RELATIONAL EXCHANGE RESEARCH IN MARKETING

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Abstract

There has been widespread acknowledgement in the marketing literature of the relevance of exchange governance structures for understanding channel functions and performance. In this context, Williamson's Transaction Cost Analysis of vertical integration has proven a useful framework from which to examine channel governance structures. However, the polar extremes represented in this framework -- e.g. true markets and hierarchies -- appear infrequently across channel relationships. As a result, increasing emphasis has been directed toward understanding the many intermediate "hybrid forms" of governance structures possible in channel relationships.

Much of this attention has been cultivated through conceptual development of Relational Exchange Theory extending from modern legal contract scholarship. Relational Exchange Theory provides a rich classificatory apparatus from which to more closely examine and compare these "hybrid forms." Extension and application of this conceptual framework to marketing represents an important research progression toward understanding channel relationships and is currently underway.

A special session focusing on conceptual, theoretical and operational issues surrounding Relational Exchange Theory was held at the Academy of Marketing Science Conference, May 29 - June 1, 1991. Examples of themes addressed during the 2-session workshop included:

   Conceptual issues pertaining to the domain of relationalism, its normative dimensions, their definitions and potential limitations of the framework in market channels.

   Theoretical issues regarding linkages between relationalism its attendant contractual norms and other constructs -- their identification and theorized association.

   Operational issues surrounding the development and application of the constructs of relationalism and contractual norms in an empirical investigation.

Panel participants provided prepared remarks and included:

   Ernie Cadotte, University of Tennessee
   Bob Dahlstrom, University of Kentucky
   Rajiv Dant, University of Mississippi
   Jule Gassenheimer, University of Kentucky
   Greg Gundlach, University of Notre Dame
   Jan Heide, Case Western Reserve
   Pat Kaufmann, Harvard University
   Tom Mentzer, Virginia Polytechnic Institute
   Bob Robicheaux, University of Alabama
   Jim Simpson, University of Alabama