Towards an model of understanding restoring actions during the stages of dissolution in inter-organisational relationships

Abstract

This proposal addresses how inter-organisational relationships can be restored during the stages of dissolution following a breakdown. There is a small but emerging body of work on restoration but it is not yet linked to either the process of dissolution or the factors affecting dissolution. Moreover the literature pertaining to inter-organisational dissolution and repair is heterogeneous deriving from different streams of research and different theoretical backgrounds. The aim of this proposal is to present an integrated model of dissolution and repair for small business dyads. Building on Duck's (1984) model of repairing interpersonal relationships and integrating findings from the inter-organisational dissolution and repair literature, it is argued that dissolution is a process rather than a single decision and that repair can happen at any stage. It is also argued that the actions and reactions of individuals drive the restoration outcome. Therefore, effective restoration depends on the ability to identify and act on the issues that are pushing the relationship towards ending at each dissolution stage.

Introduction

In this proposal, we focus on relationship dissolution and restoration of small business dyads where certain factors have led to a breakdown and the initiation of dissolution from at least one side of the partnership. Whilst it is acknowledged that in certain circumstances business relationships should be dissolved; there is evidence to suggest that most business relationships are worth saving (Tahtinen & Vaaland, 2006). Nevertheless the majority of inter-organisational research attention has focussed on the positives of developing successful relationships and not on the negatives of managing them, resulting in less attention on conceptual development and empirical evidence related to problematic relationships facing dissolution (Holmlund & Hobbs, 2009). This has serious consequences for practitioners because it is well documented that relationship dissolution represents a significant loss both financially and psychologically for small firms (Salo, Tahtinen & Ulkuniemi, 2009) yet it is the most understudied aspect of inter-organisational relationships and represents a significant gap in the literature (Johnston & Hausman, 2006).

Scholarly research examining inter-organisational dissolution dates back to the early 1990s following Dwyer, Shurr & Oh's (1987) call for research in this area. Since then studies have focussed on the reasons why relationships end (Keaveney, 1995; Perrien; Paradis & Richard, 1995; Hocutt, 1998) or on the processes of dissolution (Ping & Dwyer, 1992; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002) or on the strategies for disengagement (Alajoutisjarvi, Moller & Tahtinen, 2000; Pressey & Mathews, 2002) but with scant attention to the restoration of a relationship on the brink of ending (Tahtinen & Vaaland, 2006; Tahtinen, Paparoidamis & Chumpitaz, 2007; Salo et al, 2009)

In recognition of this an emerging field of research on recovery has been undertaken. Though few in number, these studies are important in introducing the topic but tend to focus on the processes of recovery (see Tahtinen et al. 2007; Salo et al., 2009) or on the analysis of attenuating factors leading to recovery (see Vaaland & Tahtinen, 2003; Tahtinen & Vaaland, 2006) but as of yet no attempt has been made to link restoring actions to each stage of the dissolution process. Moreover, there is a tendency by researchers to focus on recovery strategies for a particular conflictual episode (Gronroos, 1988; Weun, Beatty & Jones, 2004) rather than on the complex processes involved in recovering an inter-organisational relationship (Tahtinen et al., 2007).

Therefore, the overarching aim of this research is to provide an integrated model of restoring methods during the stages of dissolution. In pursuit of this aim this research will involve the analysis and exploration of the actions and reactions of the individuals in inter-organisational relationships to gain a complete understanding of the total process.

The empirical objectives associated with this aim are:

- To identify and analyse the factors that promote or inhibit dissolution and investigate their possible impact on different recovery methods.
- To identify the actor's responses to dissatisfaction and assess their impact on the outcome of the dissolution process.
- To identify the stages of dissolution and link different restoring methods to each stage of the process gaining an understanding of how and why different restoring actions may be chosen.

We build on Duck's (1984) model of relationship repair and highlight the importance of how both the relational aspect and the factors that promote or inhibit dissolution affect restoration outcomes. Repair becomes important as soon as the relationship enters the breakdown stage therefore research must attempt to understand the objectives of repair at each stage of dissolution (Duck, 1984). Depending on the advancement of ending, different repair methods will have different rates of success (Vidal, 2006). In the early stages of dissolution, repair methods are more task focussed related to evaluation and decision making, whereas in the latter stages, repair strategies tend to be more emotional and focus on behavioural strategic choices (Giller & Matear, 2001). These two situations therefore call for different repair strategies and methods.

This proposal is structured as follows: An outline of the theoretical perspective underpinning the research will be presented followed by the dissolution and repair literature influencing the study. A conceptual framework developed from the literature is then proposed followed by research methodology. Finally the author will highlight the contributions of the study to both research and management.

Theoretical perspective

As the aim of this research study is to examine the dynamics of relationship dissolution and repair from the point of view of the actors within it, the underlying theory underpinning this study is Social Exchange Theory (hereafter, SET) as it attempts to study inter-organisational relationships from the dyadic perspective, concentrating on the social structure of the relationship rather than the transaction (Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1968; Blau, 1964; Cook & Emerson, 1983). There are key differences between economic theories and SET. The most crucial is unspecified obligations (Blau, 1964). The exact nature of returns is not always specified. Over a series of interactions, a social order is built to such an extent that feelings of personal obligation, commitment and trust exist to sustain the relationship, which do not exist in pure economic exchanges (Blau, 1964).

