

Corporate Blogging: Building community through persistent digital talk

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Abstract

Blogging has grown exponentially on the Internet; however, the role of blogs within the enterprise remains ambiguous. Why and how do individuals use internal corporate blogs? What results do both individuals and the corporation realize from internal blogs? Our exploratory study of a large global IT corporation's internal blogging system analyzed usage statistics, interviews, and the results of an anonymous, web-based survey. We found that benefits to users were social as well as informational, and that connecting with their community was an important value sought by all types of users. Heavy users of the system realized the greatest benefits, but they also constituted the core of an online community that provided important benefits to medium users as well.

1. Introduction

Weblogs (or blogs for short) are “frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence” [6]. They have emerged as an important new digital medium in the last few years, with Internet-based blogs growing exponentially [6]. Blogs, or the Blogosphere as it is often called, have received considerable attention in the popular media (e.g., being mentioned in over 1,000 articles in May 2006¹) and, to a lesser extent, in the scholarly literature where they have been studied, for example, as forms of social activity and forums for self-expression [7, 9, 12].

Corporate blogs (the use of blogs within firms) have emerged more recently and are much less well understood. There are at least two different kinds of corporate blogs: external blogs, which can be read by people outside the corporation; and internal blogs, which are only accessible by people within the firm.

¹Factiva search of “blog/s, blogging, weblog/s” on June 4, 2006 yielded 1089 results from newspapers, newswires, and magazines for the preceding month (May 4 to June 4, 2006).

Two years ago, Liz Lawley [10] noted in her own blog that one of the areas of research that is much needed is “study of the use of weblogs as tools in specific organizational contexts.” One of the few such studies is Grudin’s examination of the use of project management blogs as knowledge management tools within Microsoft, a specific application of blogs that is still rare but potentially very useful to both individuals and organizations [5].

This paper reports on a preliminary exploration of why and how individuals engaged in internal corporate blogging within one large, global IT company (Mega, a pseudonym). Our interest was generated by an intriguing observation that on this site, the heaviest bloggers contributed almost twice as many comments on other people’s weblogs as they posted entries on their own weblogs. In contrast, users with the lowest blogging activity on this site commented on others’ weblogs much less than they posted on their own weblogs. This generated our interest in exploring the social aspects of blogging, and in this paper we report on an exploratory study that examined why users blog within Mega, and with what consequences for themselves and their organization.

2. Methods

Mega’s internal blogging engine, BlogSite, is a blog hosting platform within the company’s Intranet environment, which hosts blogs that can only be read by employees of the company. BlogSite is a large system with some interesting features, such as a front page that shows the most recent posts, the most popular posts, and the posts with the most comments. These features allow users to easily and quickly see what has been happening in the community. Because this is a corporate environment, the site also provides blogging guidelines, including information about Mega’s rules of general business conduct, requirements to comply with copyright, fair use and financial disclosure laws, the importance of not posting confidential material, the need to respect the audience,

and the value of avoiding inflammatory language and controversial topics such as politics and religion.

Our exploratory analysis of the use of BlogSite within Mega is based on three types of data: usage statistics for the more than 20,000 users who had ever registered on the system since its inception in 2003; interviews with a few of the highest users as well as a number of non-users; and an anonymous, web-based survey of a stratified sample of users, with the classification based on their BlogSite usage levels: low, medium, and high.

Examining the overall usage statistics allowed us to identify the heaviest users of the systems, and this led us to do a series of one hour individual interviews with four of the top bloggers. We then conducted two group interviews, first with a set of six non-users of the system who appeared to fit the demographic profile of active users (technical job, working on site), and second with two non-users of the system who fit a different demographic profile (both remote workers, one in marketing and the other in technology). In all these interviews, we asked general, open-ended questions about why people did or did not blog, what where their experiences in doing so, and what costs and benefits (for themselves and the corporation) they saw from blogging or not blogging. We analyzed these interviews qualitatively, identifying common themes about usage, experiences, and value of blogs.

We then used these themes to develop a web-based survey, which we administered to a sample of 300 users of the system, stratified into three equal-sized but distinct segments based on usage: *heavy users* (50 or more posts); *medium users* (5 to 20 posts and 8 or more comments); and *low users* (less than 2 posts). We used both posting and commenting activity as a criterion for identifying medium users because we were particularly interested in the social aspects of blogging and commenting activity is an important possible indicator of it. Furthermore, because the entire system had been running for less than two years at the time of our study, we used absolute contributions to the system rather than relative ones as our measure. These latter will become more important as the BlogSite system matures over time.

