with content creation.

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## Blog content review

The content reviews across cases demonstrate that blog authors remain true to the purpose of their respective blogs despite the fact none of them have formally created policy statements. The contents of the posts reflect the awareness of the unwritten participation rules blog authors discussed. The blogs that have a broader focus run a greater risk of breaking unwritten rules of the organization. These blogs—namely case 1 library blog, case 2 library blog, and case 1 president’s blog—are more likely to have statements of opinion or deal with controversial issues.

## Research questions

**Question 1:** *What control mechanisms have community colleges put in place to guide the publication of information to the World Wide Web using blog technologies?*

The control mechanisms around the blogs in these cases tended to be informally defined. They tended to be outside of the budget process and existing policies do not address them. The blog authors must use their understanding of organizational culture and unwritten participation rules to implement and utilize the technology.

**Question 2:** *How do these control mechanisms impact the adaptability of blogs to new needs that arise in the environment?*

A great degree of adaptability exists around the blogs to meet new needs. For the most part, the control mechanisms do not hamper the adaptability of blogs. However, there is evidence to suggest that new needs requiring organizational support or budget resources may go unmet.

**Question 3:** *How do these control mechanisms impact the coupling between the blogging unit and the unit responsible for maintaining web content within the organization?*

To a large degree, blogs decoupled the blogging department from units responsible for managing the college website. The blogs existed outside of the standard web infrastructure. However, cases 1 and 3 suggest the reinvention of blogs across campuses may create coupling between units that had not previously existed by spreading information and partnering to implement blogs.



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## Opportunities for examination

These findings open up an opportunity to examine the ways community colleges manage technology, how technology adapts and spreads across campuses, and how individuals work together to bring about change. The blogs under consideration are textbook examples of loose coupling among units in community colleges. The departmental blogs were both vertically buffered with little to no approvals or oversight from outside supervisors and horizontally buffered from support units across the organization. They were initiated through informal connections and partnerships, and they were largely outside of organizational control mechanisms. They reflect some of the findings presented by Levin (1998) who viewed change in community colleges as interplay between the external environment and internal control. For a variety of purposes, including the reduction of local media coverage, a desire to publicize events on campuses, and a desire to spread news about higher education, the blog authors were working to find ways to reach beyond campus while working among internal structures, controls, and limitations.

In a broader sense, the themes related to disintermediation that emerged in this study may demonstrate a further loosening from blogs. Weick (1976/2000) noted that decentralization was a core concept in loose systems. Blogs are a significant move toward the decentralization of content distribution and publication on the web. Weick (1982b) also noted that specialization within units can lead to looseness because the units become self-contained over time. This is demonstrated by the findings of the present study. Blogs allow local departments to easily distribute information to the public without the support of marketing or public relations departments. Blogs are also fairly easy to operate, so they can be implemented without the support of IT departments.

Of course, the blogs in this study may also represent the primary disadvantage of loose coupling identified by Weick (1976/2000), which is that these systems can be inefficient and slow to act. While it may be difficult to accurately gauge, one has to question the efficiency with which this technology has spread considering blogs have been in use on these campuses for many years. Considering this time period, blogs are not very pervasive. Case 1 demonstrated that some training can help to spread the technology. This may support Mars and Ginter (2007) who saw tighter coupling through the use of cross-unit committees and policy as creating a common view of the technology. The lack of awareness of college technology policy by participants supports DeLisse's (2000) recommenda-

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tions that policies be really integrated into the culture and communicated regularly or they will have little impact. Overall, the loosely coupled system model, which was the framework of this study, accurately described the community colleges in question.

### **Striking a balance**

Cameron (2000) and Ouchi (1978) found there is a need to strike a balance between control and looseness. This balance must limit risks and communicate innovations but still be loose enough to allow for variation and experimentation. Weick (2001) described the organization as “collections of people trying to make sense of what is happening around them” (p. 5), and it seems the act of blogging on these community college campuses has become an act of sense making. To a large extent, the blogs in these cases operated outside of the formal decision making structure of the colleges. They were a solution to local problems, but they were solutions that *made sense* within the broader organizational context. Figure 2 presents a visual summary of the blogs in this study. It lists factors that limit and increase adaptability that were reported by participants. It also includes factors that interplay during the initiation process and factors blog authors must consider with using the technology.