SET posits that all human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. As a result actors will remain in a relationship as long as there is value to be had (Homans, 1958; Blau 1964). The costs and rewards, economic and social, associated with an exchange will be assessed which will influence a party's decision to continue exchange relationships given the level of outcomes they have experienced (Thibaut & Kelly, 1968; Anderson & Narus, 1984; Dwyer Shurr & Oh, 1987). SET has been applied in the inter-organisational literature through the interaction and network approach which looks beyond single buyer-seller dyads and at business markets as connected dyads between key actors embedded in a web of relationships (Hakansson & Ford, 2002). The emphasis is on the dynamics of the development of the dyad rather than static governance (Harrison, 2004).

Relationship dissolution becomes a real issue if the costs outweigh the benefits of relational exchange (Dwyer et al, 1987). Indeed Social exchange theory offers relationship break up as a reasonable solution to relationships that do not fulfil the expected outcomes or if there are better alternatives (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). SET allows for the understanding of not only the financial implications of ending a business relationship but also the understanding of the behavioural process from the actors perspective which is an important in the study of relationship repair.

Business relationships are complex and have built up a life of their own through a series of interactions overtime (Ford and Havila, 2003). It is wrong to assume that joint commitment, mutuality and interest exists all of the time. Both parties manage the relationship and both have views and interpretations on the actions and outcomes of particular episodes. Aligning to the principles of SET, these actors will be constantly assessing the costs and rewards associated with the relationship. Indeed, as a result relationships may be in growth, development, inertia and decline on any number of occasions in their life (Ford and Havila, 2003).

Literature Review

As outlined in Table 1 below, over the past number of years an impressive body of literature has accumulated related to Dissolution and Repair. Researchers have explored a wide range of aspects reflecting this complex process although the literature still remains heterogeneous and somewhat disjointed when it comes to providing an overall view of the dynamics of recovery (Vidal, 2006). Only recently has the research on repairing relationships begun to gain momentum. Although this research stream has provided a preliminary basis for the study of inter-organisational repair, it has yet to take a holistic view of the dynamics of recovery between small companies experiencing dissolution. The purpose of this research is to combine research findings over the last number of years into an integrated framework of dissolution and repair in particular focussing on restoring actions during each stage of the dissolution process.

The following table describes is a breakdown of the literature reviewed to date:

Table 1

Focus	Authors
Factors Affecting Dissolution	Doyle, P., Corstjens, M. & Michell, P., 1980; Duck, 1981, 1982; Buchanan & Michell, 1991; Michell et al., 1992; Keaveney, 1995; Perrien et al., 1995; Hocutt, 1998; Gronhaug, 1999; Edvardsson & Strandvik, 2000; Havila & Salmi, 2000; Harrison, 2001; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002; Tahtinen, 2003; Ford & Havila, 2003; Tuusjarvi & Blois, 2004; Tidstrom & Ahman, 2006; Pressey & Selassie, 2007; Gedeon, Ferne & Poole, 2008
Types of Relationship Ending	Presssey & Matthews, 2003; Michalski, 2004; Akerlund, 2005
Dissolution Process	Duck, 1984; Ping & Dwyer, 1992; Tahtinen & Halinen-Kalia, 1997; Coulter et al., 2000; Tahtinen, 2003; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002; Tahtinen, 2002; Tidstrom & Ahman, 2006
Disengagement Strategies	Baxter, 1979, 1982, 1983; Alajoutsijavi et al., 2000; Giller & Matear, 2001
Switching Behaviour	Heide & Weiss, 1995; Nielson, 1996; Stewart, 1998; Athanassopoulos, 2000; Colgate & Lang, 2001; Panther & Farquhar, 2004; Ellis, 2006; Yamanandram, 2006.
Stress in Relationships	Holmlund & Strandvik, 2003.
Relationship Energy post dissolution	Havila & Wilkinson, 2002
The role of Inter-Personal Relationships and Dissolution	Seabright et al., 1992; Halinen & Salmi, 2001; Harrison, 2004; Gedeon et al., 2009
Seller's willingness to end relationships	Helm, Ludger and Gunter, 2006; Holmlund & Hobbs, 2009
Responses to Dissatisfaction	Hirschman, 1970; Rusbult 1988; Ping, 1993, 1997,1999; Hibberd et al, 2001; Johnston & Hausman, 2006; Blois, 2007; Ferguson & Johnston, 2010.
Recovery Models	Duck, 1984, Tahtinen et al., 2007; Salo et al., 2009
Strategies for maintenance and repair	Dindia & Baxter, 1984; Dant & Schul, 1992; Good & Evans, 2001
Service Recovery	Hart et al., 2000; Weun, 2004
Analysis of Attenuating factors	Vaaland & Tahtinen, 2003; Tahtinen & Vaaland, 2006

Table 1: Overview of Literature on Dissolution and Repair

Based on the this review, this research has combined the works of Social Psychology and Inter-Organisational literatures (Duck, 1981, 1984; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002; Tahtinen et al., 2007) in order to build an integrated model of recovery. We argue that in order to undertake repair, we must understand the factors affecting dissolution, we also argue that repair can happen at any stage and therefore we must link the process model to methods of repair as they differ depending on the advancement of dissolution. Moreover the actions and reactions of both parties greatly affect the outcomes of repair and therefore must be highlighted throughout the study.

