The looseness of loose coupling: 
the use and misuse of “loose coupling” in HE research

Mari Elken, NIFU | mari.elken@nifu.no
Martina Vukasovic, CHEGG, Ghent University | martina.vukasovic@ugent.be

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Please do not cite!

Abstract

The term ‘loose coupling’ (Weick, 1976) has been a term that has over time been widely employed in higher education research. Building partly on the ‘garbage can model’ of decision-making (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; March & Olsen, 1976), it proposed an alternative that discarded purely rational and linear views on organizing and governing, emphasizing instead ambiguity and complexity. The review of higher education research literature presented in this study clearly shows that the concept has frequently been used either as a given, a basic premise to study organizational processes in higher education; or as a diagnosis to the complexity of higher education organization that inhibits implementation of reforms. Thus, while Weick in the 1976 article proposed a range of possible operationalisations, the term has become rather taken for granted in literature about higher education, being a standard explanation for complexity and ambiguity, rather than an empirically studied phenomenon itself. Orton and Weick (1990, p. 203) noted that the term loose coupling was underspecified, being “widely used and diversely understood”, adopted but not studied in terms of its underlying structure, themes and implications. This seems true for higher education research to present day: it is often vaguely defined and operationalized, and it is often not clear how loose coupling has actually been identified empirically. This paper provides first results of systematization and critical examination of how journal articles focusing on higher education in the last 40 years have employed the term ‘loose coupling’ / ‘loosely coupled systems’.
Introduction

“The concept of organizations as loosely coupled systems is widely used and diversely understood”. This statement effectively summarizes one of the key points of this paper, but it is almost thirty years older. It is the opening sentence of the 1990 article in which J. Douglas Orton and the ‘father’ of loose coupling Karl E. Weick review how the concept has been used since its original publication in 1976 and offer a reconceptualization and a ‘preliminary model of loose coupling theory’ (Orton & Weick, 1990, p. 203).

Weick’s article “Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems”, Clark’s ‘organisational saga’ (1972), Cohen, March & Olsen ‘garbage can decision-making model’ (1972) and Meyer & Rowan ‘myth and ceremony’ (1977) articles, constitutes a unique set of 1970s publications advancing widely used conceptual and theoretical insights based on empirical analysis of (higher) education organizations. As will be demonstrated in this paper, these articles have become a staple ingredient of social science research, making them often cited, albeit to varying degree (Table 1). This marks a collection of thought from higher education research that has effectively ‘travelled’ far beyond their original empirical focus.

Table 1 – Citations, according to Google Scholar (30/08/2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Total (approx.)</th>
<th>Since 2012 (approx.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clark 1972: organisational saga</td>
<td>1 100</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen, March, Olsen 1972: garbage can decision-making model</td>
<td>11 000</td>
<td>3 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyer, Rowan 1977: myth and ceremony, decoupling</td>
<td>25 500</td>
<td>11 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weick 1976: loosely coupled systems</td>
<td>8 700</td>
<td>2 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orton &amp; Weick: re-conceptualization of loose coupling</td>
<td>2 600</td>
<td>1 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clark’s concept of organisational saga in higher education has travelled the least and remains primarily used in higher education research, while the other three articles have gone well beyond such a specialized focus. They seem to have travelled so far that their origins from studies of education might have been forgotten, as suggested by the editors of Academy of Management Journal in their call to organizational scientist to focus on something else than business:

“although countless MBA students whom we have encountered may be convinced that the notion of loosely coupled systems was derived from an analysis of MNCs and conglomerates, Weick (1976) in fact based it on an analysis of schools” (Bamberger & Pratt, 2010, pp. 667-668).

1 As will be discussed in the paper, the fatherhood of the concept is somewhat more complex than this.
As one way of marking the 40 years since the initial article has been published, this paper:

1. maps how Weick’s concept of organizations as loosely coupled systems has been used in higher education research, in particular with regards to breadth and depth,
2. reflects on how the concept has been connected to other staple concepts – decoupling, organized anarchy and garbage can decision-making,
3. discusses where the idea of loose coupling fits with regards to more recent advances from organizational studies of higher education, in particular the notions of universities as complete organizations (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Seeber et al., 2014), organizational actors (Krücken & Meier, 2006) or penetrated hierarchies (Bleiklie, Enders, & Lepori, 2015), as well as claims that loose coupling is no longer a suitable description of the empirical reality (Bleiklie, Frølich, Sweetman, & Henkel, 2017).

