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Abstract:
Theory and a wide variety of evidence based on many methods investigating diverse phenomena demonstrate that people use just four fundamental relational models (RMs) to coordinate most aspects of nearly all social activities (see www.rmt.ucla.edu). The RMs are communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing. Communal sharing is an equivalence relation in which only set membership is meaningful; its structure corresponds to a categorical scale of measurement. Examples include people deeply in love or members of a platoon in combat. Authority ranking is a linear ordering in which each person is superior or inferior to each other person; its structure corresponds to an ordinal scale of measurement. Examples include status hierarchies and military, corporate, and academic ranks. (Unlike pure coercive power, participants regard it as legitimate and superiors have pastoral responsibility to guide, protect, and stand up for their subordinates.) Equality matching is a relationship in which people keep track of additive differences, with reference to even balance. Mathematically, it is an ordered Abelian group, homologous to an interval scale. Common manifestations include the rules of most games and sports, as well as tit-for-tat reciprocity and an-eye-for-an-eye revenge. Market pricing is a relationship conducted with reference to a socially meaningful ratio, rate, or proportion, such as prices, wages, taxes, cost-benefit analyses, proportional justice, and utilitarian moral reasoning. Its structure is an Archimedean ordered field, like that of a ratio scale.

The RMs provide the benefits of different degrees of structure for coordinating activities and, conversely, entail different coordination costs. These coordination costs include those involved in contesting and protecting resources. Results from analysis of dyadic interactions involving consumption of a single resource show that the optimum and evolutionarily stable RM depends on these costs, along with the rate of return on consumption. Other costs that should affect the relative advantages of different RMs include the different cognitive or technical demands they impose on tracking, remembering, combining and computing what each participant does, and the social costs of negotiating among participants to reconcile their 'books'.

http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/faculty/fiske/