One hundred people in each user segment were sent the web-based survey link, and we obtained an overall response rate of 54%. Of the 161 users who responded, 59 were heavy users, 54 medium users, and 48 low users. The survey asked a variety of closed- and open-ended questions. Through the close-ended questions we aimed to understand how long people have been blogging, whether they blogged externally as well as internally, how many blogs they read or posted to, and how often they updated their blogs and profiles. The

open-ended questions asked users about the following: their expectations of the costs and benefits of participating in BlogSite; their actual experiences of the costs and benefits of blogging; their understanding of their managers' views on blogging in general, and their blogging activity in particular; specific examples of how BlogSite had helped users with their jobs; and the consequences of their BlogSite blog (e.g., whether they had been contacted outside of their blog based on their posts or comments). We analyzed the survey data by developing a coding scheme based on iterative, close readings, and then clustering a few coding categories into more general ones, as described below.

3. Results

BlogSite was originally built as a "self-publishing" platform. Mega, as a large IT company, has a wide variety of other information tools, such as email, IM, mailing lists, discussion forums, team rooms, and wikis. BlogSite was piloted as an experiment in a new communication medium. Rolled out in November 2003, the system was intended to enable employees to publish their personal data to a portal, thus getting information out of email and onto the corporate intranet. System champions expected social benefits, such as new collaborations and easier expertise location, to flow from information contained in the blogs, rather than directly from the blogging activity itself. As we examine below, the results differed somewhat from these expectations.

3.1 Types of users and their usage

Usage statistics give us an overview of demographics and use. Overall, registered users of the BlogSite system represent a small portion of the total corporation (around 6%). However, usage has increased dramatically over time (see figure 1).

The heavy users of the system provide a core group. Although there are more than 20,000 registered users, only 17% have weblogs and only 3% of those actively write blogs (defined as containing 10 or more weblog posts). The top 80 users (or less than 1% of registered users) account for 42% of all weblog entries and 59% of all comments.

The survey results highlighted some interesting differences between the three stratified user groups. On average, heavy users have been blogging slightly longer internally than externally. By contrast, medium users, and low users have been blogging externally longer than internally (see figure 2).

When they visited BlogSite, 79% of the heavy users commented on someone else's blog at least once

a month, while 92% of them updated their own blog at least once a month (see figure 3). For heavy users, thus, commenting on others' blogs was a significant part of their blogging activity.

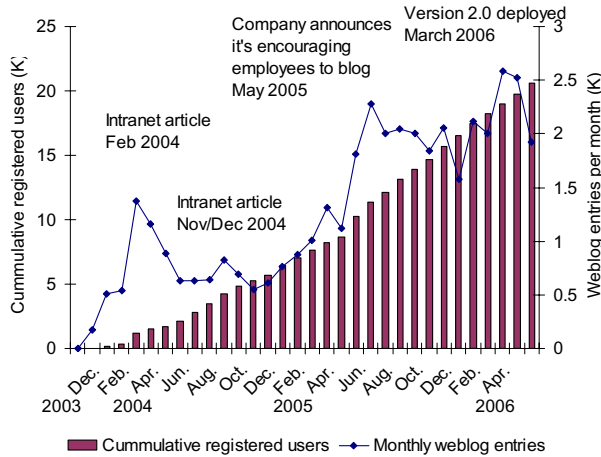


Figure 1: Posts per month on the system

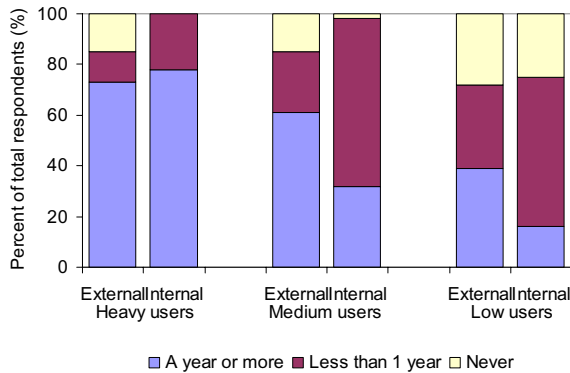


Figure 2: Internal and external blogging

This high level of commenting activity on the part of heavy users matches an analysis we did of usage statistics for the entire system. The top five bloggers on the system have significantly more posts than anyone else on the system and post comments more than twice as often as they post entries in their own weblog (see figure 4, based on site usage statistics). These two sets of results together, while insufficient to ascribe causality, suggest a relationship between amount of active involvement with others on the system and frequency of use of the system.