The paper will first present the concept of loose coupling (and organizations as loosely coupled systems) as originally presented by Weick in 1976 and further elaborated by Orton and Weick in 1990. The methodological approach to selecting, reviewing and classifying higher education research using the concept will be presented. This will be followed by a preliminary analysis of patterns of references to the concept, which will in turn serve as the backdrop for discussion of (mis)uses of the idea of loose coupling and of avenues for further exploration.

**Loose coupling according to Weick (and Orton)**

While this paper takes a starting point in Weick’s conceptualisation from 1976, it should first be noted that the actual terms ‘loose coupling’ or ‘loosely coupled’ did in fact not originate from Weick. In his 1976 article, Weick himself points to at least three prior instances of use of these terms: (1) a 1973 article by Glassman on persistence and loose coupling in living systems (Glassman, 1973), (2) an unpublished manuscript by March and Olsen from 1975 titled “Choice situations in loosely coupled worlds”, and (3) another unpublished manuscript by Salancik from 1975 titled “Notes on loose coupling: Linking intentions and actions”. Moreover, while the 1976 article is attributed to Weick, it is in essence a report of a National Institute of Education workshop organized in early 1975 in California which gathered other organizational scholars, including March. In a short note explaining the origins of the article, Weick also implies that the report was published in *Administrative Science Quarterly* effectively without peer review, apparently facilitated by the proximity of Weick’s office.

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to the office of Tom Lodahl, then editor of *ASQ*. Thus, while Weick is often cited as reference for ‘loose coupling’ / ‘loosely coupled’ concept, it seems that quite a number of people contributed to its creation. The origin story of the 1976 article perhaps explains its content and structure. Structurally, it is composed of (1) a literature review, (2) a report of discussions on promises and pitfalls of loose coupling, (3) a critical reflection on methodology, and (4) an outline of a research agenda.

Second, the article is part of a strong response to organizational research which at the time strongly assumed rationality. Together with the other three articles highlighted in the introduction, as well as (amongst other) work by March and Simon on ambiguity and bounded rationality, the key message was that there is a “substantial unexplained remainder” of organizational dynamics which is “intractable to analysis through rational assumptions” (p.1). It argues that it is not possible to answer some of the key questions – including what holds organizations together – unless light is shed on previously taken-for-granted aspects. In this respect, the concept of loose coupling is expected to act as a ‘sensitizing device’, or a new (better) pair of glasses which allow the researcher to see elements of organization that would otherwise remain in the dark.

However, when it comes to how such a sensitizing device is to be defined, the article is somewhat less clear. It refers to ‘loose coupling imagery’, as well as ‘idea of loose coupling’ and ‘coupling mechanisms’ – technical and authority based. It identifies no less than 15 different ‘connotations of loose coupling’, some of which are rather abstract and applicable beyond the specific empirical context – e.g. loose-coupling between means and ends, intentions and actions, organizational structure and organizational activity, lack of coordination, slow spread of influence/change through the organization, planned unresponsiveness, absence of regulations. Other connotations remain rather close to the school setting that initiated the discussion in the first place – e.g. “curricula or courses in educational organizations for which there are few prerequisites” (p. 5). Some of the connotations as formulated by Weick appear to be conceptually rather close to each other; compare “any one of several means will produce the same end” and “no matter what you do things always come out the same” (p. 5). Some other connotations appear to resonate with related concepts which originated around the same time, e.g. garbage-can decision-making in which problems and solutions are not necessary causally linked (cf. Cohen et al., 1972), or decoupling between ‘talk’ and ‘walk’ in organizations (cf. Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In total, these connotations essentially present a comprehensive and multifaceted image of coupling, beyond structural aspects of organizations.

