

STRUCTURING OF INTERACTIONS - TOWARDS THE NEED TO CHANGE

A Comparative Study with Two Empirical Cases

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the interaction structure between cooperating actors. Empirical data illustrates structures in terms of norms, routines and role-expectations in two different types of cases. The empirical data and analysis points to the importance of studying interaction structures rather as processes than established structures.

Introduction: Stability and Change in Relationships

The original idea that features of stability of exchange relationships between companies might positively affect outcomes was established early in the texts of IMP research and the markets-as-networks perspective. The existence of stable relationships was not synonymous with the relationships being unchangeable. Continuous interactions between companies result in long-term and mutually trustful relationships, with the function to provide closeness, security, information exchange, and pressure for development (Håkansson 1982, Hammarkvist et al. 1982). A central idea is that continuous interaction leads to stable relationships. In these relationships, actors are tied together by various socially generated actor bonds and these bonds have different characteristics and serve different purposes. Although relationships are assumed to serve important functions in terms of efficiency, stability and control, the very nature of the relationships are at the same time assumed to withhold a dynamic feature (Håkansson 1987, Håkansson & Snehota 1995)⁷. argue that such actor bonds in relationships are composed. Medlin and Quester (1999), discuss two

⁷ “In this way they (relationships) mainly serve as a conserving factor. But this is not at all the complete picture as the relationships can withhold a dynamic feature. Relationships, even if they are very established, always retain a feeling of freedom to each party which in turn give relationships a special tension. This tension drives the parties to continually develop the relationships and prevents them from becoming too institutionalized.”

interacting aspects of actor bonds, relational norms and on-going identity formation, and suggest that a full understanding of the relational norms in actor bonds can only be developed when time is also considered.

This study takes its starting point in the assumption that in all functioning relationships the partners need structures and thus a certain degree of stability, otherwise the relationships would exhaust the partners. Thus, structured interactions in relationships guide the actors, circumscribing the need to constantly remobilize, to remake the roles, and so on. The study puts focus on these structuring processes, or structuring dynamics of the interactions, i.e. on the “microprocessual level” of relationships. Interactional processes are multidimensional and any change in an exchange relationship - which might aim for a more stable structuring of interactions – will involve many of these dimensions or elements of interactions. In this study we will discuss some of these elements, in particular aspects of *norms*, *roles*, and *routines* that are part of the structuring of interactions between actors in networks.

As empirical background against which we will discuss these micro elements involved in the structuring dynamics of interactions in relationships, we present two case studies (Tuusjärvi 1999, Andersson 1996)⁸. The cases enable us to make comparisons between two structuring processes affecting and bringing stability to the interaction in two different ways in two different structural settings. One case focuses on a group of actors who jointly aimed at establishing operations in export markets. The group consisted of five companies and an export manager. The second case describes a multinational organisation, including headquarters, regional offices and foreign subsidiaries and customers aiming to alter the “internal” marketing organisation. While the first case, illustrates the structuring processes in a horizontal net of cooperating, independent companies, the second illustrates the same type of processes in an internal vertical channel of actors in one organisation.

Focus and Aim of the Study

The structuring of interactions in relationships can be linked to and affect stability and change in several different ways. Our two cases each start in two different situations. The first case illustrates the micro dynamics of interactions and the structuring processes when the structuring takes place in a new, emerging situation, while the second illustrates structuring processes which require the modification of interactions in a since long established situation. Secondly, the two cases and structuring processes take place in two different network context, one “horizontal” network arrangement and one “vertical” (and more internal channel) network arrangement.

The theoretical aim of the study is to enlarge the discussion on the structuring of interactions in long-term relationships with the help of social interaction concepts and empirical evidence in two types of network structures and situations.

A general ambition of the paper has been to draw on social interaction theory to explore the micro dynamics of interactions and how they are structured in long-term business relationships. This paper focuses mainly on the persistence of interaction in a limited period in time, but encompasses also aspects of its dynamics, i.e. of the linking together of interactions at different points in time. Thus, an implicit aim of the paper is to increase our understanding of the micro dynamics of interactions in long-term business relationship, with

⁸ For complete cases, see Tuusjärvi (1999) and Andersson (1996)

a particular focus on some of the central interactional elements involved in the processes when interactions are structured and restructured.

