



VAL HAMMOND
Research Paper

THE EMERGENCE OF TRUSTING
RELATIONSHIPS: STORIES AND
REFLECTIONS

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Introduction

With this project, we set out to investigate how trusting relationships develop in the workplace, and the consequences of losing trust. We began by exploring relevant literature and undertaking in-depth case studies, and in our original proposal we suggested experimenting with form and length of narrative material. It soon became clear that one page of text would be about the right amount to stimulate thinking among busy managers and OD/HR practitioners. So, following discussion with Roffey Park's head of research, Dan Lucy, in June 2015, we agreed to produce a series of short readings that could act as 'prompts' for discussion and learning: (i) mini-stories about trust, drawn from our case studies, and (ii) short pieces reflecting on relevant literature, which originated as blog posts (see <https://trustingrelationships.wordpress.com/>) by either Rob or Alison.

We are now moving into a new phase that involves conducting conversations and workshops with practitioners to stimulate discussion and learning. Hence this paper.

To help readers navigate the collection, we have organised it around three themes, expressed as questions, reflected in the major headings of this paper (readers might like to play with our structure or suggest different themes):

1. Does trust just happen to us?

What happens between people to create or destroy their trust in one another (e.g. in relationships between senior managers, between managers and staff or on boards)? What is the role of uncertainty, risk and vulnerability? Is it helpful to view trust as an 'emotional bank account' that can suddenly become empty?

2. What can we do to build trust?

What do people do consciously to develop or mend trust (e.g. creating social occasions to build relationships; deciding to take a risk and place trust in someone; creating transparency and openness in the organisation)?

3. Do we trust, and do we feel trusted by, the system(s) we are part of?

How does it happen that the wider system or culture is sometimes felt to undermine trust and morale (e.g. in a 'blame culture' or 'target culture')?

We are not advocating a theoretical position on trust. Instead we hope that the material we are offering will enable others to pursue their own inquiry into this rich and complex subject. In other words, our aim is to provide some thought-provoking stories and personal reflections, rather than general statements or simplistic formulae for developing trust.

Making our research as useful as possible to practitioners

Having gathered these materials together, our current interest is in exploring with managers and practitioners how they might use them to reflect on their own experience and develop a deeper understanding of trust. For example, we could imagine the stories and reflections giving rise to:

- 'Ah-ha' moments of realisation
- Opportunities for people to discuss and/or write about their own experience of developing trusting relationships, and to explore different interpretations or points of disagreement
- Opportunities to build bridges between people's experience in small groups.

After compiling this report, we tested the materials in an OD practitioner workshop to find out whether the stories and insights could be used to stimulate conversations about trust. The response was generally positive and we have incorporated what we learnt from the workshop in a Croner Strategic Briefing, due out in the Spring.

Meanwhile we invite readers of this report to dip in and out of it, picking out the pieces that stimulate their curiosity. There is no right order in which to read the text.

Alison Donaldson and Rob Warwick, February 2016

Notes on what distinguishes this from other Roffey Park projects on trust

Roffey Park has commissioned two other studies on the topic of trust and we hope that our work will complement them. Below are some thoughts about our particular angle on the subject:

1. We have focused on the social development of trust rather than either studying individual behaviour or trying to establish abstract generalisations about trust. Nevertheless, we do recognise the need for individual practitioners to feel a sense of their own agency. They may not be able to control how trust develops, but they can make moves that might make a difference, and we think this paper offers plenty of ideas worth exploring.
2. Our approach has been informed by recent and not-so-recent thinking on complexity and emergence in organisational life. This pointed us towards: thinking of trust as a process rather than a thing; understanding causality as non-linear; focusing our attention on the small moves and striking moments that can play a part in developing or destroying trust; developing written accounts that appeal to people's feelings (pathos) as well as their rational minds (logos).
3. Rather than starting out with any particular definition of trust, we chose to use our blog to reflect on a number of different ways of understanding the experience of trust.
4. Our exploration of literature has been selective but multidisciplinary: we took into consideration both academic and literary sources, and we drew on diverse disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, anthropology, ethnography, social psychology and management thinking. In doing so, we were particularly looking for writings that shed light on the social development of trust, and/or which offer ways of thinking about trust that will be helpful to practitioners as they grapple with this familiar but complex and elusive subject.
5. Our case studies were based on free-ranging, in-depth conversations with a few individuals whose backgrounds varied from civil service and non-profit to entrepreneurial and NHS. We consciously selected people who were 'at one remove' from the interviewer. In other words, Alison, who conducted the interviews, previously knew them either very little or not at all – they were all introduced to her by third parties.

Some useful ways to think about trust

IN OTHER WORDS: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE IDEA?

These short pieces originated as blog posts. The author is noted at the bottom of each piece.

Insights from literature

Trust in peripheral vision

Trust is written about in a number of ways. Here I would like to discuss two: one being less direct, but sharper; the other more direct, but less 'knowing'. In this latter case a number of authors tackle trust head on (Luhmann, 1979; Möllering, 2006), treating it theoretically, discussing it in relation to power, reason, habit and how we think about our actions. The argument makes sense intellectually, but it is hard to make a connection to practice or experience. In other words there is little 'knowing' in the practical sense. Whereas when I read ethnographic accounts (Bloch, 2013; Venkatesh, 2008) of lives lived, trust is rarely explicitly mentioned, but it is there as people describe how they get on with each other, particularly when the stakes are high. And in doing so one partially lives that journey too, even second guessing what might come. Take Venkatesh's story, for instance, of a graduate student who wants to research gangland culture in Chicago. It is a story that spans years as the student gains the trust of the gang leader JT. A trusting relationship develops between two very different people and extends to the wider gangland network and their community. It is a relationship that is shaky, tested and dangerous. Though the word trust is rarely used, it is the underpinning.