The 4 key aspects that will be explored in this study include:

- The Factors that promote or inhibit dissolution
- The Dissolution Process
- Repair methods at each stage of dissolution
- Responses to Dissatisfaction

Building the Conceptual Model

Factors promoting or inhibiting Dissolution

In the business to business literature, Halinen and Tahtinen (2002) propose a categorisation of influencing factors on the dissolution of relationships. Based on the work of Duck (1981), they classify these factors into three categories; *predisposing factors, precipitating events* and *attenuating factors and events*. The ending process is influenced by predisposing factors, advanced by precipitating events and indirectly affected by attenuating factors (Vaaland and Purchase, 2005).

Predisposing factors exist before the relationship started and have the potential to cause ending indicating that history has an impact on relationship ending (Seabright et al., 1992). These are underlying factors that exist such as dissimilarities between the companies or cultural differences that can make the relationship more vulnerable to dissolution (Halinen and Tahtinen, 2002). They can be related to such things as the nature and task of the relationship i.e. highly complex (Vaaland and Hakansson, 2000; Tahtinen, 2001), the characteristics of the companies involved (Duck, 1981), different expectations concerning the relationship or to the network that the relationship is embedded in (Halinen and Tahtinen, 2002; Tornroos, 2004). As predisposing factors are less visible, they can provide a certain amount of risk concerning the development of the relationship and should be recognised by business partners (Gronhaug et al., 1999; Tahtinen & Halinen-Kalia, 1997; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002). A poor choice of partner can also be referred to as a predisposing factor, which can lead to an inability to establish mutual expectations and goals therefore leading to mismatches in resources and needs (Halinen, 1997). Similarly in the service literature, Perrien et al (1995) notes that it is about constantly assessing and keeping close to business customers.

Precipitating events are events that ‘trigger’ an increase in relationship conflict and move the relationship towards dissolution. These events can happen during the course of the relationship or they can suddenly lead to an immediate break-up (Halinen et al., 1999). The reaction of managers to precipitating events can also lead to dissolution if conflict resolution is not achieved (Vaaland and Purchase, 2005). Similar to predisposing factors, precipitating events are related to the company, the relationship and the network (Halinen and Tahtinen, 2002; Gedeon, Ferne and Poole, 2008). Pressures from any of these can accelerate the relationship towards dissolution. Misinterpretation and an inability to agree on shared benefits and fairness (Tuusjarvi and Blois, 2004); personal relationships (Michell et al., 1992; Perrien et al,. 1995) and performance (Michell et al., 1992; Keaveney, 1995) have influenced both relationship maintenance and dissolution. Furthermore, in service management research *critical incidents* have been used to understand how consumers perceive unsuccessful service episodes (Keaveney, 1995; Edvardsson and Strandvik, 1999). However, focussing on the incident alone is not enough and there is a general consensus in the literature that researchers must look at the time dimension (past, present and future) and the structural dimension (internal and external conditions) of the relationship (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000). In business relationships the study of critical incidents has been used for events that have a major effect on relationship development (Halinen, 1997, pp 272) or events that deviate from the norm and trigger perceptual and or behavioural attention (Holmlund and Strandvik, 1999). Havila and Salmi (2000) note that it is not the event itself that is critical but the way in which the parties react to it that is the issue. Outcomes of critical incidents can be measured on three levels: cognitive, emotional and behavioural (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000) Indeed there has been a call to move from taking an episode perspective to a relational view towards an analysis of these events in the context of business relationships (Holmlund and Strandvik, 1999). A more holistic and contextual view of customer dissatisfaction in business to business relationships is required where the trigger is seen as the catalyst but may differ from the final reason for ending the relationship (Michalski, 2004).

The third category to influence dissolution is ***attenuating factors***. Actors evaluate these factors in order to assess if the relationship is worth continuing. Attenuating events are thought to moderate the effect of predisposing factors and precipitating events (Halinen and Tahtinen, 2002). Although a number of studies have looked at increasing switching costs as a means to maintaining and restoring a relationship, it is believed that these are not enough to restore a relationship that has entered the dissolution process (Tahtinen and Vaaland, 2006). Table two below describes a categorisation of attenuating factors:

If managers perceive these attenuating factors as important or strong, they will try to save the relationship or at the very least halt its decline. Relationship dissolution becomes a real issue if the costs outweigh the benefits of relational exchange (Dwyer et al, 1987). Indeed Social exchange theory offers relationship break up as a reasonable solution to relationships that do not fulfil the expected outcomes or if there are better alternatives (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959; Emerson, 1962). This cost-benefit analysis can be achieved through regular evaluation of the relationship using the attenuating factors described (Tahtinen and Vaaland, 2006). It has been shown that attenuating factors can help change the course of dissolution towards restoration (Tahtinen and Vaaland, 2006). This analysis can highlight the importance of the relationship to both partners to the extent that they realise that it is worth continuing. On the other hand it has been argued that the analysis may have the opposite effect where a party may realise that alternatives are better and move towards dissolution (Vaaland and Tahtinen, 2003).

Categories have been proposed by Tahtinen & Vaaland (2006) outlined in table 2 which can be used in the analysis of business relationships.