Theoretical Background

Structuring of interactions is regarded to bring a number of positive consequences to the relationship through increased cohesiveness and predictability in interactions, but at the same time it may bring along inertia and ineffectiveness. Instead of seeing interaction structure as a 'thing', Turner (1988) argues that it is "a process in which individuals produce and reproduce patterned sequences of interactive responses." (p.149). To capture the process-nature of structuring interactions, Turner presents six general concepts: 1) categorisation, 2) regionalisation, 3) normatisation, 4) ritualisation, 5) routinisation, and 6) stabilisation of resource transfers. These processes allow actors to "repeat and organize interactions across time and space" (Turner 1988, *ibid*). For the purposes of this article, two of Turner's concepts were chosen for closer inspection: normatisation and routinisation, i.e. the development and evolution of norms and routines.

Turner (1988) seems to include role expectations within the concept of norms. However, we consider role expectations to be of particular importance here, and therefore they are discussed separately. Norms, role expectations and routines together with rituals contain actual rules for behavior.⁹ Yet rituals, from ceremonies linked to certain events all the way down to shaking hands before a meeting, are excluded from this article, although they certainly have importance for the relationships between parties. Each of the three focal concepts are discussed here below.

Norms: Shared norms define acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and accordingly bring uniformity to interaction. In particular they imply sanction: either positive or negative reaction to behavior. Norms always constrain actors' behavior and reduce their power to make decisions as to behavior. Norms shared by parties to a relationship may be in conflict with what is in their individual interests. Actors may be tempted to violate norms and act according to individual interests, but due to the threat of sanctions, violating norms may cost them. A norm that is widely violated may even cease to exist (Coleman 1990).

Routines: Routines are those "behavioral sequences where, without great mental and interpersonal effort, actors do pretty much the same thing in time and space." (Turner, 1988). Turner (1988) refers to Giddens and mentions the importance of routines in "reproduction of structure as well as for meeting people's deep-seated needs for ontological security and trust." He further points out that the strong potential emotional arousal from interruption of routines reveals their importance.

Role expectations: Role expectations are norms that regulate one particular actor's behaviour (Napier and Gerschenfeld 1993, 118). An important task of role-expectations is to reduce uncertainty through bringing predictability to the division of tasks. Yet, roles imply two types of conflicts: those internal to a role and those between roles. Conflict internal to a role occurs when an individual actor perceives conflicts between behaviors necessitated by one role and another role of his/hers. Conflict between roles occurs when others have different expectations towards the role that one performs. (Helkama, Myllyniemi, Liebkind, 1998). These conflicts can mobilize change in role-expectations.

⁹ The other three concepts (categorisation, regionalisation and stabilisation) do not directly define behavior.

According to Turner (1988), interaction structure is not only a result of structuring processes but also of motivational and interactional processes. The problem with Turner's theory is its all-encompassing nature. Consequently, it becomes very difficult to capture his whole framework at the same time in one study. Feldman (1984) discussed interaction structures more narrowly and distinguished, for example, four ways of *creating norms*. He seems to have included role-expectations and routines in the same category of norms, therefore his typology can easily be adapted to the whole of interaction structures. Structures can be developed through (1) "explicit statements" and agreements by parties or outside actors, (2) "critical events" in the history of the cooperation, (3) "primacy", i.e. repeating the earlier behavior and (4) "carry-over behaviors" from other situations and contexts. (c.f. Feldman, 1984).