Perhaps trust is like seeing something from the corner of your eye: there it is clear and makes sense. As soon as you turn to look directly at it, any clarity disappears. And in trying to gain more understanding it takes on a different quality, less of experience and practice, more of intellect and theory.

Bloch M (2013) *Types of Shared Doubt in the Flow of Discussion*. In: Pelkmans M (ed.), *Ethnographies of Doubt - Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies*, London: I.B. Tauris & co.

Luhmann N (1979) *Trust and Power*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Möllering G (2006) *Trust: Reason, routine, reflexivity*. London: Elsevier Ltd,

Venkatesh S (2008) *Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Crosses the Line*. London: Allen Lane.

Rob Warwick,

From broad definitions to rich descriptions

In a section of his book on leadership called 'Hallmarks of Team Excellence' John Adair (Adair, 2002), a leading writer on the subject, provides the following very reasonable broad description of trust and support:

A good team trusts its members to pursue their part in the common task. Appreciation is expressed and recognition is given. People play to each other's strengths and cover each other's weaknesses. The level of mutual support is high. The atmosphere is one of openness and trust (p161).

The general heading of 'Hallmarks' is telling, it is static and this is often the case in how trust is written about. Although it is a description that I can relate to and seems 'obvious' it lacks something essential. What we are interested in are the rich descriptions of the sense of movement as we negotiate our ways round and into trusting relationships. Here the micro-interactions are important: what we do, how these actions are reacted to and how these lead to further interactions. And why we sometimes get stuck. Then there are the actions that we can take to change those relationships, how we relate to each other and how these in turn come to affect and hopefully improve our trusting relationships.

Adair J (2002) *Effective strategic leadership: an essential path to success guided by the world's great leaders*. London: Macmillan.

Rob Warwick

Chicken soup and the quantification of trust

In March 2015 we found ourselves at the University of Chichester in the front row of a traditionally tiered lecture theatre. We were there to listen to Professor Patrick Sturgis from Southampton University talking on trust.

Patrick based most of his argument on methods that involved large data sets going back decades including the 1959 'Generalised Trust Question'. Insights included a fact that trust had remained largely constant in the UK over the last 40 years, whereas in the US it had been declining.

But it was his reference to chicken soup that grabbed my attention; that trust was the 'chicken soup' of human relations. He was quoting Eric Uslaner (Uslaner, 2002) from the University of Maryland who said.

Trust is the chicken soup of social life. It brings us all sorts of good things, from a willingness to get involved in our communities to higher rates of economic growth and, ultimately, to satisfaction with government performance, to making daily life more pleasant. Yet, like chicken soup, it appears to work somewhat mysteriously. It might seem that we can only develop trust in people we know. Yet, trust's benefits come when we put faith in strangers.

Chicken soup conjures up feelings of comfort, warmth, family and reassurance, particularly in times of un-settlement or ill-health. It was a stark contrast to the graphs and comments about statistical significance. Like with many subjects there are many routes to knowledge. These few lines, which one can almost 'smell', not only captured the essence of what trust feels like inside us, but draws this experience into the issues

that matter in a functioning society of which we are part. Trust therefore exists both at a person-to-person level and in the context of wider society in ways that are difficult to fathom.

Uslaner E (2002) *The Moral Foundations of Trust*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Rob Warwick

Thinking too much about trust?

Have you ever thought about something too much? What seems obvious and intuitive unravels under logical examination. One's reaction: more thought and logic. It is like picking up dry fine sand on the beach and soon your hand is empty. Thinking about doubt, hope, enthusiasm and many other human characteristics is similar. But it is particularly true, it seems, of trust. Trust is a social process, it needs other people, thus adding further dimensions to how we might study it. Perhaps logic and thought are not enough: there is a tendency to chop and segment a subject into its component parts and then to step back and draw conclusions. We also need to give voice to the holistic sense of the experience, particularly that of anticipation as we jointly take the next steps in developing a relationship. And to build a bridge between the author and reader so that the reader might imagine the points being made in the context of their own experience.

Rob Warwick

Our focus on specific relationships and interactions

For this project, we undertook a small number of in-depth case studies. What we wanted to explore with people were some of their specific experiences of trust emerging or collapsing. We were not looking for big generalisations about trust in society. Instead we were curious to see if we could identify some moments where there was a movement in a person's sense of trusting (or being trusted by) another. In