Table 2

Category	Motivation to restore	Loss	Authors
Lost Relational investments	Relational investments made in developing bonds in the relationship will be lost both economic and Social on an individual or company level.	Future relational benefits lost. Bonds of trust and commitment. Knowledge and Technological bonds. Social and Personal bonds.	Hocutt (1998); Nielson (1996); Young and Denize (1995); Seabright et al. (1992); Tahtinen (2001); Ping (1994).
Dissolution Process Costs	Cost of ending can be high and internal functions can be disrupted i.e. legal costs and the costs of ending production and transferring employees	Time, effort and negotiations. Production. Legal battles.	Vaaland (2002)
Possible Sanctions for Future Business	The partner or the network can impose sanctions leading to loss of reputation and referrals.	Social Pressure. Negative word of mouth. Network pressure. Reputation.	Alajoutsijarvi et al. (2000); Tahtinen (2001).
Network Limitations	Few alternative partners	Lack of alternatives. Weak substitutes.	Ping (1993); Stewart (1998).
Set up Costs	The costs of finding a new partner and establishing new relational investments	Setting up a new relationship including search costs and new development costs.	Heide and John (1990); Weiss and Anderson (1992); Dwyer et al. (1987)

(Adapted from: Tahtinen and Vaaland, 2006, p16)

In order to attempt repair, an analysis and understanding of these attenuating factors is necessary but also predisposing factors and precipitating events. If parties in a relationship do not understand the reasons for breakdown, they will not be able to initiate the appropriate repair methods. This study will link these factors to the dissolution process.

The Process of Dissolution

The theory development on the stages of dissolution has been thus far influenced by Social Psychology; Duck's (1982) model of personal relationship dissolution, Ping and Dwyer (1992) on channel termination and Halinen and Tahtinen (2002) on business to business relationships. For these authors relationship dissolution should not be seen as an event but an extended process with affective, behavioural, cognitive and social aspects. Based on the foregoing, Table three presents the phases that individuals pass through in relationship dissolution. For Duck (1982) there is a threshold at each phase, which moves the person onto the next stage. The tension/conflict levels rise as the partner moves from one phase to the next.

The emphasis of the early phases of the model is a cognitive one, focussed on evaluation and decision-making (Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002). Later phases are the result of the evaluation, decision-making and actions from the first stages (Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002). At these stages the managers are faced with behavioural strategic choices about the best ways for managing the growing intent to dissolve the relationship (Giller & Matear, 2001).

Table 3

Stages	Explanation	Authors
Breakdown	Chronic dissatisfaction. Negative view of the benefits of the relationship. Episodic dissatisfaction from role breakdowns adds to overall dissatisfaction. Relational norms deteriorate.	Duck, 1981; Ping and Dwyer, 1992.
Intrapersonal	Following from breakdowns in the partner's role performance and other norms, the relationship deteriorates. The individual decides what action/response they should take. They evaluate the situation from their own perspective.	Duck, 1981; Ping and Dwyer, 1992; Tahtinen, 2001; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002.
Intracompany or Dyadic	Individual seeks a consensus among the firm's managers on a set of remedial measures including termination. The decision to terminate may be constrained by extrinsic or structural commitment. If it is high the member abstains from termination	Duck, 1981; Ping and Dwyer, 1992; Tahtinen, 2001; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002
Intercompany	The focal and partner firm assesses the status of the relationship and jointly develop a set of remedial measures or terminates the relationship. The relationship needs to be readjusted.	Duck, 1982; Ping and Dwyer, 1992; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002.
Public	The firms communicate with outsiders. This can happen before, during or after the intercompany stage.	Duck, 1982; Ping and Dwyer, 1992; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002
Aftermath Stage	Partners develop an ex post account of the dissolution	Duck, 1982; Ping and Dwyer, 1992; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002.

Adapted from (Duck, 1981; Ping & Dwyer, 1992; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002)

At the breakdown stage when dissatisfaction has reached a discontinuity threshold (Sheridan, 1985), a business partner's reactions are no longer moderated by norms. Instead they revert to protecting their own interests (Ping & Dwyer, 1992). This leads to the intra-company stage where self- interest precipitates greater consideration of the partner's structural and intrinsic commitment (Ping 1990, Ping and Dwyer 1992) such as the availability of alternatives; the amount of irretrievable investments and any other switching costs. These considerations determine the nature of the partners' response to dissatisfaction (Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002). A partner may try and restore equity in the relationship if they perceive that inequity exists.

According to Ping & Dwyer (1992) at the intercompany stage the role performance and norm violations have reached such a point that restoring commitment immediately is difficult. However there can be attempts at this stage to negotiate an improved performance and readjust the relationship (Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002). This can be a difficult process as conflict levels are high from the breakdown. The outcome of this stage depends on communication and negotiation and the party's motivation to either stay in the relationship or to terminate (Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002). This is influenced by the perceptions of fairness (Gassenheimer et al., 1998), the degree of harmony and the communication strategies adopted.

The image of the firms to the outside also needs to be considered. At the public stage, the aim is to maintain reputation within the marketplace and change public attitudes towards the firms (Ping & Dwyer, 1992). It is preferred by managers to blame the external environment rather than internal failings. At the aftermath stage, the parties create internal and external accounts of the termination (Ping and Dwyer, 1992; Halinen and Tahtinen, 2002). These accounts usually differ between companies in order to preserve their company image. In some instances relationship energy may exist in the form of social bonds even after resource ties and activity links have been broken (Havila and Wilkinson, 2002). Relationships may not totally end; the energy they possess might keep ongoing relationships even if the business has been ended (Havila & Wilkinson, 1997). This can lead to the relationship restoring at some time in the future or provide opportunities for other market relationships.