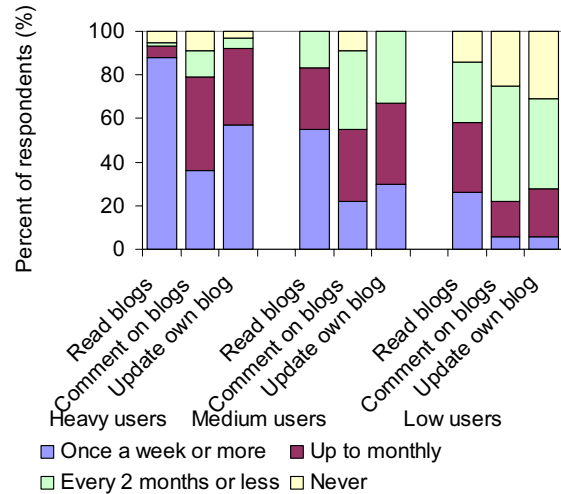


Figure 3: Frequency of blogging activities

Another interesting result of the survey is that all usage groups appear to read others' blogs more often than they update their own blogs (see figure 3), which could indicate some type of lurking in all user segments. Because active lurkers (people who actively read but don't post) can extend the influence of the online community to the offline community of a company [14], this could indicate benefits from the system that go beyond those experienced by direct users. This pattern is most obvious in the low users of the system, where 58% report that they read other people's blogs at least once a month, while only 28% say they update their own blog that often.

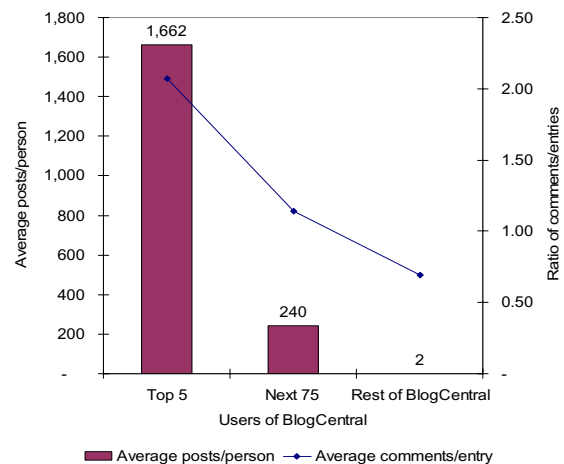


Figure 4: Posting and commenting by bloggers

As we examined the demographics of the users surveyed, the medium users stood out from the heavy or low users. This user group was significantly newer to the company (39% of them have been with the

company five years or less, compared with 20% of heavy users and 26% of low users). As we discuss below, many of the medium users report seeking out the BlogSite system to find information about the company, an activity that is not surprising given their relative newcomer status within Mega.

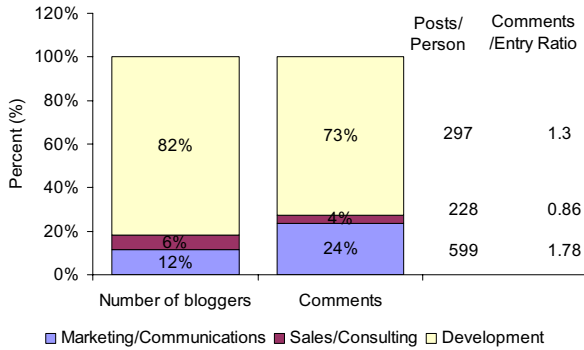


Figure 5: Commenting behavior by bloggers

Our findings also suggest that diversity of participants may be an important social benefit of blogging. When we analyzed the top 80 bloggers by job roles (marketing/communications, sales/consulting, and development/engineering), we found that although they are primarily in engineering (82% of the top 80 bloggers are in development roles), those in marketing commented twice as much as they wrote entries in their own weblogs. They contributed almost 25% of all the comments by the top bloggers, and posted more than twice as often as any other group (see figure 5). These differences suggest that technical experts provide content and marketing and communications experts provide commentary and linkages. They also suggest that different types of roles are important to create a virtual community. Further, as Constant, Sproull and Kiesler found, diversity of ties in a large organizational computer network can contribute positively to people being able to solve technical problems [2].

3.2 General benefits from blogging

To identify how and why participants used BlogSite and to understand the consequences for themselves and the company, the survey included three specific open-ended questions about perceived and experienced benefits of corporate blogging, as well as requests for specific examples of work-related benefits. In the following charts, the perceived and experienced benefits are labeled “expected” and “actual” benefits.