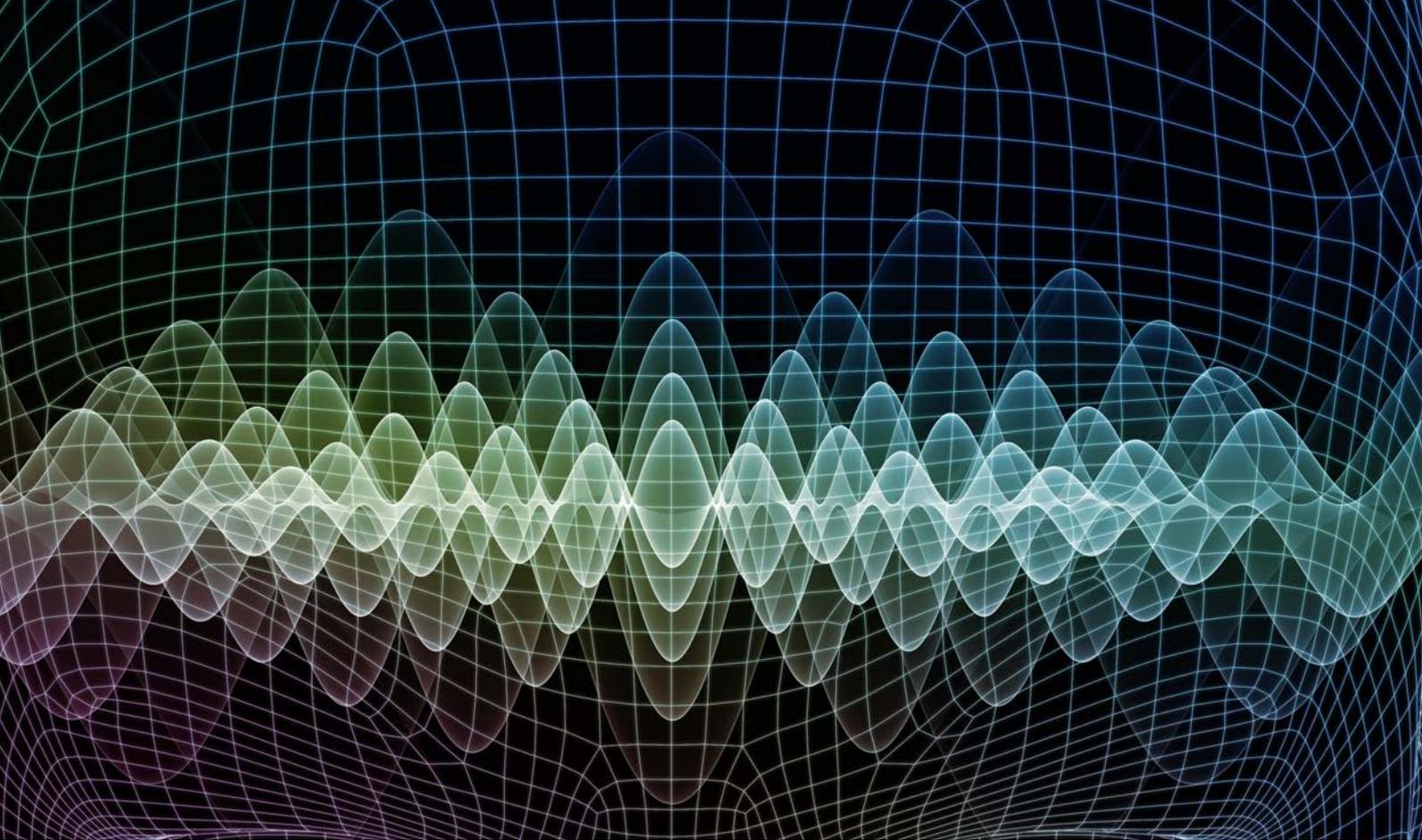
other words, we wanted to encourage interviewees to notice the specific human interactions and incidents in which trust or distrust emerged.

As I reflected on my own experience and talked informally to friends about trust, three things struck me:

1. I noticed it is hard to distinguish between trusting and liking someone. As I get to know somebody, I am simultaneously growing to trust and like them (or to distrust and dislike them). I wonder, can we like someone we don't trust? Probably not. But to some degree we can trust someone we don't specially like.
2. Trust always emerges in a context – the organisation in which people work, the culture of that organisation, the history of the relationships. One friend who works in a university related how she sometimes distrusts people at work because of their role. For example, she is generally mistrusting of senior management in her organisation. What this tells me is that trust is not just about what happens between the immediate parties. While specific interactions can be telling, context also matters.
3. I notice that people's stories about trust can be interesting and illuminating, but I am also aware of the limitations of one-to-one interviews. Let me explain what I mean with the help of an example. I know a team in which relationships have broken down to such an extent that some members can barely look each other in the eye. If I were to interview the team members separately, I am sure that I would hear a plausible story from each individual. Each person would have their own perspective, including their personal justification for their own actions. So, how could one elicit these perspectives and help repair the broken trust? Two options occur to me: (i) by interviewing all members of the team separately, as well as observing or participating in a team meeting, one could then create a multi-perspective written narrative account, juxtaposing but not merging the individual points of view; and (ii) by facilitating a dialogue among the team members, one might be able to help them develop better understanding and renewed trust.

Alison Donaldson





A dynamic way of thinking about trust

As part of our research, we started by recording the experience of just three people, which on the face of it might seem a very limited “sample”. Yet, to us, this approach makes good sense, given that (i) stories enable us to describe and explore the complex, emergent nature of trust, and (ii) what we want are stories and vignettes that can be used in management education.

Our thinking is strongly informed by the writings of Ralph Stacey and colleagues, but it is always enlightening and reassuring to find additional underpinning for one’s chosen research method. Henri Bortoft’s book, *Taking Appearance Seriously*, is a rich source of different thinking about experience and meaning. Three themes seem particularly pertinent to our work:

- **A different approach to wholeness.** Referring to the “hermeneutic circle”, Bortoft explains: “In order to understand the whole we must understand the parts, but in order to understand the parts we must understand the whole.” This gave me much food for thought regarding the case studies. What I take from it is that an individual’s experience is not just a subjective take on trust. Individuals are not completely separate beings. Rather, we are all connected. As Bortoft writes, “each person in their role in an organisation is in fact an expression of the organisation as a whole, so that we could say the whole organisation comes to expression, to some degree, through the role of each person in that organisation”.
- **Phenomenology.** Bortoft draws on traditions of scholarly thinking that invite us to take appearance (and experience) seriously. These include Goethe’s writing, as well as the phenomenological thinking that emerged in the 20th century (e.g. Heidegger and Gadamer). Bortoft also looks back to the history of western science to trace how we came to consider our sensory perception as unreliable and

inferior, whereas mathematics and theoretical explanation came to be viewed as superior forms of knowledge. While theory-based scientific explanation has been extremely successful, it has had the effect of “shifting attention away from the phenomenon”, notes Bortoft.