As was mentioned earlier, without the structuring of interactions parties to a relationship would soon be exhausted (Turner, 1988). Structuring interactions can also be seen as a means to safeguard and assure individual actors' interests when other actors' behaviour can have important consequences to the actor (c.f. Coleman, 1990). A more detailed typology for reasons to establish rules in groups comes from Feldman (1984), who argues that "groups [of humans] are likely to bring under normative control only those behaviors that ensure group survival, increase the predictability of group members' behavior, avoid embarrassing interpersonal situations, or give expression to the group's central values". He seemed to discuss the reasons for structuring more from the perspective of a group than from the perspective of an individual actor. However, because this paper focuses on cooperative constellations established to bring benefits to individual companies, we here emphasise more the individual actors' interests.

Adapted from the typology of Feldman, structuring can be seen as a means to (1) ensure the survival of the cooperative arrangement, (2) increase the predictability of behavior of the parties, (3) avoid conflicts, (4) express the central values and goals of the cooperation, and (5) increase effectiveness of the operations.

"Vertical" and "horizontal" structuring

Both the importance and the contents of the structuring processes are likely to vary between different kinds of relationships and different contexts: between vertical and horizontal arrangements and between those with high or low interdependence between parties, or along the intended length or the age of the relationship, to name few. In this article we have chosen to elaborate on the differences in structuring between vertical and horizontal relationships.

Park (1996) posits that in vertical cooperation companies do not have so many 'hazards' as in horizontal cooperation. Duties and benefits arise quite naturally when the relationship is of "vertical, serial interdependence" and each party takes responsibility of its own task in the chain of activities. Compared to this, horizontal relationships provide more possibilities to 'clashes' between companies and boundaries between companies are more difficult to set. Deciding on the division of tasks and the division of benefits is more a question of negotiation and joint decision making. Also, if partners are competitors they usually have to keep certain distance which is likely to be of less importance in vertical relationships. (c.f. Park, 1996).

It is evident that individual companies are bound to face the conflict between striving towards individual goals, and striving towards collective goals, and those important to their partners. The degree of this conflict may, however, vary. Structuring of interactions between partners

with conflicting interests has been claimed to demand norms and leadership (see e.g. Helkama, Myllyniemi and Liebkind 1998). However, at the same time companies pursue to maintain autonomy and are reluctant to accept an outside authority (Van de Ven 1976). This produces a strong dilemma for running cooperation between companies.

Park (1996) claimed that horizontal interdependence "constitutes two serious threats; appropriability of firm-specific assets and operational difficulties stemming from decision-making loci and routines"(p.807). He proposed that horizontal cooperation is often structured in *trilateral* way; the decision making power is given to some outside authority. In contrast to this, vertical relationships are more often structured in *bilateral* way; the companies make decisions between themselves.

Drawing from the discussion above, it can be assumed that horizontal cooperation contains strong pressure towards structuring interactions in a way that solves or mediates potential conflicts of interaction that arise from parties' conflicting interests. On the other hand this aspect may remain of lesser importance in vertical cooperation.

Two Empirical Cases

The paper draws on two empirical cases. *The first case* describes the emergence of an export group in the Finnish metal industry. The group was formed in 1995 to offer engineering products and subcontracting to Germany and Sweden. The group consisted of five SMCs, where four of the companies had worked together already during the establishment phase. The fifth company joined later. The group received subsidy from Ministry of Trade and Industry for a period of three years and administrative help from Finnish Foreign Trade Association. Another thing of central importance to the group was the jointly contracted export manager. *The second case* follows the attempts to reorganise the marketing organisation of a Swedish biotech equipment supplier. During a four-year period in the early 1990s the company reorganised radically the internal relationships between and operations of the central HQ units in Sweden, a regional unit for Europe, and the local subsidiary organisations in the local European markets. This was done mainly to meet changing customer demands and to change the company's customer orientation. Table 1 below sums up and makes a condensed comparison between the two cases.