Compared to ambiguity concerning what exactly is (not) loosely coupled in (educational) organizations, the article is much clearer with regards to promises and pitfalls of loose coupling. The basic premise here is that loose coupling in general serves a positive function in an organization, but that it also constitutes a liability. A loosely coupled organization is better at sensing the complex
environment, but runs the risk of “producing faddish responses” (p. 6). At the same time, loose coupling allows for localized adaptation which does not affect the whole system and thus shields the whole organization from too quick response to negative signals from the environment, effectively contributing to organizational perseverance. And while being able to ‘seal off’ a problematic part of an organization is good in that respect, it also poses obstacles for repair. A loosely coupled organization is thought to be more creative with regards to novel solutions but, given that change spreads slowly and weakly through the organizations, benefits of such novel solutions may not reach where they are needed. Loosely coupled organizations resonate strongly with professional autonomy, and may be easier and cheaper to coordinate, but that also comes with “non-rational system of fund allocation” (p. 8) and thus funding is, reportedly, not useful as an incentive for change.

With regards to research agenda, the article advocates for an inventory of elements in (educational) organizations that could be (loosely or tightly) coupled and for a mapping exercise of patterns of coupling, as well as functions and dysfunctions that arise from such patterns. It stresses that such endeavour should be based on a context rich methodologies as well as longitudinal and comparative studies, so that what was previously invisible can be seen. It also links to other Weick’s work, arguing that more attention should be made on how people make sense of their loosely coupled organizations. However, the research agenda actually starts with a suggestion that “more conceptual work has to be done before other lines of inquiry on this topic are launched” (p. 16). Such plethora of terms is effectively an admission that the concept is ambiguous, and comes with a warning that “[I]f researchers start stalking the elusive loosely coupled systems with imperfect language and concepts, they will perpetuate the blandness of organizational theory” (p. 16).

Yet, it seems that the concept got a life of its own. In late 1980s Orton and Weick conducted a review of approx. 20 years of studies utilizing the concept of loose coupling / loosely coupled systems and found that “like a linguistic Trojan horse, the loose coupling concept has preceded loose coupling theory into various strongholds of organizational studies” (Orton & Weick, 1990, p. 203). They admit that the concept is ‘underspecified’ and that its face validity comes coupled (!) with significant imprecision, but argue that such imprecision may have abetted its wide use. In an almost ironical manner, the rather open conceptualisation (or, loose definition) of loose coupling is likely what also led to its success and spread.

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3 It is interesting to note that one other widely cited article has a similar admission. Namely, while isomorphism concerns “homogeneity in structure, culture, and output” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 147), it is admitted that “… [N]or have we addressed the issue of the indicators that one must use to measure homogeneity” (p. 156).
Reflecting the initial context in which the 1976 article appeared, they reiterate that the term ‘loosely coupled’ should allow researchers to simultaneously acknowledge (and see) rationality and order in an organization (hence ‘coupled’), as well as indeterminacy and independence of its elements (hence ‘loosely’). They also postulate two distinct interpretations of the concept. One the one hand, there is a unidimensional notion of loose coupling – a scale ranging from tightly to loosely coupled elements in a system. On the other hand, there is a dialectical notion that is based on the extent to which elements are distinctive from each other and responsive to signals external to them (which includes signals from other parts of the organization). This yields a 2x2 matrix (Table 2), which not only highlights that loosely coupled systems are those in which both responsiveness and distinctiveness are present, but also links the idea of coupling through one other often cited concept, i.e. decoupling which originates from Meyer and Rowan (1977).

![Table 2. A dialectical interpretation of system coupling. Based on Orton and Weick (1990).](image)

Orton and Weick also classify the different studies they reviewed (reportedly approx. 300 of them) into five distinct ‘voices’. **Voice of causation** comprises studies focusing on why one finds loose coupling or not. The three identified explanations include (a) causal indeterminacy, which relates to ambiguity circumstances which give rise to garbage can decision-making approaches; (b) fragmented external environment which, amongst other, concerns decoupling talk from walk; and (c) fragmented internal environment which highlights fluidity of participation and dispersion of interest and involvement. **Voice of typology** focuses on what can be (loosely) coupled – (a) individuals, (b) subunits, (c) organizations, (d) hierarchical levels, (e) organizations and their environments, (f) ideas, (g) activities, and (h) intentions and actions. Here Orton and Weick provide a leaner and sharper typology, compared to the 15 connotations identified above, at similar levels of abstraction. **Voice of direct effects** focuses on (supposedly) desirable effects of loose coupling on organization as such, including increased modularity, variety and discretion. This is distinct from **voice of organizational outcomes or indirect effects**, which highlights how the fact that specific organizational aspects are
loosely coupled affects organizational performance, resistance to change, buffering of problematic areas, adaptability, member satisfaction and effectiveness. The voices of effects (direct and indirect) correspond clearly to the discussion of promises and pitfalls of loose coupling that Weick presented in 1976 (see above). Finally, the voice of compensations highlights different approaches through which negative aspects of loose coupling can be redressed, namely leadership, focused attention and shared values. These five voices constitute building blocks of what Orton and Weick label ‘a preliminary model of loose coupling theory’ (Figure 1).