- **The importance of looking upstream.** This means “shifting our attention away from what is experienced into the *experiencing* of it” (my italics). This seems extremely a propos for our research: we are thinking of trust not as a finished product of human relating but as a process. Like Bortoft, we are trying to shift our attention away from the thing called trust into the upstream process of how trust developed. How did trust evolve for the people we are speaking to? And what became possible after a sense of trust established itself - or what were the repercussions when a sense of trust evaporated?

Bortoft refers to this shift in attention as the “dynamic way of thinking”. This fits well with our intention to focus on people’s experience of developing trusting relationships. We are not looking for abstract statements about trust, nor do we intend to make our results generalisable or repeatable, or even to create a general theory of trust. Instead, we listen carefully to people relating their lived experience, and we hope that the resulting narrative accounts will inspire others to reflect on their own experience.

Henri Bortoft (2012). *Taking appearance seriously: the dynamic way of seeing in Goethe and European thought*, Floris Books.

Ralph Stacey (2012). *Tools and Techniques of leadership and Management: meeting the challenge of complexity*, Routledge.

Alison Donaldson

Does trust just happen to us?

IN OTHER WORDS: WHAT HAPPENS TO BUILD OR ERODE TRUST IN RELATIONSHIPS

Extracts and stories from interview-conversations

How a lack of proper grounding provoked cautious behaviour

Context: Line relationship, Civil Service

Could you tell a story from your experience about trust at work?



I had a new boss once and he never did something that I think is essential, which is to sit down with people and have an introductory one-to-one conversation. I very quickly realised that hadn't happened. I felt deeply uncomfortable. Nothing was grounded because that basic opportunity had been missed. It meant that every exchange felt brittle.

And then there was a piece of my work which he told somebody else he didn't like. I found out because the other person told me. Had there been that initial conversation, we could have handled the situation. But it was a distrusting relationship.

Did this have consequences?



It made me much more cautious in expressing opinions or trying out new ideas, much less adventurous, and it also made it harder for me to manage my own team, because I was less confident about whether what I was saying or the messages I was conveying to them were accurate, because I didn't have that bedrock of feeling that I really knew where I was. So there was more of a risk, I felt, in those exchanges.

This experience contrasts with situations where another boss had shown an interest – there my brain felt energised and I had a sense of exploring things and testing ideas. Whereas this world was very much one of going to work thinking I must be careful about the tidiness of how I handled things. That mindset meant there were things that didn't occur to me or that I didn't follow up.

How a pendulum style of management created uncertainty

Context: Line relationship, third sector

Could you give another example of how trust works?



I am thinking of situations where your boss seems keen to have long conversations with you but then fails to back you up in front of others. This is very confusing and unhelpful. It's almost more stressful than a situation where the relationship is limited or poor. From day to day you fall into what is apparently a very trusting style and then you go back to your desk wondering 'what is going to happen next?' It's like a pendulum.

Can you recall a memorable incident?



I remember having a conversation with my boss about someone I managed. It was a sensitive, performance-related topic. Two days later my boss told me that she had spoken to the person in question and found out what they thought of me. I felt the step she had taken was not an agreed outcome of our first conversation. The situation felt messy and I was irritated. Her action had further complicated and muddled things. I thought I had had a conversation with my boss and that I was making her aware of the problem. The only outcome I expected was that she would be aware of what had happened and that she might give some advice, either immediately or later on.

What would you have liked your boss to have done?



I would have liked her to hear me out, to ask some questions, to think about what she could do to help, and to agree anything before doing it.

On the surface, it might be quite useful to find out what a person reporting to you thinks about you. I remember when I was coaching someone once I suggested we have a three-way conversation with her boss and it turned out to be very useful.

