

# The Repertory Grid: A Technique for Eliciting the Personal Constructs of Individuals

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## Abstract

*As the uses of information technology (IT) in organisations increase in both variety and complexity, practitioners and researchers are searching for ways to better understand how various information system (IS) stakeholders (users, managers, IS professionals) make sense of IT in their organizations. Sensemaking in organisations begins with the personal constructs individuals use to understand and interpret events that occur around them. A technique suitable to the elicitation of personal constructs that individuals use to understand IT and its role in organisations is the repertory grid (RepGrid). It is a structured interview technique that facilitates the elicitation of responses from participants in a non-intrusive manner. The RepGrid has been widely used in psychology, management, marketing and more recently in IS fields. It offers the potential to significantly enhance our understanding of how users, managers and IS professionals make sense of IT in their organizations. This tutorial introduces the RepGrid to researchers and practitioners. It presents an overview of the RepGrid and discusses how the technique has been employed in IS research, including a program of research using the RepGrid undertaken by the presenter.*

## About the Presenter

**Dr. Felix B Tan** is Professor of Information Systems and Chair of the Business Information Systems department in the Faculty of Business and Law at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. He serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Global Information Management*. He served on the Council of the Association for Information Systems between 2003 and 2005. Dr. Tan is internationally known for his work in the global IT field. His other research interests include IT user behaviour and the management of IS. He actively uses the RepGrid and narrative inquiry in his research. Dr. Tan has published in *MIS Quarterly*, *Information & Management*, *Communications of the ACM*, *Communications of the AIS*, *Journal of Information Technology*, *Information Systems Journal*, *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, *IEEE Transactions on Personal Communications*, as well as other journals and refereed conference proceedings.

## Scope of the Tutorial

At the end of the tutorial, participants should be able to:

- demonstrate a basic understanding of the RepGrid,
- demonstrate a clear understanding of issues to be considered when using the RepGrid,
- apply the RepGrid in their own research.

The tutorial provides an overview of the repertory grid technique and discusses how the technique has been used in IS research. It expounds on the potential of this technique to IS researchers by considering the variety of ways the technique may be employed – for both qualitative and quantitative investigations. The flexibility of the RepGrid is further illustrated by considering a program of research using the RepGrid undertaken by the presenter.

Dr. Tan has employed the RepGrid in several research projects which have since been published:

- Guo, Z., Tan, F.B. and Cheung, K. "Students' Uses and Gratifications for Using Computer-Mediated Communication Media in Learning Contexts". *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, Vol 27, Article 20, 2010.
- Napier, N.P., Keil, M. and Tan, F.B. 'IT Project Managers' Construction of Successful IT Project Management Practice: A Repertory Grid Investigation". *Information Systems Journal*, 19(3), 255-282, 2009.
- Tan, F.B., Tung, L.L. and Xu, Y. 'A Study of Web-designers' Criteria for B2C Website Evaluation using the Repertory Grid Technique'. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 10(3), 155-177, 2009
- Xu, Y., Tung, L.L. and Tan, F.B. 'Attributes of Website Usability: A Study of Web Users with the Repertory Grid Technique'. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 13(4), 99-128, Summer 2009.
- Tan, F.B., Gallupe, R.B. 'Aligning Business and Information Systems Thinking: A Cognitive Approach'. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 53(2), pp. 223-237, May 2006.
- Tan, F.B. & Hunter, M. G. 'The Repertory Grid Technique: A Method For The Study Of Cognition In Information Systems'. *MIS Quarterly*, 26(1), 39-57, 2002.

## Background of the Attendees

The likely audience will be researchers and practitioners interested in a technique that helps them better understand how various stakeholders (users, managers, IS professionals) make sense of IT in their organizations.

## Material Provided to Attendees

- Examples illustrating the variety of ways the RepGrid has been employed in IS research
- A copy of the tutorial slides will be made available to all attendees after the session

## Timetable / Structure

The proposed tutorial will run for 1h 30 mins. The structure of the tutorial is outlined below:

- Personal Construct Theory
- The Repertory Grid
- Element Generation
- Construct Elicitation
- Completing the Grid
- Data Analysis
- Program of Research
  - Skill Archetypes of IS Project Managers
  - Website Usability