Towards a Context-Sensitive Approach to Researching Trust in Inter-organizational Relationships

Prof. Dr. Reinhard Bachmann
Chair in Strategy
University of Surrey
School of Management
r.bachmann@surrey.ac.uk

International Conference on ‘Trust, Culture and Gender’,
Trust Research: The State of the Art (Conceptual)

- Definitions (eg., Rousseau 1998)
- Classification of trust forms (Sako 1992; Mayer, Davis, Schoorman 1995)
- Models of trust development (destruction and repair) (eg., Lewicki and Buncker 1996)
Trust Research: The State of the Art (Methodological)

- Questionnaire-based methods
- Quantitative, qualitative approaches
- Few comparative contributions
The Problem

- Dominance of positivistic epistemology
- Dominance of a certain form of business research industry
- Comparability of data needs to be ensured

- But do we really think that vertrauen, trust, sinroi, guanxi is all the same?
Key Question

Which trust research method, if any, is sensitive to the research context and yet ensures that data from different contexts can be compared?
Repertory Grids

- Kelly 1955
- Personal Construct Theory
- Original Context: Family Therapy
- Organizational Psychology

-> EXAMPLE: Pilot Study in Switzerland
   (Clases, Bachmann, Wehner 2003)
## Repertory Grids: Elements I

### Types of Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Order Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Broker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Network Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In- and Outsourcing Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Auditor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. My Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Cooperating Company (many common experiences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Cooperating Company (few common experiences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Cooperating Company (no common experiences)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. My Virtual Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The Other Virtual Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The Organizational Roof on Top of the Two Virtual Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My Ideal of the Virtual Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Repertory Grids: Elements II

## Types of Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution-alised Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Groups to Exchange General Views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Thematic Working Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Rules of the Virtual Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Technical Communication Platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. The Market Environment of the Virtual Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. The Biggest Failure in Order Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Repertory Grids: Creation of Constructs

# Randomly, take pairs of elements
-> Similar OR dissimilar?

EXAMPLE: ‘Myself’ AND ‘My Company’
Similar OR Dissimilar?

‘Similar’ -> In what respect? -> both ‘reliable’
‘Dissimilar’ -> In what respect? -> one ‘reliable’, the other one ‘honest’
Repertory Grids: List of Constructs

- reliable
- honest
- ....
- ....
- always a bit difficult
- tricky
- useful in some situations
- ....
Repertory Grids: Create Construct-based Profiles for all Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My company:</th>
<th>Broker:</th>
<th>….</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• reliable</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• honest</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ….</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ….</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• always a bit difficult</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• tricky</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• useful in some situations</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ….</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School of Management
www.som.surrey.ac.uk
Unsystematische und unstrukturierte Kooperation

Personale Bindung

Personifizierung einer Verpflichtung

Integration neuer Partner noch nicht ideal

Isolationitis

Kontaktlosigkeit

Gefühl von Unsicherheit

Integration neuer Partner noch nicht ideal

Zuverlässigkeit und Stabilität

Gefühl von Sicherheit

Vorgabe eines klaren Ablaufs

Networking betreiben

Vorgabe eines klaren Ablaufs

Aktiver Netzwerker

In-/Out-Sourcingmanager

Trust

Unsystematische und unstrukturierte Kooperation

Constructs specifically signifying trust (underlined)

Constructs specifically contrasting trust (in italics)
Repertory Grids: Global Meaning Space

- trust
  - myself
  - my company
  - the order
  - order manager

- ideal VO
  - p.-company (a lot of exp.)
  - K.E. groups

- conflict
  - p.-company (little/no exp.)

- working groups
  - nw-coach
  - market
  - technical platform
  - rules of VO
  - biggest failure

- my VO
  - other VO
  - VO (AG)

- VO (AG)
  - roles on individual level
  - roles on company level
  - roles on network level
  - concepts
  - coordinating functions
  - project-related level

- VO (AG)
Repertory Grids: Situated/Experience-based Commitments

Pro-active Cooperation

Re-active Cooperation

Formal/Decontextualized Commitments
Conclusion

• We need more sophisticated methods in trust research
• We need to handle more complexity (in a comparative view)

• Repertory Grids are a powerful method in trust research
• Repertory Grids can be utilised at the macro level
• Repertory Grids can be combined with other methods