<i>Case 1: The Export group</i>	<i>Case2: The Biotechnology Corporation</i>
Net of horizontally related, mostly complementary companies with some overlap in technical capabilities.	Net of actors in an internal vertical channel, i.e focus on the vertical interactions
Joint partnership in export cooperation in a net of five independent companies plus one export manager.	A net of "internal" actors (subsidiaries, regional companies headquarter divisions...) within one, single multinational company
Starting point: interactions in a "new" network situation, i.e <i>structuring processes</i> in a situation when a new network is established.	Starting point: interactions in an "old" established network situation, i.e. <i>structuring processes</i> in a situation where a set of established interactions first have to be changed.
The overall process: Mobilizing actors into interactions, establishing and structuring of interactions.	The overall process: Mobilization to break established interactions, mobilizing the actors into new interactions, starting the structuring of the new interactions
The "productions system", i.e. the activity links and resource ties, affected by the relational interactions, concerns mainly coordination of sales and marketing, and to some extent, manufacturing activities.	The "productions system" that are affected by the relational interactions concern mainly coordination of complementary marketing, distribution and after sales activities in the channel system.
Important connections: the links to the domestic customers and governmental supporting organizations giving administrative help and subsidy.	Important connections: the links to other internal channel actors
Time horizon: three years of functioning as a subsidized export group with positive expectations for continuity after that. Dissolution, however, after the three years.	Time horizon: short term change project (a few months) with the purpose to implement a new, long-term (years) vertical solution for the marketing channel

In sum, the two cases have two different structural and processual starting points :

Structural

Processual

Case 1 The "horizontal case"

The process of establishing and structuring new interactions

Case 2 The "vertical case"

The process of breaking old to establish new structured interactions

Discussion

Long-term cooperation contains so many norms, role-expectations, and routines that it is difficult to carry out a detailed discussion on them. The discussion will therefore focus mainly on the central examples of norms, routines and role-expectations with some notions on processual aspects (c.f. Gergen and Gergen, 1986). The functions of these structures are also briefly discussed in tables after each section.

Case 1: Central norms of interaction

The ultimate goal of the cooperation was to help companies penetrate export markets. The more concrete short-term goal was to gain orders from export markets.

The most central norms seemed to centre around *expectations of fairness* and to relate to the short-term goal. The pursuit towards fairness could be seen in several ways of behaviour: In the beginning there seemed to exist the expectation for some equity between realised turnovers, but towards the end the parties seemed not to expect turnover, but opportunities to all. The export manager's work input was balanced, as much as possible, to gain benefits (i.e.

bids for offers) for all. The companies made offers jointly even when they had the technical capability to offer alone.

Of importance was, however, that the companies admitted that the costs of following the norms of fairness were not important. They were not at the time in great need for orders and the costs of cooperating were low due to the governmental subsidy that was given to the group. Had it been otherwise - they would have had more temptations to violate the norm of fairness.

Another central category of norms focused on monitoring cooperation. Control over other actor's acting was expected to reflect trust, and not the principle of close monitoring. Related to this, the companies were expected to give information openly and also to show faith in this information.

The subsidised system lasted three years. To sustain the group after this period would have necessitated adjustments to the interaction structure. Yet, the parties did not begin the process of restructuring but seemed to aim to sustain the one existing.

Case 2: Central norms of interaction

The dominating norms that were surfaced during the initial attempts to reorganise the vertical channel, reflected established views about the rights and duties of each actor in the channel: HQ, regional office, local/national sales subsidiary. These concerned what types of information that these actors were expected to provide to each other, and how this information should be provided and reported to the other counterparts.

Another stabilised norm that became apparent when challenged by HQ's change efforts concerned the local channel actors' (i.e. the sales subsidiaries') high degree of local power and authority. Interactive norms that had been institutionalised indicated that subsidiaries were expected to exercise a high degree of localised authority on matters that concerned the interactions and relationships with the local customers (e.g. how to organise the contacts with the local customers, what key customers to interact with and so on). This was also reflected in the interactions between HQ and the subsidiaries. The latter were only expected to report and provide very general and aggregated information about matters in the local markets.