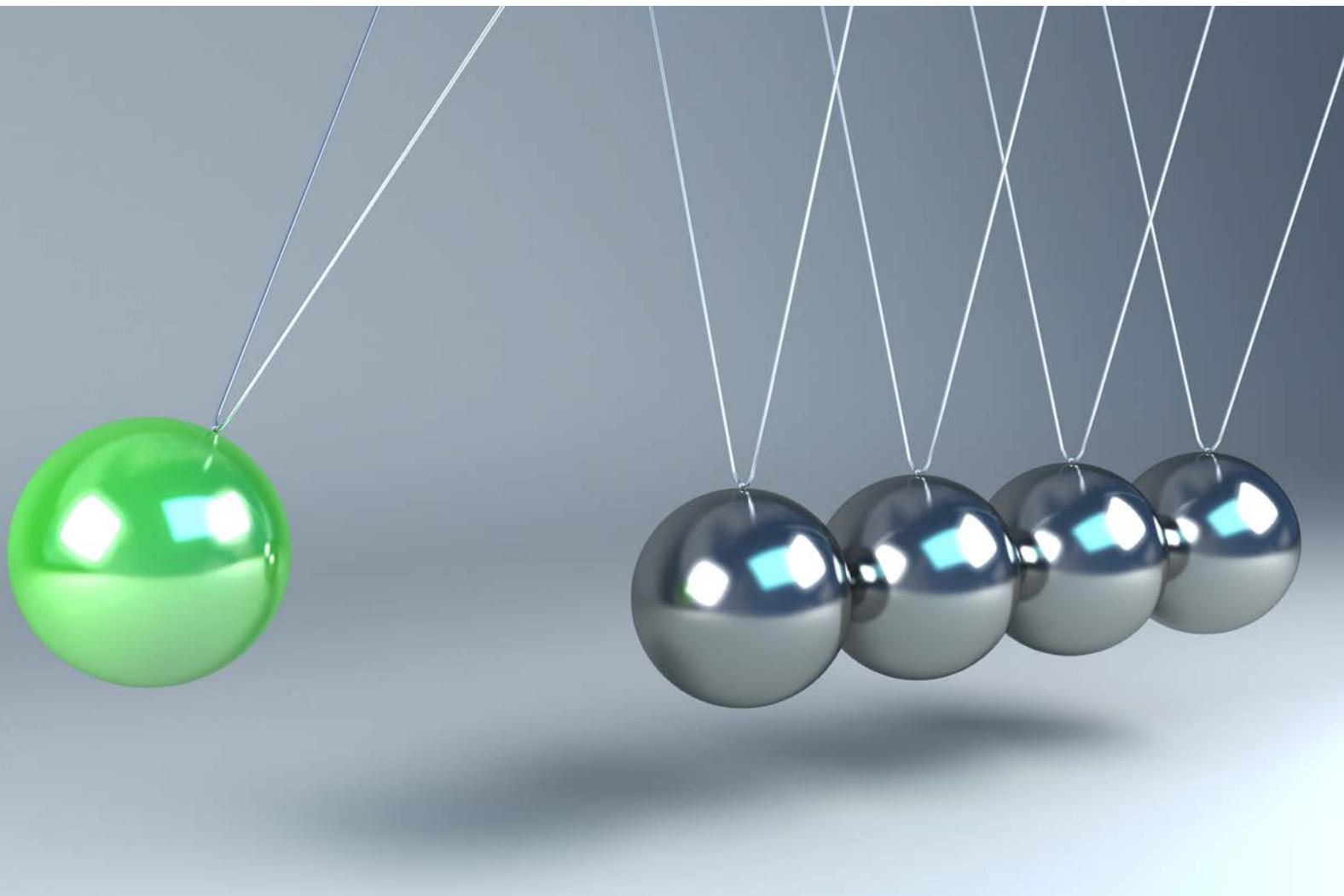


Yes, that's very interesting. Coaching is a very different, off-line dynamic. I've always been comfortable with the idea of my boss talking to members of my team, but there is something particular about a situation where you are trying to line manage somebody. A boss must express confidence in their staff, and parameters have to be agreed. You have to feel confident that any conversations with team members will be expressed in a wholly constructive mode.

What consequences did this incident have?



It made things more complicated and I was more uncertain. In terms of my relationship with my boss, it was this pendulum thing. On the one hand she encouraged very open conversations, but then something unexpected would happen. I had a slight sense of being caught out and thought I must stop myself from trusting this person. I don't want to generalise about the third sector, but there is something about management behaviour being helped by training. When people have common training, it is easier to anticipate one another's behaviour because there is an element of common ground.



Everything changed in one conversation

Context: Relationship with boss, NHS

“We don’t think about things until they go wrong”

As a scientist, I worked in diagnostic laboratories, and it’s very hierarchical. At one stage, I was a Basic Grade Medical Laboratory Scientific Officer, and two levels above me there was a chap called Dave, who was a Chief in Blood Transfusion. I got along with him famously well. He was a really nice guy, very affable, very knowledgeable. He managed to combine a matey sort of environment with the appropriate amount of discipline and an academic knowledge of the subject that made you feel very confident in what you were doing. You felt that if you had an issue you could very easily go and speak to him.

When his boss retired, Dave went for the job and got it and he became Senior Chief Medical Laboratory Scientific Officer. And I sort of expected that matey thing would carry on. And it did for quite some time.

I got to the point where I’d almost grown out of being in laboratories. Putting test tubes in the rack and pushing ‘go’ was not really my thing any more. So I applied to do a one-year part-time Certificate in Management run internally for hospital staff. I got the funding and the time – no problem. It changed my thinking, I was very grateful for it and I wanted to go on and do the Diploma. And this is where the issue arose. I went ahead and applied and I assumed that I would be allowed to do it, and I was refused and couldn’t understand why.

So I had a long discussion with Dave, because all courses had to be approved at his level. The conversation was slightly weird. It started off with him saying that he didn’t understand why I wanted to do the course. So I explained why, but that wasn’t what was required. He kept asking questions, and finally he said that I couldn’t have the time off because the laboratory ‘didn’t have enough space in the diary’. Now, the trouble with that was that I had designed the diary and I ran it, so I could tell him exactly how much time was available for education and training. He then said ‘Other people want to do courses.’ And I said ‘Fine, who?’ Then it came to ‘I don’t think this is the right course for you working in the laboratory.’ And that was the little crack in the dam – I was trying to remove objections and obstacles and then I realised he just didn’t want me to do it.

I think probably I was a bit too direct and he found that quite challenging. And, looking back on it, there were lots of pressures on him. If I’m honest, I think the reason he didn’t want me to go was that the section of the laboratory that I ran was starting to fall apart because I wasn’t there one day a week, but he never said that to me. If he had said that to me, I’d still have wanted to do the course but it might have made the conversation a little bit easier. It was the fact that I saw what was behind the conversation and I could see that he was reacting rather than discussing. And he’d lied to me when he said ‘There isn’t enough room in the diary.’