Orton and Weick admit that such a schematic representation of the relationship of the five voices oversimplifies relationships between and importance of different elements, and does not necessarily correspond to how different researchers utilizing the concept would see it. Moreover, while it admittedly orders the different strands of research into a neat overview, it is perhaps more of a conceptual framework than a fully-fledged theory in which mechanisms linking different elements are specified (see e.g. Schlager, 2007 for a distinction between framework, theory and model). Nevertheless, Orton and Weick maintain that loose coupling, specifically if understood dialectically and as more than a negative definition, allows for simultaneously grasping connectedness and autonomy (order and disorder) in organizations, thus being particularly well suited for addressing how organizations (or systems, to use Orton/Weick term) are socially constructed. They posit that the concept of loose coupling will motivate researchers to consider structure as “something that organizations do, rather than merely as something they have” suggesting that “loose coupling may be able to do for the study of organizational structure what bounded rationality did for the study of decision making” (Orton & Weick, 1990, p. 218).

In sum, in both the original article from 1976 and the re-conceptualization of 1990, the idea of loose coupling is presented as relevant for different dimensions (individuals, subunits, environment in general, other organizations, etc.) and as having both beneficial and potentially harmful consequences for organization as such and its performance. Already in 1976 Weick stresses the importance of deeper engagement with the concept, while in 1990 Orton & Weick order the different strands of research. In order to see how higher education researchers have responded to these calls for research action, a review of higher education studies was conducted.
Figure 1. A model of loose-coupling theory (Orton & Weick, 1990, p. 217)
Loose coupling in higher education research

Approach

In order to examine how the term loose coupling has evolved over time, a mapping of relevant literature was conducted – with specific focus on journal articles. The starting point for selecting the studies to be analysed was Google Scholar citation record from 1976 until end of 2016 of Weick article from 1976 and Orton & Weick article from 1990. Within this set of over 11 000 citations, for this preliminary analysis we selected articles that were published in (a) journals specific to higher education research and (b) more general social sciences, provided that they concerned higher education (the list of journals is provided in Annex 1). This yielded in total of 238 articles. The articles were divided randomly into two samples which comprised 125 articles (some of the articles appear in both samples for further testing of inter-coder reliability). For this paper, one sample has been analysed in detail. However, given that the process of selecting the 238 articles required a quick analysis of the key features of articles, the authors believe that the key trends presented in this paper (on the basis of 125 articles) provide a solid basis for the discussion on how the concept of loose coupling has been utilized in higher education research.

The mapping of the articles focused on the following aspects:

- journal and year of publication;
- whether the article includes a clear theoretical/conceptual framework, an empirical section, what is the level of analysis (individual, sub-unit, organization, system), and whether the study is comparative or not;
- which of the loose coupling articles is cited: Weick 1976, Orton & Weick 1990 or both?
- what is the nature of reference to loose coupling, distinguishing between use of loose coupling as: (a) a background description (e.g. universities are loosely coupled) without any further engagement; (b) as one of the central concepts, but without an explicit definition; (c) as one of the central concepts, with an explicit quote from Weick or Orton & Weick explaining the concept; (d) as one of the central concepts, with own definition, in which case the definition was also recorded in the data base;
- whether loose coupling is described in more detail (the what) and whether there is a discussion of antecedents and/or consequences (the how and why) of loose coupling;
- whether Meyer & Rowan 1977 article on myth, ceremony and decoupling or Cohen, March & Olsen 1972 article on garbage can decision-making were referred to as well and in what relationship with the reference to Weick (or Weick & Orton).
The mapping exercise

As indicated in the mapping, the notion of loosely coupled systems is rather often used in higher education research. When divided into five year intervals, it is most cited in the most recent period, likely also a result of the expansion of academic publications in recent decades. The vast majority of articles that focus on higher education use the original 1976 article (116), while only a small number of articles cite the Orton & Weick reconceptualization from 1990 (9). Only in the very early period is there substantially more publications in general social science journals citing Weick’s loose coupling, though this is most likely not linked to loose coupling as such, but more a reflection of the overall development of higher education research and academic publishing outlets.