Although these business models provide a firm basis for analysis, they neglect the role of dispute resolution mechanisms throughout. According to Duck (1982) we should aim to explore and validate techniques to prevent dissolution and to promote repair of relationships where partners wish it. The restoration stage proposed in Tahtinen's (2003) model has not been expanded in any great depth to give the inter-organisational literature an understanding of the strategies or the methods of restoring relationships. They also imply that restoration can be achieved in the early stages of the dissolution process and not at the later stages. This is a neglected issue within inter-organisational literature and therefore, it is necessary to draw on other disciplines namely Social Psychology to get a greater understanding of these dynamics.

Restoration of relationships

Restoring a business relationship is different to maintaining it and the actors involved must acknowledge the problems and have a full understanding of the issues they face (Hart, 1990; Tahtinen and Vaaland, 2005; Yanamandram and White, 2006). Studies within the business literature have defined the restoration process as "*all the actions the actors undertake to change a problematic business relationship into a beneficial one*" (Salo et al., 2009, pp 621).

From a Social Psychology perspective, Duck (1984) suggests that repair has different goals at different parts of the process of dissolution. Indeed repair options have different rates of success depending on the stage of dissolution they are applied to. Different phases are susceptible to repairing actions and not to others. In other words, if certain actions are not applied in time they may not work further on in the dissolution process. As such the factors influencing dissolution must be assessed so that a clear cost benefit analysis is understood. Erecting barriers to exit is not sufficient to repair relationships and can in some instances create negative feelings (Vidal, 2006). Restoration must include the reestablishment of positives in the relationship and the actions required to reduce tension (Vaaland and Tahtinen, 2003; Vidal, 2006).

Different restoring actions are required from the first stages of the dissolving process to the more advanced stages (see table 4). Where at least one partner is detached in the initial stages, communication and Meta communication can be used, whereas network strategies, outside support and intervention would be more suited to behavioural restoration at later stages (Duck, 1984; Vidal, 2006). Whatever strategies are chosen will depend on the analysis of factors and the dissolving stage. Duck (1984) believes that repair will be most effective when it takes into account the concerns and issues most prominent in the partner's minds at each stage.

However, problems occur in greater and lesser degrees during the stages of dissolution (Duck, 1984). Rather than presenting restoration as a stage within dissolution, Duck's repair model (1984) looks at each stage of dissolution and the objectives of repair at each stage.

Table 4

Stage	Objectives for Repair	Repair Methods	
Breakdown	• Reduce tensions in interactions • Improve communication • Increase commitment	• Individual positive behaviour • Communication techniques • Process. Readjust relationship • Make adaptations	• These methods are most likely to be effective when both partners desire it and when the breakdown has not reached high levels of dissatisfaction
Intra Company	• Focus on the positives and on the relationship. • To strike a balanced view of partners behaviour	• Cost/Benefit analysis • Adjust attitudes towards the partner. • Re-evaluate relationship internally	• Need to focus on the positives here to try and personally work out the problems through adjustment of behaviour.
Inter Company	• Focus on the future of the relationship.	• Changes in the actual relationship. It centres on relational roles. This involves the creation of new patterns of activity and new ways of working.	• Mutual desire to repair the relationship is required after considering the future of the relationship**.**
Public	• To consult others and gain their support for helping the relationship. • To obtain help to understand the problems.	• Intervention teamwork. • Reconstruction of the relationship using the influence of outsiders. • Different social support is needed at different stages. • More distant kinds of support networks are usually consulted as they are more objective and uncommitted.	• This stage focuses on two issues; the individual needs and the network/social consequences. • Handling the wider consequences of the troubled relationship and minimising the disruption to the network.
Aftermath	• To create acceptable account of the dissolved relationship and save reputation.	• Create acceptable stories from both sides	• Need to end relationship as amicably as possible

(Adapted from: Duck, 1984)

During the process of dissolution and attempted repair, it is expected that relational characteristics will be affected by the problems in relationships. Dissolution can start at a cognitive level where the relationship is fading in the mind of one actor but needs to be expressed so that the partner notices it. Deterioration in the relationship affects the partner's intentions and a will to act. When the cognitive level moves to behavioural weakening, the issues are far greater to resolve and will result in decreased trading and social interaction. The closer therefore the parties get to behavioural deterioration the lower the potential for repair (Vidal, 2006). It is important then that both partners understand each other's perception of the trouble the relationship is in (Vaaland and Tahtinen, 2003). The restoration process cannot progress if either party is confused regarding the reasons for breakdown.