Within three months of that conversation, I’d left the laboratory because I didn’t trust Dave anymore. It all happened in one conversation and everything went downhill from there.

I tried to continue as though nothing had happened – almost draw a line under it and move on. I wanted stuff to go back to the way it had been before. But I was always suspicious and it all felt a bit staccato and two-dimensional after that. It never was a trusting relationship on either side again.

I think my departure did have some negative consequences for the organisation. During my time in the hospital, we had started a whole range of things, including a full set of investigative tests. When I left, all that closed down again.

I can feel a lot more forgiving now because I understand it more from Dave’s point of view. But I still think he handled it really badly. What he should have done is just told me the truth in the first place. It would have been far easier for him.

I still think about it 15 years later. I think that’s because I really felt very fond of Dave – he was somebody I could have gone out for a drink with socially. I’ve had people that I’ve worked for that I have disliked more but it’s affected me less. And I think when he lied to me, it undermined everything that I thought. It has coloured an entire section of my life. Even at the time I would have said ‘I’m a reasonable judge of character.’ And it just made me doubt myself.

Talking openly about things

Context: NHS

“I always knew that I could tell her confidential things”

There are maybe 10 people in this organisation who I've worked with for a long time, who know quite a lot about me, and I know a lot about them. We've been through difficult times together and we've talked about our frustrations to do with work but also things like bereavements, children, all those sorts of things. Some relationships have survived enormous changes – my relationship with Rebecca, for example.

I think the reason that Rebecca and I are so close is that we've both been through fairly traumatic times at different points, so trust has built up because we've talked about those things.

Rebecca came into my department because she was thinking of leaving the service because she was being bullied. She went to her manager and said 'I'm going to have to leave, I can't stand it.' And her manager said 'Don't leave. Let me see if Susan can accommodate you for a few months.' She came to me and I did a certain amount of nurturing, but she didn't need much. She just needed to change her environment and her work. She was very self-effacing but very trustworthy. I don't know how it happened but I have always trusted her. I always knew that I could tell her confidential things about what was going on in the service, things I'd heard.

I remember when I first met her. It was before she worked for me, about eight or nine years ago. We used to have a peer support service here. You got some training and Rebecca and I were on the same course and got to know each other quite well. Because of the nature of the course, we were in an environment where sharing was normal. And thinking back to the other people on that course, we all became quite close. But because Rebecca came to work for me, that enabled us to continue.

So, we'd started with a certain level of intimacy, and that continued even though I was now her manager. We talk about that openly. So I'll say 'I'm saying this to you as Boss Susan, not Friend Susan.' Or 'I'm just telling you this as Friend Susan, not Boss Susan.' I can't imagine her giving me any kind of trouble, but with any human you manage there are always some issues, so we've developed a language to manage that. I wouldn't tell her my innermost secrets but there's not much I wouldn't tell her. We're not peers – I don't care very much about those things – but I am her manager.

When somebody left the team and another person joined, I found it interesting how the dynamic changed. In a way, Rebecca and I are now more close – almost because we go back further. There's definitely something about time in this. You know you can tell a person a secret and they won't tell anybody else, and they know the same about you. But that has to build up over time. You can't just do that on one experience.



The way someone responded to a question in a board meeting

Context: Charity board

What have you noticed about trust between board directors?



When it comes to relationships between executives and non-executives, I think a lot depends on what the executives think the non-executives are there for. It's quite a common phenomenon, and certainly I have seen it, where the executives are very protective of their role and their responsibility, and very nervous of the non-execs straying into their territory, and they're right to be nervous if the boundaries get blurred. But the anxiety can create a dynamic where, instead of welcoming and trusting the questions and the engagement, there is a concern to preserve territory.

Can you give a specific example?



I was on a charity board where two members of the executive team were very nervous that the board was going to misunderstand their role and make decisions in excess of their responsibility. This created a dynamic in meetings in which what we got from the executives was defensive. There was a lack of trust and a lack of openness. An example is when an FD doesn't give a full answer to a question. As a trustee you sometimes need to know more. In a more trusting situation, the FD's response might be, "That's a really interesting question".

Can you recall a striking moment?



We were discussing the budget for the following year. It was quite an ambitious one and there were things that needed to be explored. I wanted to know what scenarios had been considered – for example, a change in government policy or a change in income. The FD's response was that what I ought to understand was that that is an extremely difficult thing to do. So then I felt doubly concerned. Had they said "That's an interesting question – I've done the following and would appreciate discussing it," I would have felt relaxed. And it led to a difficulty because my anxiety meant that I asked again and then they became even more dogmatic. So, you can create trust simply by the way you respond to a question.

Have there been any informal interactions since? Did you call the FD?



To some degree, and indeed in the past I have done that. But I didn't on this occasion. Sometimes it's important to revisit and reassure, but it is also important not to imply that there is no issue. Otherwise, there is a risk of just smoothing things over. As a non-executive you are working in a role where those opportunities for informal contact and relationship building are much less available

On being pushed from behind

Context: Relationships across organisational boundaries

“I was forced to implement a wrong decision”

I was working at a Primary Care Trust, where I was in charge of health and safety. When I arrived in the organisation, we didn't provide our own health and safety element. Instead, we had a relationship with the Acute Trust (the nearby hospital). There was a guy there called R, a really good guy, I got on with him tremendously well, and I'm telling this story because the person who probably broke the relationship was me. I'll explain how it happened.

R was the health and safety person in the hospital that provided us with the service. At the time, it was becoming a Foundation Trust, so we had to draw up a contract for the service, and money had to be exchanged. The Foundation Trust concept changes relationships.