The findings of this study suggest a lack of balance, but not because there are too many controls, but because there are too few. Blog authors have been granted a great deal of freedom to experiment and innovate with blogs. In some instances, administrators may not be aware of blogs, but in most instances, administrators have knowingly given blog authors a free hand. The findings of this study suggest that a little bit of administrative intervention in terms of support and increased awareness for blogs could have significant impact in spreading the technology. The training offered by innovation champion A in case 1 suggests a small amount of support for this training could really spread the technology in significant ways. But administrators need to step in and make this happen, because it is clear IT departments do not want the job.

Additionally, the risks at the heart of the conundrum of control are still real for these three cases. Administrators and blog authors noted there has never been a problem so they did not need to formalize controls, but this is somewhat shortsighted. The blog authors have demonstrated a high degree of self-awareness, but this does not mean they will continue to be so aware into the future. Naturally, administrators will always have to grant a degree of trust to blogs authors, since no grouping of control

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mechanisms can perfectly ensure blog authors will not make a mistake or act irresponsibly. Additionally, as Lessig (1999) noted, there will be latent ambiguities when technologies change and adapt to a point where pre-existing policies do not address the new possibilities that changes bring about. However, administrators could better define how blogs and 2.0 tools fall in line with the college mission and offer guidance on how tools should be used. There may be opportunities for marketing or public relations departments to offer guidance in how to refer to the college or college policy in the very public realm of the web. Figure 3 is a construction presenting a continuum of looseness and tightness in terms of blogs and other web 2.0 technologies. The three campuses in this study fall on the left side—"Too Loose"—of the continuum. Campus leaders have an interest in communicating and sharing information. Control mechanisms can be utilized to emphasize use and enable creativity within the organizational culture.

### **Underestimating complexity**

The one note that continues to ring at the conclusion of this study is the one struck when comparing the web 1.0 sites to the blogs. The standard websites in each of these cases are much larger, more pervasive in the daily tasks of the college, and utilized by a greater number of organizational members requiring a greater degree of cross-unit cooperation. The standard websites in each case are more tightly controlled with standard processes for initiation and defined design templates. It is this standardization that drove almost all of the blog authors to initiate their blogs.

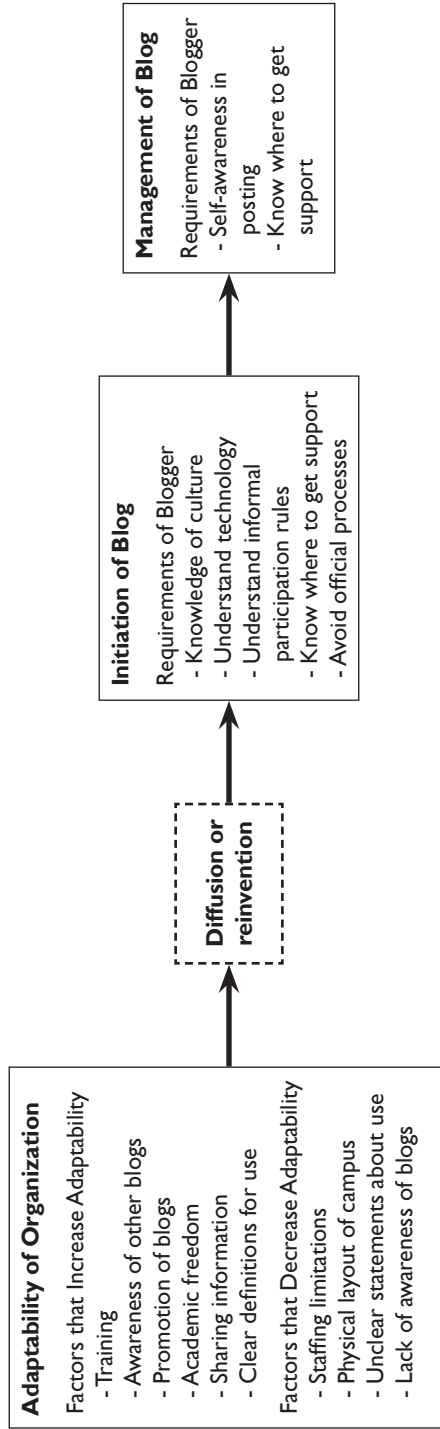
There are many good reasons to standardize 1.0 sites. Among these are standard navigation, consistent designs, and efficiency in providing support to departments starting and maintaining subsites. However, those who have participated in simplifying the use of 1.0 sites have limited the technology to a degree where they are not meeting the needs of local departments. More importantly, they lost sight that their job was not just to standardize practice, but also to facilitate use and meet new needs. Weick himself said, "My worry when executives say, 'keep it simple, stupid,' is that they're underestimating the complexity of their own organizations and environments" (Coutu, 2003, p. 86). The great promise of the web in the mid-1990s was its democratizing nature (Blood, 2002; Burstein, 2005), but much of the simplification of the 1.0 sites in these cases have underestimated the complexity of the organization and robbed the technology of this benefit. The ways campus leaders have solved the conun-