Not surprisingly, heavy users of the system derived the most benefit from blogging. Heavy users came to the system with the strongest sense of what they would

get out of blogging and then received the most benefit. Only 4% of heavy users report receiving “no benefit” or note “don’t know.” Low users, on the other hand, see significantly less benefit than either the heavy or the medium users (see figure 6). When asked the same question about actual benefit received, 30% of low users say they receive “no benefit.” More strikingly, 65% of low users say they either receive no benefit or little long-term benefit that is directly work-related.

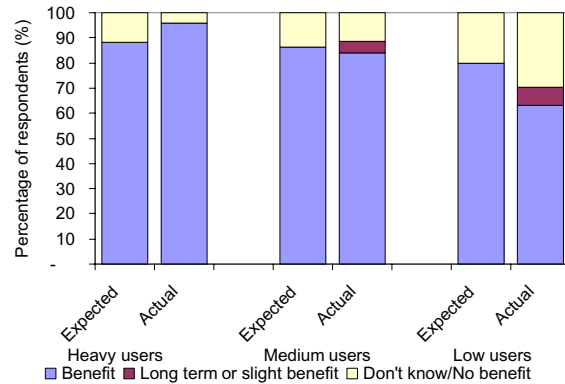


Figure 6: Benefits from blogging by user segment

Medium users appear to derive almost the same amount of work-related benefits (71%) from blogging as heavy users, even though their usage is less (see figures 2 and 3). If medium users can derive work-related benefits without a large investment of time, then it may be that internal blogging communities with a small core of heavy users and a larger group of medium users can provide important value to the corporation, perhaps even comparable to a community of all heavy users. At the organizational level, this suggests some interesting tradeoffs about costs (in time to individuals) and benefits (to the company) from the blogging activity of employees.

We clustered the results of the benefits questions to allow for comparison across the responses. Three general types of benefits seem evident: informational, social, and other (see table 1). We included “solved a problem” and “feedback on an idea” as informational benefits, because we coded on the primary motivational and outcome benefit. While both the benefits of problem solution and feedback require social interaction with others on the system, the intended and received results are informational.

Figure 7 shows that both heavy users and low users came onto BlogSite expecting significant social benefits, while medium users expected both social and informational benefits. Heavy and medium users’ actual social and informational benefits exceeded their expectations. Interestingly, heavy users, with high

actual social benefits, were also most likely to mention specific work-related informational benefits in the examples they provided (49%).

Table 1: Types of reported benefits from blogging

<u>Informational</u>	<u>Social</u>
Getting/sharing information	Engaging in dialogue
Journaling	Building community
Problem solving	Communicating
Getting/giving feedback	Collaborating
	Gaining perspective
<u>Other</u>	Gaining company pulse
Managing upwards	Networking
Working efficiently	Developing Reputation
Self expression	Building Career
Replacing technology	

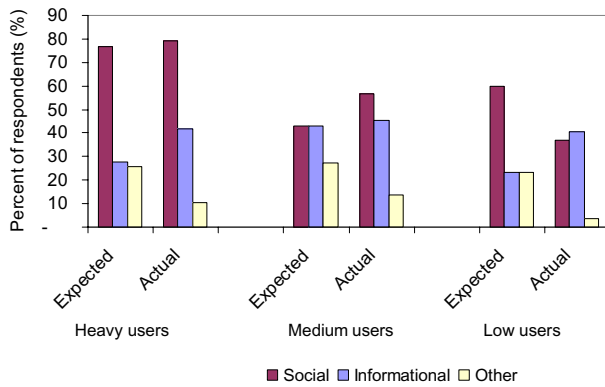


Figure 7: Expectations and experiences of benefits

Heavy users expected social benefits and the actual benefits they experienced were both social and informational. For instance, one of our interviewees (a heavy user) was a remote worker on a team, most of whose members were located on site with the manager. This interviewee mentioned that having an active blog and having his manager subscribe to it was a great way to keep his manager updated on what he was doing.

In contrast to heavy users, low users did not experience the social benefits they expected, but they did receive more actual informational benefits than they expected. Interestingly, low users were significantly less able to cite specific work-related benefits (<40%) than either heavy or medium users (>70%), indicating that work-related benefits may be related to usage level.

Medium users appear to be coming to BlogSite looking for information as much as for social benefits (as noted, this may reflect their relative newcomer status within Mega). These users not only get the

benefits they expected, but the actual benefits they experience are higher than they expected.