The facilitative aspects of these institutionalised, interactive norms (e.g. not being expected to exchange more than necessary information) became an obvious hindrance to the change agents responsible for altering the interactions. The transformable nature of norms became apparent as HQ and the group of subsidiaries had to renegotiate their established, general interpretations of expected obligations, concerning what information to provide (e.g. about local markets), and also when and how to provide it (e.g. how often to report and meet to discuss market and marketing matters.) Initially, the established interactive behaviour reflecting norms about decentralised authority and local power (including ideas about "all business being local") was altered successively, being replaced by interactive behaviour reflecting channel actors' increased ambition to take responsibility for the whole channel system and the overall market position.

Drawing from the description of norms above the table below presents the central functions of these norms in the two cases.

Case 1	Case 2
<p>Functions of the norms: The most important norms reflected expectations of benefits for all, a fair dealing of benefits, trust-based monitoring of operations and open communications. The norms seemed to sustain trust and good reputation between actors during and after this period. The norms served not so much to sustain the cooperation after the subsidised period, but the existing structure.</p>	<p>Functions of the norms: The established norms (about rights and duties concerning information exchange, and about power distribution) initially safeguarded some of the actors from change agents' renegotiation efforts The norms initially defended the actors' sense of tradition and security in the interactions Later, normative aspects of solidarity (to the new ideas and to the whole system rather than to each local market context separately) served to speed up the process to renegotiate the established internal norms and to establish new.</p>

Table 1: Functions of the central norms of interaction in case 1 and case 2

Case 1: Routines of interaction

Decisions were discussed and confirmed in meetings every three months. As a rule, the representatives of the companies, the export manager, and two representatives from one of the supporting organisations were present in the meetings. These meetings were generally carried out in routine order. The export manager presented each time updated reports over matters of importance: customer contacts, possible bids for offers, those bids that were received and the state of orders. The most important function of the meetings was thus operational planning, but also more important development matters were discussed. The routine-type of nature of the meetings was possible since most of the discussing and sensemaking processes were made in dyadic contacts between parties. However, it is possible that the presence of the representatives from the supporting organisations increased the companies' tendency to act as a relatively unanimous group in the meetings.

Case 2: Routines of interaction

Standards and formalised rules for meeting procedures, i.e. when and how channel actors should meet (e.g. rules for the number of weekly, monthly, yearly meetings) were few when the change processes started. The routinised interactions were more on a general and dyadic level between HQ and each single sales subsidiary (mainly on management level). The introduction of new standardisation and formalisation procedures by the change agents, serving to disrupt the old and to regulate and routinise new, emerging interactions - mainly based on a number of joint group meetings (HQ and all subsidiaries together) - were initially very difficult to achieve. The dyadic interactions were taken for granted and were partly routinised.

The purpose to reduce uncertainties through increased standardisation with strong elements of rationalisation, (reducing inefficient and unnecessary interactions) proved difficult to break, initially. Change agents at HQ attempted to create persistent interactive behaviour through elements of repetition, by e.g. introducing more regular and frequent meetings. Change agents had to break the fairly weak routines by renegotiating the established, interactive learning through increased frequency and repetition.

The introduction of new standardised and information technology based, automated routines (communication via IT systems) also supported the breaking of these weak routines.

Routinisation elements successively made more regular and predictable the actors' repertoire of interactive responses in relationship to each other, in both the single dyads, HQ-subsubsidiary, and in the whole system of actors. The new, emerging routines began to function as control mechanisms preventing or deterring the local subsidiaries from beginning to pursue local interactions that threatened the feasibility of the new emerging interactive group structure. Changing roles with increased role specialisation among the subsidiaries supported the emergence of these new interactive routines. For example, some regional subsidiaries began to interact regularly in smaller groups, dividing up the work in regions instead of concentrating on each specific country market.

Drawing from the above-presented description of routines the table below presents the central functions of these routines in the two cases.