Previously there had just been relationships between the two NHS organisations, and because we were both NHS we both came under the umbrella of the Department of Health, and if things went sour, you just reported it to the Department of Health. They came in and, as a proxy for the Secretary of State, they decided how it would fall out and everything was fine. But of course Foundation Trusts didn't report to the Department of Health. They were separate legal entities. It was a legal change.

So, I said to R, 'Look, this is just an administrative issue. You and I need to bash this out. We need to get to the point where we're both happy and then we can just carry on the way we did before.'

And it stayed like that until the following year, at which point the heavy hand of government came in and they reduced the amount of money available. So they were looking desperately for ways of cutting budgets. And because this was a budget we'd never had before, our Director of Finance said 'Let's just not have health and safety support from the Acute Trust. Let's get somebody internally to manage it.' And, as I was managing the contract anyway, that became me.

So, they just cut the relationship with the Acute Trust, and I was in the position of having to discuss this issue with R. And even though we had only paid a very small amount per year, R was going to end up losing a member of staff. So he was saying to me 'Can't you take this person on? They're valuable.' And I replied 'No, we're looking to cut funding.' So I was in this cross-organisational issue, and it was the first time I had to do something that really I felt was: (1) wrong, and (2) unnecessary. I was forced by a policy change to pull the rug out from under somebody else. It was a wrong decision and it didn't matter how I handled it, the decision I was forced to implement was going to lose R a member of staff.

I'm envisaging the meeting we actually had. Imagine a Victorian workhouse-style hospital. We were sitting in one of those rooms and I remember the sunlight streaming through the windows and me sitting there having to go through step-by-step what was going to happen and why. And I remember him coming back at me with 'But this doesn't make sense.' And at the same time I'm having to both defend the decision that's been made and agree with him, because my natural inclination was to say to him 'You're absolutely right, this is really silly, I'm stuck.' But I owed some level of loyalty to my managers. It's just that horrible hollow feeling that you get because you're delivering this rather unnecessary news.

We sort of got over that, because I think he realised that it wasn't my decision and it wasn't what I thought was right. And I went back to work and we'd see each other occasionally as we were quite close geographically. And then they made the decision that I would be the health and safety person for the PCT. And I thought 'How are you going to put me in charge of an organisation that manages clinical healthcare in aging buildings with fire regulations? We manage liquid nitrogen and various other hazards, and I've got no health and safety training at all.'

So when R came to see me – on another lovely day – I had to say 'They've paid for me to do a course in health and safety.' And he just looked at me. For him, that was it. That was the end, because as far as he was concerned everything I'd said beforehand was gone. I'd virtually lied to him, and I'd got a qualification out of it. That's how he felt. You could see it in his eyes.

So in a sense it was me that did it. I was being pushed from behind, which is a deeply unsettling feeling. R and I never spoke again. Had I had my way, I would have said to the PCT 'Well, what you're doing is silly because it's financially short-term.' But there were two layers of management above me taking the decisions. And because it was my first management job, I didn't have either the insight or the confidence to say 'What you're doing is wrong.' But I probably would say that now.

Two-faced behaviour

Context: NHS peer relationship

“He has done something to somebody else which demonstrates to me that he is not a trustworthy person”

There is somebody (Sam) I did trust and I don't any more. I haven't told him. He works in my Directorate – we're colleagues – and he's been through some turbulent worky things and I was one of the people that he would always confide in. He would ask for advice about how he should play it and what options he had, and I tried to treat those conversations as if they were coaching conversations. I asked a lot of questions. So there was an element of trust there.

He's not somebody who is very well regarded in the organisation, not very effective, and he would tell me things that were going on for other people in a slightly gossipy way – 'I know I can tell you this because you won't tell anybody else.' But I thought 'Well, okay, let me try and support him.' He also lost his mum and talked to me about that and about his kids.

I wouldn't regard him as a friend friend. He isn't somebody I would tell secrets to, because I know he tells other people secrets – that's one of my benchmarks. So we talk about holidays and things we've got in common, but I wouldn't talk to him about any deeper, darker things. I regard him as a colleague with whom I have a constructive relationship.

The reason I don't trust him anymore is not because of anything he has done to me. It's because he has done something to somebody else, which I've been told about, and which demonstrates to me that he is not a trustworthy person. He's done a very two-faced thing: he has enormous problems with our Director – I get on okay with her but people do find her difficult and the two of them clash. They wind each other up. In team meetings, she's telling him off, and he's saying 'You didn't understand what I meant.' The last time I witnessed that, Sam asked me 'What am I doing wrong with her – why is it so difficult?' And I said 'It's all about communication with you two. Often you're actually not saying anything different from one another. It's just how you express it.' So I gave him some tips and said 'You need to choose your battles. It's no good always being negative or always taking a particular viewpoint which is against her viewpoint. You've got to choose the things that you think are really important to drive through, because otherwise it's going to become so antagonistic that you won't be able to communicate at all. You've got to try and find a way of working with her.' It was that sort of conversation.

Now, the Director's post is an interim one and there is a question about whether she will be appointed into a permanent one. And I found out from somebody else that Sam emailed our Chief Exec saying how he thought that the Director ought to get the permanent job because, whilst there might be issues, she was the best person for the job. And he copied her into the email. I didn't see the email but I am told that it was strongly supporting her permanent appointment, whilst in the meantime he's supporting a member of staff who's taken out a grievance against her for bullying and who is off sick.

I assume Sam thinks that, if the Director knows that he's supporting her, maybe she will look favourably on his request to be promoted. So that's really self-serving and it also drops the rest of us in it because, if she then stays, it means we're all stuck with her. All these things will come out in the end. I'm waiting for it to hit the fan because I think that the person with the grievance will discover at some point that he has supported the Director's appointment. It's about as two-faced as you can possibly imagine.