It would be misleading to state that no research has been conducted on models for restoration in within the business literature. For instance, process models have been proposed which focus on restoration through the analysis and understanding of attenuating factors (Tahtinen and Vaaland, 2003; Tahtinen et al, 2007) and the restoration of commitment and trust (Salo et al., 2009). Communication is crucial to the recovery process in addition to assigning key people to the role of recovery on each side (Salo et al., 2009). Indeed mutual exchange and effort, information sharing, and gaining a deep understanding of both companies are essential to recovery (Salo et al., 2009). Three dimensions that are important when restoring relationships are open communication, trust and commitment as they encourage the motivation to restore a relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Hocutt, 1998; Tahtinen, 2002). These however need to be rebuilt as part of the process of recovery (Salo et al., 2009). The relationship atmosphere and recovery actions are closely related. Restoring actions improve the atmosphere, which aid in the discussion and resolution of problems. A partner shows signs of commitment and trust when they undertake restoring actions but before this they must understand and solve the causes of the conflict.

Whilst the recent studies on inter-organisational relationship repair provide a firm basis for starting the recovery process, they place particular emphasis on the evaluation of attenuating factors as opposed to focussing on the methods of repair utilised by the parties involved.

Responses to Dissatisfaction

The importance of the managerial actions in the dissolution has been highlighted throughout the various models of business dissolution (Halinen and Salmi, 2001). Indeed Halinen & Tahtinen (2002) note that the ending process may not always result in a dissolved relationship. How it advances is a result of the evaluations and decisions of managers who can restore the relationship as much as dissolve it? There are a number of reactions to decline and dissatisfaction in business relationships. Studies have distinguished between four categories of responses depending on their constructive or destructive nature (Hirschman, 1970). Strategies such as voicing and loyalty (Hirschman, 1970) are constructive and offer more opportunities to restore the relationships whereas neglect and exiting (Hirschman, 1970; Rusbult, 1982) are more destructive thereby pushing the relationship towards ending. Rather than assuming that the relationship is on the road to dissolution, the exit-voice-loyalty and neglect approach deals with reactions to problems at whatever point they emerge (Ping and Dwyer, 1992).

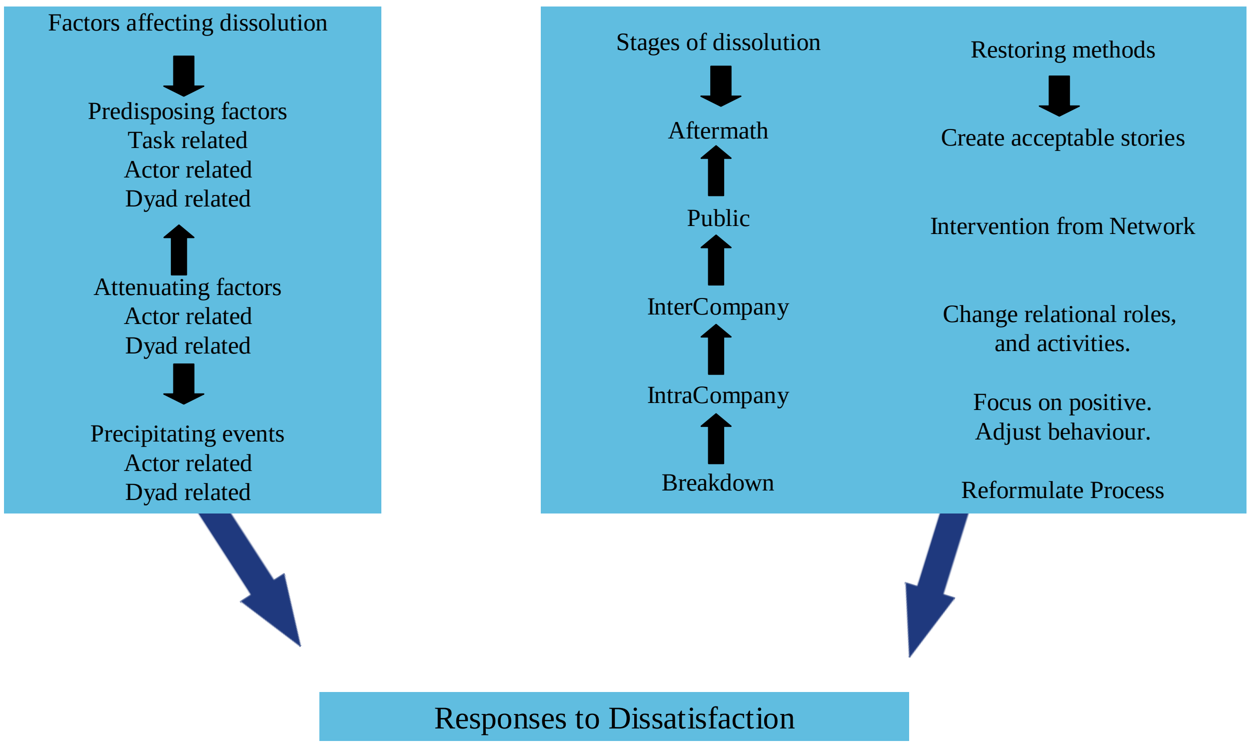
Hirschman's (1970) framework suggests that customers will behave in one of three ways to dissatisfaction in a relationship. They can *Exit* – Formally separating, threatening to end or searching for alternatives, *Voice* –Actively and constructively trying to improve conditions, discussing and solving problems, seeking help from a third party, or trying to adapt and *Loyalty* – doing nothing while waiting for conditions to improve, giving public and private support for the relationship. Later Rusbult (1982) identified *neglect* as a fourth response where the partner allows the relationship to disintegrate as they are neither motivated to continue or restore it. It can be proposed then that the potential for restoration becomes weaker as the exit option is pursued.