Case 1	Case 2
<p>Functions of routines: The routine way of carrying out meetings seemed to support the purpose of avoiding conflicts: cohesiveness in open meetings while sensemaking was mostly taking place in dyadic interaction. They also enhanced perceptions of mutual understanding. Regular and routine-like meetings also seemed to maintain the expectations of continuity of the cooperation.</p>	<p>Functions of routines: When threatened by change, the routines, (some based on standardised and formalised interaction) served to secure actors' sense of ontological security and trust. During the change process, increased routinisation served to stabilise the change process, through increased rationalisation and specialisation of roles</p>

Table 2: Functions of the central routines of interaction in case 1 and case 2

Case 1: Role-expectations

Agreement on role expectations gained more emphasis already in the planning process compared to the other aspects of structuring. The discussions included actors' roles in the areas of potential technical overlap and in other areas of potential conflicts. There were discussions on what kinds of work each company would aim to get through the cooperation (technical aspects), and the companies' responsibilities when a joint order was to be carried out (e.g. legal responsibilities).

Except for planning and administration of cooperation, partnering companies' roles were close to their roles in their core business in the domestic market. They calculated offers for customers and when the offer was accepted they would manufacture the order. Participation in export marketing and visiting customers was voluntary.

The export manager was to take care of export marketing fairly independently. The agreement between companies contained also the possibility that he would assist companies in technical production matters when the companies needed his assistance. During the operations, the export manager's participation in technical matters became dominant for a period. An action taken by the new partner in the group became important for settling clearer boundaries to the export manager 's main tasks as export manager.

The matter where the companies mostly had potential for conflicting interests concerned the distribution of benefits. Early agreement contained the idea that either the export manager *or* the companies together would decide on the distribution of bids for offers. As the operations

began, the export manager was authorised to make the suggestions for the distribution. Linked with his responsibility for distributing bids for offers, the norms of fairness concerning distribution of benefits was mostly sustained by the behaviour of the export manager. However, the companies retained final decision-making power concerning whether to accept to offer the suggested part or not.

Case 2: Role-expectations

Role expectations gained much emphasis in the initial phase of breaking the established routines for interactions. The boundaries of HQ's and the subsidiaries' roles concerning e.g how to divide up the various marketing and customer contact responsibilities needed to be renegotiated already in the beginning of the first phase of destabilising the established structure. The established role expectations were upset even more in the next step of change when a new intermediate channel actor, the Regional office, was established between HQ and the subsidiaries. The new roles emerging were in some cases far from the since long established and the subsidiaries' sense of trust through the established norms about local authority and decentralisation of power, reflected in the division of roles between HQ and the subsidiaries, was challenged. It created role ambiguities in the intermediate phase when role expectations from the old channel structure remained while implementing the new channel structure. The ambiguities concerning role expectations in this phase were linked also to the new set of vertical interactions emerging between HQ, the Regional office, and the subsidiaries (which were based on new divisions of work). This successively lead to new roles sets and stable role expectations, dissolving the old distribution of power in the internal vertical channel.

Drawing from the description above the table below presents the central functions of these role-expectations in the two cases.

Case 1	Case 2
<p>Functions of the role-expectations: Establishment of role-expectations increased predictability in interactions and clarified responsibilities. The pursuit towards clarity in roles of companies (in particularly technical aspect) increased trust that each company would gain a 'fair dealing' of benefits. Another function seemed to be to assure as much autonomy as possible to the companies. Final purpose was to avoid open conflicts in case of overlapping interests.</p>	<p>Functions of the role-expectations: The established role-expectations concerning the distribution of responsibilities between parties initially served to protect some threatened actors (here: the subsidiaries) from the change efforts. The new emerging role-expectations served to clarify the boundaries between the new channel actor and the old established actors. The ambiguities associated with the initial disrupted role expectations served to speed up the development of new roles and role expectations, i.e to speed up the dismantling of the old role expectations.</p>

Table 3: Functions of the central role-expectations in case 1 and case 2

Concluding discussion

We conclude by bringing up for discussion three issues, which stand out as important in the empirical cases. It is possible to see some differences between the two cases as well as

similarities, concerning the importance of role expectations, the role of conflict and power, and thirdly, concerning the role of formally decided norms.