The actual benefits of corporate blogging for medium users are skewed towards social benefits. Many of their comments about specific work-related benefits reflect these social aspects, for example:

“It has given me connections to people around the company that I would have not otherwise have. In rare cases, it answers a technical question I’m struggling with that none of my immediate coworkers has an answer for.”

“It really helped me communicate with the field and give them a static page to go to refer to issues that other people experienced.”

“[I] gained executive visibility and someone pursued [my] idea.”

The extent of these social benefits is interesting given that medium users may not have come to the system to expand their network or build reputations.

Having reviewed the overall benefits of blogging, we now examine a couple in more detail, focusing specifically on the benefits of community and corporate knowledge.

3.3 Benefits of community

In the interviews, we found that the notion of *community* came up several times in a variety of ways. Conducting the survey allowed us to investigate whether other users also found community an important benefit of participating in blogging. To do so we attempted to cluster some of the users’ expected and experienced social benefits into something that we might term “community-related benefits.”

One of the most prevalent responses to our question about expected benefits from blogging was “to communicate.” Variants on this response included: to communicate “quickly,” “easily,” “widely,” “freely,” “without bureaucracy,” “informally,” “in an unstructured manner,” and “in context.” This was interesting as people often think of communication as a way to accomplish something else. Focusing on the process of communication as a benefit in itself highlights that participants recognized communication to be as much about finding a way to connect to another person as it was about the actual information and ideas exchanged. Similarly, “building a network” included such reported benefits as “getting to know someone,” “social networking,” “meeting people from other parts of the company/outside my circle,” “making a friend,” and “finding an expert.”

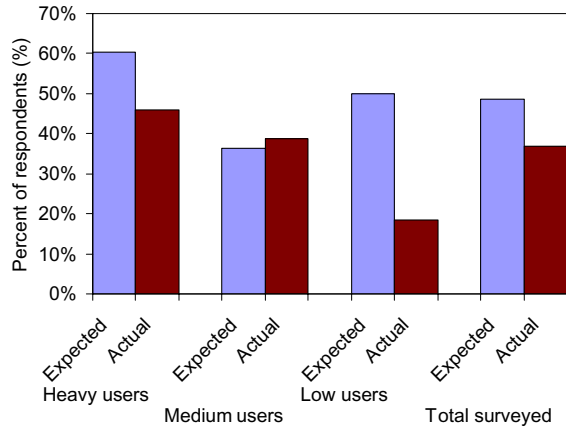


Figure 8: Examining community-related benefits

Based on this examination of users’ specific reported social benefits, we combined “dialogue,” “community,” “communication” “networking,” and collaboration” to create the aggregate category of “community-related benefits.” We then used this new category of community-related benefits to compare expected and actual benefits across the three user segments (see figure 8).

What is striking about the findings is how high the aggregated community-related expectations are across the groups. Of the heavy users, 60% expected community-related benefits from joining BlogSite, while 50% of low users had these expectations. Interestingly, neither of these two user segments experienced as high community-related benefits as they had expected, with low users experiencing the most dissonance. In contrast, the medium users display a different pattern. As mentioned before, a large portion of this group was looking for information. Thus, the community-related benefits actually received by this group were higher than they expected, although still lower than the actual community-related benefits received by the heavy users.

While the work-related aspects of these community benefits were lower than expected for all groups, they are still substantial for both heavy users (27%) and medium users (26%). Consider the following examples offered by users:

“My network is SO MUCH BIGGER now. People know me from my blogging. I am more tied into people I would only know very surface level otherwise. Blogging inside [the company] has helped me build my personal brand sort of...and it’s also give me a peep into what other [people in the company] are thinking. I have collaborated on projects and articles, set up the podcasting pilot all due to blogging. It’s freakin awesome.”

“[I have gotten] a sense of community. Important for a work-at-home employee.”

“...as a remote worker (3-4days/wk at home office) [blogging] makes me feel more connected to [Mega].”

3.4 Benefits of corporate knowledge

Two other interesting corporate-specific benefits emerged, ones that appear to be particularly valuable to a large, geographically-dispersed company such as Mega with different product areas. We see these are related to gaining knowledge about the corporation, both broad-based (“perspective”) and focused (“pulse”) (see figure 9).