With regards to levels of analysis, a bit more than half of the articles (68) focuses on the organisation as a whole, while 15 articles explore both the organisation and its subunits. There are also articles focusing only on subunits (8), and individuals (7). For some articles, in particular those that are essentially theoretical reviews, it was not possible to identify a clear level of analysis. Table 3 summarizes the citations of Weick or Orton & Weick with regards to outlet, theoretical, empirical and/or comparative focus.

Table 3. Citations of Weick 1976 or Orton & Weick 1990, depending on the outlet and content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weick 1976</th>
<th>Orton &amp; Weick 1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HE specialized journal</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theoretical framework</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empirical material</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparative</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning how the reference to Weick (or Orton & Weick) is used, the vast majority of contributions uses loose coupling (or loosely coupled systems) as a background concept (Table 4). Those that are engaging with the concept more closely also provide detailed descriptions of the specific instance of loose coupling as well as discuss the antecedents and consequences. With regards to own definitions, they reflect the variety of connotations and the five voices that were identified in the 1976 and 1990 articles, stressing autonomy of sub-units, weak linkages that imply buffering sub-units from each other, resistance to (radical) change, low interdependence, high specialization, weak leadership as well as decoupling talk from walk.
Table 4. Citations of Weick 1976 or Orton & Weick, depending on type of use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weick 1976</th>
<th>Orton &amp; Weick 1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>background description, no other use</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>central concept, no definition</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>central concept, quoting Weick or Orton &amp; Weick</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>central concept, own definition</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>describing in detail</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussing how and why of loose-coupling</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the 20 articles in this sample which also cite Meyer & Rowan 1977 contribution on myth and ceremony, 11 make an explicit linkage between the concept of decoupling and the concept of loose coupling, suggesting these are interchangeable. Moreover, 43 articles (approx. one third) also cite Cohen, March & Olsen 1972 text on garbage can decision-making model, and most of them (37) use it in much the same way as (Orton &) Weick – as a background description, often in the same sentence.

The results reported in this paper are preliminary and will be completed with the analysis of the full corpus of journal articles as well as edited volumes or monographs published in higher education series by key academic publishers (e.g. Springer’s Higher Education Dynamics, Palgrave’s Studies in Global Higher Education). However, even such preliminary analysis points to important trends that are not likely to be significantly changed once the analysis is complete (see above on selecting and sampling of journal articles). Furthermore, this analysis essentially forms a basis for the discussion on the relevance and use of the concept in the future.

Discussion and conclusion

A common denominator for the articles that were examined was that they engage with the concept of loose coupling or loosely coupled systems in a somewhat superficial manner. The references to Weick 1976 (and far less to Orton & Weick 1990), are primarily used to signal specific characteristics of higher education organizations, without necessarily unpacking what these characteristics actually are and very rarely discussing the implications of this explicitly. This is somewhat ironic given that Weick himself launched the notion of loosely coupled systems precisely with a view that things which were before just assumed – at that time rationality in organizations – will be questioned and that the sensitising device of loose coupling will make previously invisible aspects of organization visible (Weick, 1976, p. 3):
“It is conceivable that preoccupation with rationalized, tidy, efficient, coordinated structures has blinded many practitioners as well as researchers to some of the attractive and unexpected properties of less rationalized and less tightly related cluster of events.”

Such limited engagement with the concept may be an indication that the messages from both cited articles – concerning conceptual clarity as well as the need to empirically identify patterns of loose (or tight) coupling – have not been taken aboard in the higher education research community.

Nevertheless, it is clear that despite the lack of explicit conceptual and empirical advancement, loose coupling has become a classic in higher education research. From a critical viewpoint, one could argue that being a classic could also mean that the term obtains a more ritual purpose. Specific references can become a signalling device for legitimating a claim that one is a part of a specific research community (for ritual and other uses of ‘the classics’ see Stinchcombe, 1982).