With the exception of Blois (2007), Hirschman's framework has seen limited adaptation in business to business contexts but can be used to capture dissatisfied business customer response behaviour (Ferguson and Johnston, 2010). The important thing to understand is that a business partner may not be as passive to dissatisfaction- response behaviour as a supplier of consumer goods and in some instances the exit option may prove more financially viable than remaining in the relationship (Blois, 2007 p9). In relation to restoration, it is argued that there can be a link between responses to dissatisfaction and the propensity to restore a relationship. Both voice and loyalty can increase restoration potential and therefore this will be explored as part of the study.

A Tentative Conceptual Framework for understanding restoring actions during dissolution.

Based upon the foregoing, this study utilises a meta-theoretical approach that integrates differing theoretical strands from social psychology (Rusbult, 1982; Duck, 1981, 1982, 1984); inter-organisational relationship ending (Ping & Dwyer, 1992; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002; Tahtinen, 2003) and responses to dissatisfaction (Hirschman, 1970) to develop a tentative conceptual framework (Figure, 1). This framework brings together the elements required to capture the restoring actions at each stage of dissolution.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



Proposed Methodology

This study is investigates the restoration methods employed during the stages if dissolution in inter-organisational relationships using an interpretative case study approach.

Case Research Design

For this research the approach chosen is an exploratory interpretative case study approach using two case studies. The main reason for this is evident in the study's objectives of understanding restoring actions during the stages of dissolution in inter-organisational relationships. The researcher is attempting to 'inductively and holistically understand human experience in context-specific settings' (Patton, 1990, p37). Research on restoration in inter-organisational relationships is in its infancy and therefore the research chosen has to be unstructured and flexible (Kumar, 2002; Malhorta, 2002). The rationale for using an interpretative case method is that the complexity and nature of the phenomenon can be studied in its real life context (Yin, 2003). This is important as information rich data needs to be explored in order to gain a greater understanding of what happened (Patton, 1990).

By its very nature interpretative research needs to be flexible in design as information relating to the research questions may not get answered if a standard format is followed, so the researcher may have to change the direction of the research design (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Nevertheless at the outset if the researcher makes accountable decisions regarding the research questions, the unit of analysis, sampling strategy, strategy for data collection, management and analysis and planning; some of the difficulties with conducting case research can be overcome as the researcher has the tools to make change decisions when the need arises (Mason, 1996).

In addition, case studies will aid in theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989). Although a considerable amount of time has been spent on researching the literature concerning dissolution and repair and concepts have been developed, the researcher will have to be open and willing to accept that preconceived ideas or concepts may have to change. As the literature on restoration is very new, no existing theory offers an answer to the phenomenon outlined in this study. To date the literature addresses the analysis of attenuating factors and how this leads to a process of restoration but the understanding of the restoring actions taken during dissolution have largely been ignored. As Eisenhardt (1989, p548) notes '*strong theory building should result in new insights, replication is important in theory testing but in theory building the goal is new theory'*. It is envisaged at this stage that this research will be an iterative process which will involve integrating past research with empirical evidence to build a theory on the restoration actions undertaken during the stages of dissolution in inter-organisational relationships.

Defining the unit of analysis

Case researchers often have difficulty in answering *what the case is?* (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For Yin (2003) the most appropriate unit of analysis occurs when the researcher has defined their research questions. For this research the question that is to be addressed concerns the understanding of restoring actions during the stages of dissolution in inter-organisational relationships. Miles and Huberman (1994) advise researchers to think about the focus or heart of the study and build outwards to a boundary by concentrating on what is not being studied. This is related to what Patton (1990) describes as *'the key issue with selecting and making decisions about the appropriate unit of analysis is to decide what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study'* (168). Although boundaries *'are not as solid as a rationalist might hope'* (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p 27), the key is defining the case as early as possible to in relation to the concepts and research questions already outlined by the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Mason, 1996).

A case is defined as *'a phenomenon occurring in a bounded context,*' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p 25). To study and understand the restoring methods undertaken during dissolution in inter-organisational relationships, the business to business relationship is the unit of analysis and the CEO to CEO relationship therein.

Sampling

Having defined the case, the sampling strategy becomes important. Conducting qualitative research involves small samples which are studied in-depth within their real life context (Patton, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Whereas quantitative samples usually require a large sample selected randomly, interpretative qualitative samples are selected purposefully (Patton, 1990). The reason and logic behind purposeful sampling is about selecting cases that are information rich and that allow the researcher to learn about the central issues of the research thereby illuminating the research questions (Patton, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Case selection is an important first step in the sampling process with its main concern to establish information rich cases than can be studied in-depth. This will allow the researcher to develop theory (Patton, 1990, p181).

For the purpose of this study, the time and resource constraints involved, cases will be chosen based on a criterion sampling strategy (Patton, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The justification for using this approach is four fold; first the cases have to have long established business to business relationships likely to have rich information concerning the relationship. The cases should have experience in relationships that have been on the brink of ending put have saved the relationship. Second, in order to achieve the objectives set out in this study, both sides of the partnership should be willing to tell their side of the story. Third as demonstrated in the literature to experience such dissolution and repair relationships that are close represent a more realistic chance of uncovering more in-depth information and a rich understanding of the phenomenon under inquiry. Fourth due to resources and the purpose of the research business to business customers in Ireland will be included.