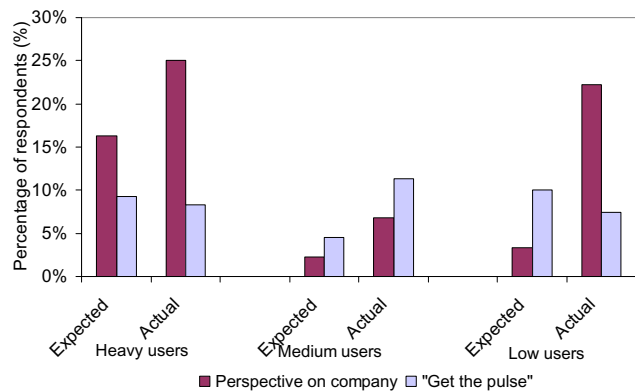


Figure 9: Benefits of gaining corporate knowledge

The first of these is gaining broad knowledge about aspects of the firm (e.g., new policies, strategies, events, or initiatives). We term it gaining “perspective on the company,” and 18% of the respondents to the survey (29 users) listed this as a valued benefit of using BlogSite. In a few of our interviews, a specific example was offered of such value. In mid-2005 Mega announced some changes in its pension plan, and several people mentioned that the blogs had given them a broader perspective on the implications of this change and that this had made the transition easier. Survey respondents also offered some examples of how BlogSite had provided them with a broader sense of what was happening within and across Mega:

“[Blogging in Mega] ... has given me a peep into what other[s] are thinking.”

“I have gained perspective on how people in other groups throughout Mega work, and, thereby, [felt] an enhanced sense of community.”

“Learned of events inside [Mega] that are not well marketed in my organization.”

Gaining perspective on the company through the blogs is how users learn about what is happening in Mega, and, through this, gain broader knowledge of the corporation than they would have if they just interacted with their close circle of colleagues. It also makes them feel more connected to the organization.

The second corporate knowledge benefit is that of “getting the pulse” of the company. Where gaining perspective is gaining broad-based knowledge, “getting the pulse” is the gaining of a more focused and specific understanding of what is currently valued in the firm. A number of users mentioned this benefit, for example:

“[getting a] better “pulse” on things being discussed – I work with teams who can translate this “pulse” into action. Also get some good feedback as we go about how things are working, or not working.”

“...knowing what’s important to employees.”

“...helps me monitor what issues are on people’s minds.”

“It’s interesting to read about the experiences and expertise of other [people in the company]. I feel like I have a better feel for the pulse of the company.”

This sense of “getting the pulse” involves developing a feel for what is important to employees and appears to be related to the opportunity for others to express themselves within the corporation. On blogs, people lower down in the organization can be “heard” by people higher up in the organization. Unlike “watercooler” conversation, blogs persist and can be read by others throughout the organization, both in local and in distributed sites, and both in time and over time. The textual persistence of blogs is particularly useful for leaving a trace that others may access at various times, for example, newcomers to Mega or executives trying to get a sense for their team or assess the climate in their division. In addition, such a trace provides a resource for those whose job it is to understand what employees are thinking and ensure that organizational initiatives are communicated effectively. In the case of Mega, the communications team actively monitors the BlogSite regularly so that they can keep track of emerging issues, and respond when they deem appropriate.

3.5 Barriers to blogging

Although there appear to be a number of specific benefits to internal corporate blogging, there are also some costs and barriers to wider adoption and use. A detailed analysis of the costs of the system is beyond the scope of our study. However, our interviews and the survey generated some insights into what some of

these might be. For example, a number of heavy users observed that blogging involved a lot of time. Interestingly, they tended to frame this time commitment in terms of investment rather than costs, suggesting they viewed the time well spent. Such assessments of time and benefits are subjective. As Fulk et al. found, individual contributions to a knowledge repository tend to be influenced by individual gains, and the experienced costs are both subjective and variable across individuals [3].

With respect to barriers, most respondents noted that they do not use blogs more frequently because they have “no time.” When asked why they do not comment more frequently on others’ blogs, a number responded, “No need to pontificate,” while others noted that it takes more time to write a comment on another person’s blog than it does to post to one’s own weblog. This suggests that people take commenting on other people’s blogs quite seriously. Several people explained that not only did they want to comment thoughtfully, but that doing so would also entail committing to coming back later to check for responses from the blogger, possibly obligating them to a further round of comment and response. The following quotes give a flavor of some of these concerns:

“Constructive comments take a long time to write. Usually just don’t have time to craft the right message. Don’t just want to fire off any old comment, want it to be carefully thought out and succinct.”

“Again, takes too much time. Moreover, once I post a comment, then I have to remember to come back to see the follow-up to those comments – takes too much time.”