Firstly, both cases show evidence of the importance of role-expectations and of inertia that results from an established role-structure. In **the first case** the export group of individual companies, the development of roles seemed to be guided strongly by the actors' desire to maintain autonomy. The need to maintain autonomy was accepted by each of the actors. There developed relatively clear boundaries between companies, which seem to have resulted in inertia. This inertia seemed to imply inability to make changes to the interaction structure which would have been necessary if the group was to continue operating after the subsidised period was over. In **the second case** the established role-expectations concerning the distribution of responsibilities between parties initially created obvious inertia which served to protect some threatened actors from the change efforts. Later, the emerging ambiguities associated with the initial disrupted role expectations served to break this inertia, speeding up the development of new roles and role expectations. The new emerging role structure served to create a strongly integrated new "channel" with the focal actors more acting as one towards the market.

Secondly, conflict and power played important roles in the two cases. The parties in **the first case** seemed to pay much emphasis in maintaining good relationships and reputation between each other. Companies avoided conflicts and showed fairness in their behaviour. They restrained their power voluntarily by giving the export manager certain decision-making authority. One important reason for this was that the companies knew that most of them would continue interactions in the future also apart from the cooperation. To continue cooperating the companies would have needed to make changes to the structure, but the motivating forces were not important enough for this and the cooperation dissolved. In **the second case**, with a different power structure, the actors were less focused on the aspect of fairness. Here, changing the structures was dependent on the most powerful actor's perceptions of the usefulness and importance of creating a new structure, although there were other (counter) reasons or motivations among the other channel actors, trying to resist the imposed changes in the structure.

Thirdly, it can be assumed that cooperation would be more based on structured and shared norms and authority relationships in horizontal cooperation between somewhat competing parties than in vertical cooperation. Cooperation between complementary actors (e.g in a vertical marketing channel) would be relatively less based on norms and authority relations - and more on mutually accepted routines. Theoretically, we could expect more formally decided norms and role expectations, in **the first case** as one could expect much more hazards in the horizontal cooperation than in **the second case** of vertical cooperation. In addition, the interaction structure in the latter would reflect more long-term perspective in this cooperation than in the horizontal cooperation, building more on emerging routines, emerging from less formalised, long-term adaptations.

Our cases seem to partly confirm that formally decided norms and divisions of roles are more apparent in the horizontal case. However, this does not seem to mean that the less formalised norms of decision making emerging in the vertical case are less strong. On the contrary, and particularly in a situation of radical change when the informal and implicit norms are challenged and surfaced, the strength of these informal norms for decision making and role-expectations becomes apparent.

Focus for future studies: the dynamic aspects of structuring processes

Forces of inertia in structuring processes

Building on our two cases, it can be assumed that it would be possible to define characteristics of interaction structures that enable change, and interaction structures that inhibit change. When forces in the external world pose pressure for change, the first kind would be likely to adapt while the second type is likely to dissolve.

It is generally accepted that the interaction structure reflects what is of importance to the parties. Accordingly, the interests of individual actors are central forces behind the structure (c.f. Turner, 1988). When e.g. the parties pursue to avoid conflicts and have built a structure that fulfills this function as in the case 1, we may assume that inertia may eventually become dominant (c.f. Gergen and Gergen 1986, 316). We suggest thus that an interesting question for further study would be to study the links between motivating forces and the types of structure that inhibit or enable change.

Structuring as a long-term change and adaptation process

From a social interaction perspective, Turner (1988) argues that "social structure is not a 'thing' however, but a process in which individuals produce and reproduce patterned sequences of interactive responses. Once created, these established sequences become, in a sense, a 'mental template' or 'schema' for how those individuals will interact when they resume contact" (p.149). Although not in direct focus of this paper, studies contain examples of such, more long-term, structuring processes, In our cases we could see that to secure actors sense of ontological security, when threatened by change, the interactive routines from ongoing, increased specialisation of roles became important, initial forces of inertia. In connection to change and the destabilisation of actors' roles and role expectations, the function of trust invoked by the routinisation of interactions were surfaced. These and other aspects of the dynamic and more long-term properties of the structuring of interactions, including norms, routines and role-expectations would be one important topic for future studies.

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