The rational for adopting a two case approach is that in order to gain an understanding of different restoring methods during dissolution and the notion that relationships can be restored at any stage requires more cases so that comparisons can be drawn regarding the different methods that may have been used. In addition, Inter-organisational relationship studies of restoration have not been approached this way before so focussing on more that one case with an exploratory goal should provide more insights and richer data.

Since this research is interpretative in nature, it has a focus on understanding rather than generalisability (Hirschman, 1986). Concentrating on 2 cases will allow the researcher to give a more detailed and in-depth account of the phenomenon than is possible if multiple sites are investigated. If the cases selected match the criteria for selection, they should be able to answer the research questions set out at the beginning (Mason, 1996).

Finally in practical terms, the very sensitivity of this study leads to considerations regarding gaining access and refusal to participate due to confidentiality and sensitivity so more often than not cases may not meet the prespecified criteria. However the researcher has access to a number of research groups within WIT who interact with external companies so this will be the starting point for the study.

Strategy for Data Collection

At this point, the researcher has discussed the proposed research design and has attempted to clarify what the researcher wants to find out about, from whom and why? Knowing what to find out leads the researcher to ‘how’ information is gathered (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is envisaged that a research protocol will be developed which is a necessary tool for conducting interpretative research as it outlines the parameters of the research that the researcher must abide by (Yin, 1994).

In addition Case studies provide more rigor (Eisenhardt, 1991) as they usually involve more sources of evidence which allows the researcher to cross reference material from several sources and to develop rich empirical evidence (Roche, 1997). The researcher is currently reviewing several sources of data by linking them to the research objectives as suggested by Mason (1996). In order to achieve the research objectives, the current sources of evidence being considered although not yet agreed include: Interviews, Documentation, Reflective practices and Archival records.

Finally in relation to the trustworthiness of the data and the rigour of the research strategy being proposed for this study, Lincoln and Guba (1984) propose four evaluative criteria for interpretative research namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability

Credibility will be achieved through the use of different techniques such as prolonged engagement with the case sites, the different methods used to obtain data, gathered data will be sent back to participants for review to ensure their credibility. Findings will also be presented to the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1984).

In relation to *Transferability* the researcher will have to provide rich descriptions to enable other researchers to assess the interpretations derived from the data and whether they can be transferred to a different context (Hirschman, 1986)

To achieve *dependability* multiple sources of evidence to triangulate findings will be needed (Yin, 1994; Mason, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and the use of an external auditor for examination (Lincoln & Guba, 1984).

Confirmability should address the issue of whether or not interpretations will be logical and rational (Hirschman, 1986) and therefore an audit trail of the whole process needs to be documented and presented.

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

As Tähtinen and Vaaland (2006) highlight, most researchers concentrate on “conditions and relational characteristics that reduce the risk of jeopardizing the “healthy” state of a relationship” (p. 15); a review of relevant literature indicates that research from a recovery perspective is extremely scarce yet recovery activities differ from maintenance activities involved in developing relationships (Vaaland, 2004).Research on recovering inter-organisational relationships appears disjointed and incomplete. This research drawing from social psychology is the first attempt at capturing a holistic view of the dynamics of restoration and as such will provide a significant contribution to theory and practice.

Although in conceptual form, the framework presented in this proposal does provide useful contributions to both theory and practice. Although current research in inter-organisational relationships has provided a preliminary basis on dissolution and restoration (Ping & Dwyer, 1992; Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002; Tahtinen et al., 2007; Salo et al., 2009), it is disjointed when it comes to providing an overall view of the dynamics of recovery (Vidal, 2007). This research will close a significant gap in the inter-organisational relationship literature by relating recovery actions to the stages of dissolution, and thus gaining an understanding of the factors leading to breakdown and the behaviours of the individuals involved in recovery. This investigation will not only aid researchers and managers in understanding and managing recovery under different conditions but it will also allow further understanding of the dynamics of managing partnerships.

This research will also aid practitioners. In the context of business markets, actors are not only responsible for the problems but also the evaluation of those problems and the recovery efforts involved (Vaaland, 2004; Salo et al., 2009). From a managerial perspective, it is necessary to understand the reasons why relationships can become dysfunctional and in turn what strategies can be used to restore them (Vidal, 2007). It will aid companies to protect and maintain their most profitable relationships and in turn to evaluate those relationships that may not be worth saving. Indeed, more information about the ending process may decrease the possibilities of it happening again. If relationships are in disorder they run the risk of lost development and growth as well as the possibility of ending (Vaaland and Tahtinen, 2003). Insight into the ending process and any recovery strategies will aid in the establishment of new relationships as companies are expected to learn from their experiences. In addition, recovering an existing relationship will save companies the social and financial costs in establishing new relationships. The literature highlights that the development of long-term relationships is important to sustainability and profitability yet relationships still end which is evident in the high failure rate of inter-organisational relationships. It seems necessary then that if actors wish to continue a relationship, rescue efforts are needed (Tahtinen et al., 2007).

Conclusion

Research on recovering inter-organisational relationships is disjointed and incomplete. This research is the first attempt at capturing a holistic view of the dynamics of restoration and as such will provide a significant contribution to theory and practice. The research draws upon a behavioural model of Social Psychology as a means of understanding restoration in inter-organisational relationships (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964).

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