



Andreas Schwenk

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Finding a Cue through “Q”

Applying Q-Methodology to Compare German and U.S. Diplomats’
Attitudes towards U.N. Security Council Reform

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With a foreword by Prof. Dr. Steunenberg

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Foreword

The study “Finding a cue through Q” focuses on how people communicate and whether they share similar perceptions the moment they engage in negotiations. For decision-making studies, this understanding is quite crucial. In her article ‘An agenda for the study of institutions’, published in 1986, the Nobel prize winner Elinor Ostrom sketches how decision-making is embedded in a broader context. It includes structural as well as institutional characteristics, which shape the outcome of decision-making. While decision-making is often reduced to simply a calculus of costs and benefits, a richer institutionalist approach also includes normative components. People may not only decide on what they like, but also how possible outcomes link with deeper values such as fairness, equality or something alike. And these values matter when it comes to deciding on an important but difficult issue.

In this book, the reform of the UN Security Council is such an issue. It is a difficult one: years of discussion and debate have preceded current discussions. Already in 1992 reform was put on the political agenda. It is an important issue: the discussion determines whether and how the UN may act, on behalf of its members, in case of various international conflicts. Andreas Schwenk carefully reconstructs these debates and the various reform proposals since then. As this study shows, reform continues to be an issue of various opinions and approaches with yet the common goal to find a workable solution for the future.

In order to analyze the current process, Schwenk uses Q-methodology to assess the normative points of view, but also judgements, contentions and capabilities of these actors. Q is a qualitative methodology to identify discourses through a careful collection, scoring and analysis of a broad and diverse set of statements, which are part of the overall discussions on some topic. Discourses are used to understand why negotiators are not able to find an acceptable solution.

Based on the analysis in this book, two discourses appear to be present in current debates. One is the discourse of convinced institutionalism. In this discourse, the UN Security Council is perceived as an institutional body in which geography and member state contributions should be part of the degree of control individual members have on decision-making. The other discourse is cautious institutionalism. Any change of the existing structure would be, in this discourse, a risky enterprise gambling with world peace and security. Therefore, any change of the current (veto) structure should not be made. While sharing agreement on the institutional identity and role of the council, both discourses prominent among the interviewed diplomats from Germany and the United States, differ in their assessment of risk and opportunity ahead.

The study is a nice example of how differences in normative understanding affect the outcome of decision-making. The study also nicely shows how the extensive discussion on reforming the UN Security Council is stalled. Only a geopolitical disruption changing the interest perception of the council members, or a step-by-step reform process with temporary trial periods for new council formats, would allow for progress.

I would like to wish you a lot of pleasure in reading this book. I am confident it will provide you with further insight in a complex but very interesting debate.

Bernard Steunenberg
Leiden University
6/2/2019

Abstract

United Nations Security Council reform has been an issue on the agenda of the United Nations once again since the end of the Cold War, and the following realignment of power structures in the international system. While the debate about reform has been intensively held until about 2007, reform efforts have stalled since then. In this master thesis, I attempt to seek possibilities for a revival of said debate through a combination of political discourse analysis and intensive Q-Methodology in search of common ground. For this study, diplomats from the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States of America were included as participants. They were asked to rank statements out of the two countries' discourses on UN Security Council reform according to agreement or disagreement. Instead of presenting study participants with a priori categories, this method allows me to reconstruct typologies for dominant discourses, based on the answers of the study participants. Social perspective narratives were then created for the results, leading to the surfacing of the dominant discourses. In this study, two different discourses were discovered in an analysis of the study participants' rankings: 1. Convinced Institutionalism & 2. Cautious Institutionalism. The results of this study can be used to relate UN Security Council reform to political discourses in the two countries on this subject, further clarifying positions from a cross-national comparison.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Literature Review	5
2.1. Two Countries in the United Nations Security Council	5
2.1.1. The Federal Republic of Germany	5
2.1.2. The United States of America	9
2.2. Main Initiatives and Draft Resolutions	13
2.2.1. The “Razali Reform Paper”	15
2.2.2. The High-Level Panel Report	16
2.2.3. The Group of Four	20
2.2.4. The Group “Uniting for Consensus”	21
2.2.5. The African Union	23
2.2.6. The “Small Five”	25
2.3. An Academic Approach: The “Schwartzberg Reform Proposal”	26
2.4. Assessment of Main Initiatives	28
3. Methodology	33
4. Results	39
4.1. Analysis of Interviews	39
4.2. Two Typologies	41
4.2.1. Convinced Institutionalism (Factor A)	44
4.2.2. Cautious Institutionalism (Factor B)	45
4.2.3. Diplomats’ Alignment to the two Discourses (Factor Loadings)	47
4.3. Assessment of Typologies	49

5. Limitations	55
6. Conclusion	57
References	61
Appendix	69
About the author	83