Other barriers to use that were mentioned included some technical complaints such as “slow refreshes,” “too hard to find information,” and a lack of certain types of features. Many of these barriers can be addressed through technical solutions.² Some respondents complained that blogs “lacked readership” and that there was “nothing interesting to read.” These are issues that may get resolved as more people join the community and contribute both readership and content. As with other online communities, a critical mass of participants is necessary to encourage further growth [11]. “Not knowing how to get started” and “not relevant to my business goals” indicate that additional communication may be required, informing possible users about how to blog and offering them concrete, job-related examples of benefits.

² The initial blog server was not built for the current scale of use and version 2.0 came out after the survey was conducted.

Our interviews with non-users of the system revealed a range of reasons why they didn't blog, some familiar (lack of time) and others more surprising (loss of control or inhibiting):

"[I] saw the advertising in May [2004], but didn't feel like I had the luxury of time and there would be better ways to document of my work."

"Working in market [research], I guess I could put up the 4-5 most-requested information, but then I would lose control of who saw it and would lose the interaction that tells me what they do with it."

"What makes blogs interesting is being controversial or personal and if you can't really do either [in a corporate setting], what's the point?"

"Corporate blogging doesn't feel natural. [You] have to be very careful about what you say which creates some inertia."

The concern about control over information is not unique to blogging (for example, it emerged as an important issue of potential users of groupware [13]), however it does suggest interesting differences between internal corporate blogs and external blogs, and indicates a rich area for further study.

3.6 Connections beyond blogs

In our interviews, a couple of people noted that they contacted people outside of BlogSite after engaging with them on the system. In our survey, we asked whether respondents had contacted anyone outside of BlogSite and whether they themselves had ever been contacted in this way. If blogging is a forum for creating social connections, then the results are telling. About 60% of heavy users (17 respondents) have contacted people outside of the system because of something they read on BlogSite, while only 30% of low users (6 respondents) have done so (see figure 10). Additionally, about 70% (25 respondents) of heavy users and only about 10% (2 respondents) of low users have been contacted because of something they posted on BlogSite (see figure 11).

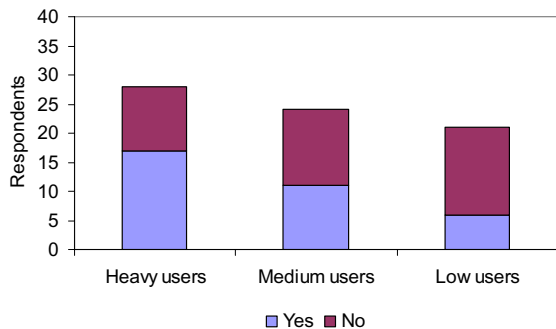


Figure 10: Contacts initiated outside of BlogSite

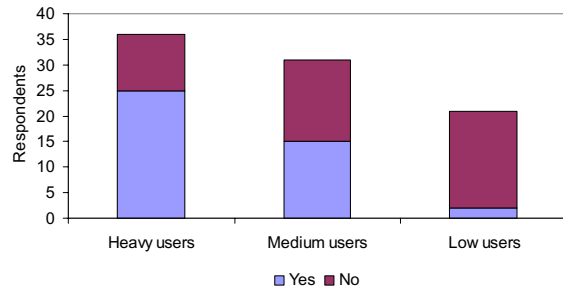


Figure 11: Contacts received outside of BlogSite

Table 2: Reasons for contacting/being contacted outside of BlogSite

<i>Situations when you contacted someone (outside of BlogSite) because of something you read on BlogSite?</i>	<i>Situations when you have been contacted (outside of BlogSite) because of something you posted on BlogSite?</i>
Personal communication	Personal communication
To ask questions about post	Questioned about my post
To initiate collaboration	Wanted my collaboration
To ask/say something and not be publicly quoted	Wanted to use my code/content
To give recommendations to improve their technology	Wanted my expert opinion/help
To get an opinion/help from an expert on my problem	Looking for specific customer help
To get the blogger to participate on my project	Offered positive comments about my posts in phone call
To follow-up with someone who commented on my blog	Asked to do a press interview/write an article
To forward links to other bloggers	Contacted by an alumnus of my school
To shut down offensive content	Followed up my post by sending comments by email
To shut down political conversations	People like to flame in private
	Was asked to remove confidential material
	Someone thought I'd violated the blog guidelines

Reasons for why respondents chose to contact a blogger outside of BlogSite highlight the social aspects of blogging. Conversations begun as posts that become personal, or relationships that develop on BlogSite, tend to be taken off the blogs and into email and other forms of communication. Topics of conversations that are taken off-line range from requesting specific help

from an expert, initiating a collaboration with a blogger, and trying to recruit the blogger to work on a particular project, to suggesting where to get a haircut in New York, and expressing sympathy for someone who is ill (see table 2).