Such ritual use is not necessarily problematic in itself. However, in this case it seems to be the predominant use and as such has implications for advancement of organizational studies in higher education. As indicated above, very few studies engage with the concept in a more encompassing way, e.g. describing what loose coupling actually entails or discussing its consequences for intra- or inter-organizational dynamic. Loose coupling of higher education organizations seems to have become an almost entirely taken-for-granted empirical fact, save for a few exceptions. Recent studies that emphasize universities as complete organizations (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Seeber et al., 2014), universities as organizational actors (Krücken & Meier, 2006), or universities as penetrated hierarchies (Bleiklie et al., 2015) have challenged these taken for granted assumptions. Each of these studies discusses changes that push higher education organizations away from being only loosely coupled systems, and point to processes through which they also develop clearer identities, become more integrated and more goal oriented, introduce a hierarchical control approach next to the professional one.

Such findings stand in stark contrast to (a) the bulk of references to Weick’s loosely coupling being made in the most recent period (2012-2016), and (b) most of these references (26 out of 31) being used primarily as a background description. This implies that most of the higher education research community, by relying on loose coupling as an all-encompassing staple description, may have cornered itself into another blind spot. Arguably, this could be a more general challenge, and similar reviews of how the concept is used in more mainstream organizational science could be done to assess this.

What is proposed is a research agenda focusing on loose coupling from a processual perspective. Namely, while Weick and Orton narrowed down the 15 connotations of loose coupling into eight
types of loose coupling in their 1990 diagram, one could argue that these essentially focus the analysis around *structure, norms and practices*, where coupling takes place between these and within these. That is, coupling represents a mechanism between various structural units, as well as between structures, norms and practices. This would also mean that organizations are considered as open systems, where the external and internal life of organizations interact.

In other words, loose coupling should not be considered only as an outcome, but also as a specific *organizational process*. This processual focus requires attention to both the *causes* as well as the *effects* of loose coupling, and especially the way in which such causes and effects themselves are linked. Not only does this require attention to the ’what’ of coupling, but also the ’how’ and the ’why’.

Furthermore, a key question for such analysis concerns the *conditions for maintaining specific forms of coupling*. In other words, what kind of internal and external drivers stabilize specific (loose or tight) coupling patterns, what kind of drivers lead to loose coupling transforming into full organizational fragmentation (or even dissolution) and what kind of drivers strengthen the coupling more.

In addition, it would be fruitful to consider whether and how *multiple coupling processes* interact, given that recent analysis of organizations emphasizes hybridity, with multiple organizational forms and practices side by side (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011). If loose coupling can be identified according to one dimension (e.g. between norms and practices), it should not be taken as a given that there will be loose coupling between norms and structures, or among structures. In such context, one can also expect that organizations would also sustain both tight and loose coupling. Yet, we need more empirical knowledge of the conditions under which such hybridity of couplings takes place.

In general, it is suggested that higher education research would benefit from going ‘back to the basics’ – revisiting what are the different elements that can be subjected to loose (or tight) coupling, empirically identifying the patterns of coupling and theoretically accounting for specific antecedents and consequences of such patterns. In this manner, higher education research might also be able to once more contribute back to the mainstream organizational science as it did in the 1970s.
References


Annex 1

Journal specializing on higher education

1. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education
2. European Journal of Higher Education
3. Higher Education
4. Higher Education Policy
5. Higher Education Quarterly
6. Higher Education Research and Development
7. Journal of Higher Education
8. Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management
9. Minerva
10. Quality in Higher Education
11. Research in Higher Education
12. Review of Higher Education
13. Studies in Higher Education
14. Tertiary Education and Management

General social sciences journals, only articles focusing on higher education:

15. American Journal of Sociology
16. American Sociological Review
17. Academy of Management Journal
18. Academy of Management Review
19. Annual Review of Sociology
20. Administrative Sciences Quarterly
21. Educational Administration Quarterly
22. European Journal of Education
23. Governance
24. Journal of Education Policy
25. Journal of European Integration
26. Journal of European Public Policy
27. Journal of Management
28. Journal of Management Inquiry
29. Journal of Management Studies
30. Journal of Organizational Behavior
31. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory
32. Journal of Policy Management and Analysis
33. Management Science
34. Organization
35. Organization Science
36. Organization Studies
37. Policy & Politics
38. Policy Sciences
39. Policy Studies Journal
40. Public Administration
41. Public Administration Review
42. Public Management Review
43. Public Organization Review
44. Regulation and Governance
45. Research Policy
46. Science and Public Policy
47. Strategic Management Journal
48. Strategic Organization