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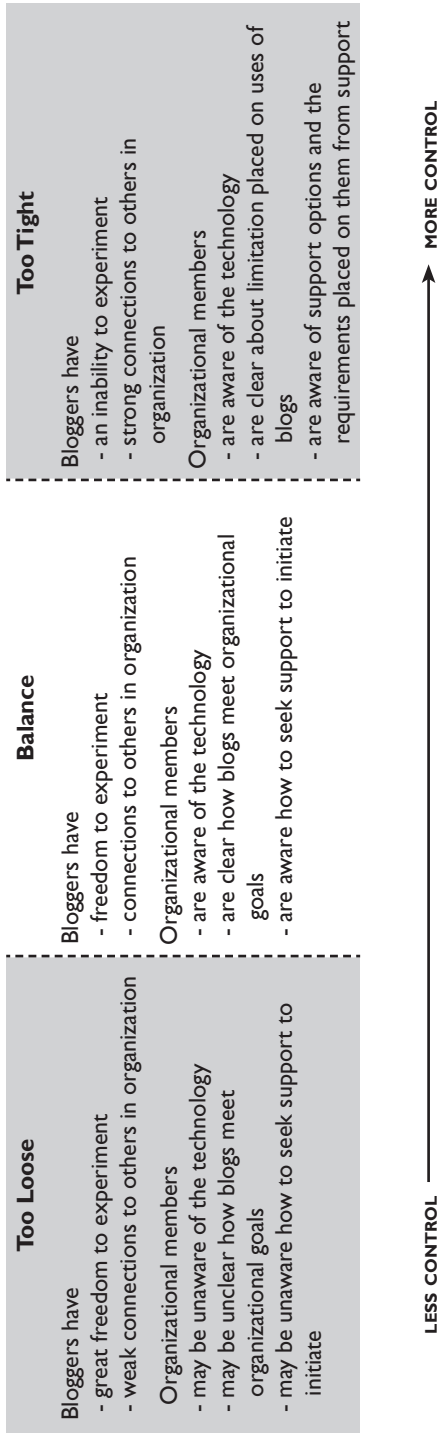
drum of control for 1.0 sites is by tightening down the hatches, limiting variation, and limiting participation.

At this point in history, blogs and other 2.0 technologies are still relatively new and in limited use on campuses, but it is clear that blogs and other social media sites are sweeping across campus websites. Web 2.0 tools are not as widespread at the department level as 1.0 pages, but their potential seems to be significant. Blog authors are free to experiment, and Facebook and Twitter authors are free to implement and utilize these technologies. New tools are opening up new communications potential not imagined just a few years ago. It is like the mid-1990s all over again. The IT administrators interviewed in this study all noted that their policies did not properly address 2.0 technologies and that at some point in the future they may have to go through the updating process. If use is emphasized and complexity is recognized, control mechanisms could be put in place that foster use and offer guidance that protect the organization while still encouraging local departments to meet their own complex needs. However, the real possibility exists that oversimplified, standardized practices similar to those for 1.0 sites could be put in place around 2.0 tools. This would surely be a missed opportunity to utilize the advantage that loose systems provide, which is rich innovation, creative practice, and specialized approaches that meet the diverse needs of community college students (see Figure 2, next page).

Figure 2. Descriptive Model of Blog Cases 1, 2, and 3



**Figure 3. Striking a Balance Between Looseness and Tightness**



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