An examination of who has been contacted due to something they posted on BlogSite reveals that heavy users are the most often contacted and for largest variety of reasons. The most prevalent reasons include: wanted expert opinion/help, had a question about a post, wanted to collaborate, wanted to use code or content, and personal communication (see table 2). These reflect some of the benefits mentioned above: building network and engaging expertise.

4. Discussion

The heavy users of BlogSite appear to provide an active core for the community both in terms of posting content and in terms of actively commenting on other people's content. Although this tool was originally intended as an easy place for "personal publishing," the majority of users surveyed came onto the system looking for community-related benefits. In an organizational context, this tool provides a means for creating social ties and the benefits that extend from having these ties across geographies and divisions.

In Granovetter's paper on the strength of weak ties [4, p. 202], he suggests that "individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system" and that "new ideas will spread slowly, scientific endeavors will be handicapped." In connecting people from parts of the organization that normally would not have contact, blogs seem to create similarly diverse ties as those needed to create a strong social system within an organization. In particular, the examples of getting the company pulse and getting company perspective speak to exactly the types of information from distant parts of the social system that are so valuable in creating a strong social system.

We also see evidence of weak ties strengthening, as a large number of people build on contacts begun on BlogSite, developing personal relationships and work-related collaborations in the offline world. Granovetter highlights the value of strong ties as well as weak ties:

"Weak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle; but strong ties have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more available" [4, p. 209].

One of the comments made in our interviews was that business people on the system asked technical questions and technical people were exploring

business-related questions. Although we cannot verify this association, it is consistent with the strong community aspect evident in our other findings. It also indicates that the community space is trusted enough and informal enough that employees are willing to risk asking questions outside their area of expertise.

Kalman et al. suggest that communication is a low-cost/low-risk first step that may lead to higher cost/risk collective action [8]. In a corporation such as Mega where coordination among groups is critical (e.g., software has to run on hardware), corporate blogging may provide such a first step, leading subsequently to the more valuable (and difficult) cross-functional collaborations that create breakthrough innovations.

The real benefit of corporate blogging may thus be to create an informal mechanism that links disparate, far-flung parts of the organization into constructive contact. In a company as large and diverse as Mega, networking is understood to be very important. Not only do internal training materials have dedicated sections discussing the importance of "networking," but during the orientation session that everyone takes on joining Mega, networking is presented as a critical factor for succeeding in the firm. Blogs appear to offer an important way for employees to build and sustain such networks and develop relationships and their reputations over time.

We have seen in the above analysis that a core of heavy users provides benefits not just for themselves but also for the medium users of the system. If bloggers and active lurkers also extend this benefit beyond the blogging community itself to non-blogging members of the firm, then the relatively modest cost to the company of having some employees spending significant time blogging internally could be particularly valuable. While early adopters of blogs appear to be getting considerable value from blogs, educating managers and executives on the potential value of blogs will also be important. The biggest concerns management had about blogs were associated with policing them and their use for non-work-related activity. Both issues can be addressed through education and careful policies.

Blanchard and Horan talk about two types of virtual communities—those that reinforce physically compact communities and those that connect geographically dispersed communities of interest—and find the former more effective at creating social capital than the latter [1]. Corporate blogs such as the one in Mega may represent a third type of virtual community whose members are geographically dispersed, but who share a common organizational culture and identity. In such cases, the online community may reinforce the sense of belonging to the organization and consequently build

more social capital than the geographically dispersed virtual communities discussed by Blanchard and Horan. Such virtual communities may create community benefits to the organization beyond what social and informational benefits they create for individual participants. For large organizations, this could be especially important.

This sense of belonging, may also reinforce the information gathering aspect of blogs. In Constant et al.'s research, information providers who help information seekers through a sense of "organizational motivation" tend to provide the more useful answers [2]. The community and organizational aspects of blogging could similarly enhance knowledge sharing within the organization, not just by creating ties, but by enhancing people's sense of organizational citizenship.

We have found that blogging appears to create significant social as well as informational benefits for users of the system. The community benefit and the connections created begin as weak ties with values of perspective and information. Over time, stronger ties develop and social benefits are augmented. The persistence of information in blogs provides a valuable tool for members of the organization, including managers and executives, to "see" and learn about employee concerns, emerging issues, and important trends in the corporation.

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