So how that relates to trust for me is that, even though he hasn't done that to me, he could. And I haven't had any meetings with him since I heard this story. So it will be interesting to observe my own behaviour next time. I'm interested as an observer but I'm not supporting the person who's off sick, I'm not supporting Sam, and I'm not supporting my Director. I'm just keeping out of it. And if our Chief Executive appoints somebody into the permanent position who is known to be a bully, then that will affect my trust in that Chief Executive as well. So there is a ripple effect.

I can't have a conversation with Sam about this because I'm not meant to know. I've been told it as a secret. And it has affected how I work. This week I was meant to be covering a presentation for him and I didn't. I got somebody else to do it. At one time I would have just done that because it was him. And now I don't feel like I want to do those sorts of favours because something's changed in how I view him.

I'm sure he thinks he's doing right or, if he knows he isn't, he's not going to tell anyone. And actually he might not notice too much of a change – I'm not sure he's that perceptive and I'm quite good at being professional. So if we're in a meeting, I'll be normal with him. But I won't go the extra mile.

Different Expectations

Context: Party politics in a local Council

“Neither of us did anything wrong, and both of us felt the other one was to blame”

For 14 years I was a local Councillor in a very party political town. I'm a Labour person, though my party probably think I'm a bit right wing! And I made one or two friends in my own group, but I actually made more friends on the Conservative side. I made my way up the ranks and eventually became Chair of a committee, which was the big thing in those days. One year, control of the Council changed and one of the people I was particularly friendly with in the Conservative group (we accepted that we had political differences and just laughed about it) got to be Chair of the committee.

One day there was a debate in Council about his committee and, as is expected, I made some disparaging remarks, and he made some disparaging remarks back – that was expected too. And we were all fine. And then for some reason he took offence. I asked him 'Why have you taken it that way?' And his reply was 'Well, you said this about me in Council.' And I said 'But you'd expect me to say that about you in Council – we're in opposition to each other, and I expected you to say the things you said back.' But he got really upset because it was personal as far as he was concerned.

Fundamentally both of us felt that the other one had breached some level of trust. And that was a real problem. It went on for about three months and when you're seeing each other at least once a week, three months feels like a very long time. And he wouldn't call me during committee meetings and little needle things like that.

The resolution came when I happened to walk into a pub with the Labour group one day, and he was sitting there with the Conservative group. I just went over and said 'Look, this is really stupid. I did what I thought was right at the time, you did what you thought was right at the time. We're mates, can't we move on?' And we couldn't at that point, but that was the beginning of sorting it out.

Reflecting back, both of us had expectations of the other that were fundamentally different and as such we'd undermined one another's trust. If you analyse it, neither of us did anything wrong. It was entirely a contextual thing, and both of us felt the other one was to blame.

Today we're reasonably close and when we see each other we go for a drink. The way he sees things, I did something wrong and I apologised. From my angle, if he needed an apology then that was fine – I thought the relationship was worth more than us just being childish about it. But that's party politics for you. When party politics is involved, everybody becomes childish!





“We wouldn’t go out for a drink together but we trust one another”

Context: Peer relationship, third sector

Could you trust somebody and not really like them?



I think that when people say a relationship is “perfectly business-like”, that’s code for “I wouldn’t go out for a drink with this person but I trust them.”

I can give an example of a peer relationship. She and I had very different backgrounds and some different values. I had worked in relatively commercial, business-like, civil-service-type environments and was coming into the third sector. She had spent her whole life in the third sector and distrusted the business and commercial world. She and I were never going to have a common view of the world in this respect, or particularly to enjoy going out for a drink together. However, she was extremely efficient and did what she said she would do.

She told me once that she didn’t like something I had done, but there were never any hard feelings. There was a business-like equanimity. We could tell one another whether what we had done was right or wrong. We respected one another. I remember in a meeting she said “P will do it” by which she meant ‘I’m happy for P to take this action because I know it will happen’. But would we say we liked one another in terms of friendship? No. And when she left the organisation, neither of us suggested exchanging contact details.

Trust and the 'emotional bank account'

Context: Entrepreneurial consulting firm

Could you relate an experience of how trust developed with someone at work?



In *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey writes about the 'emotional bank account'. Every time you trust in someone or you treat someone well, you make deposits in the account. But then if you break trust, it goes all the way back down to zero pretty much immediately. And that really rang true to me.

In our latest restructure, there was one particular employee – a huge amount had been invested in this person, in coaching him around his confidence, and his own career, and helping him try to find a pathway to much more fulfilling work. We really tried to look after him as best as possible. The moment we'd announced that the company in its current form was not going to continue, that emotional bank immediately was overdrawn. It was a time of great uncertainty and was difficult for everyone, but I really remember the anger from this particular person. And it was like all that trust had never been there at all.

How did he express that?



Through shouting and swearing! I think it was the following day, after it had stewed, and he was talking about betrayal and that kind of stuff. The MD took the full brunt of it – and he'd invested more than anyone, with genuine loving kindness. And it was such a powerful reminder of how trust can vanish when things are difficult. And it took quite a lot of steps to rebuild trust. That particular employee didn't want any part in the transformation. He was done. As far as he was concerned it had all finished. So we respected that and tried to help him finish as quickly as possible. We helped him with job applications, gave him references. I was really keen for him to explore starting his own initiative and I think the only thing holding him back was confidence in himself. I remember sitting in a coffee shop and talking about all the wonderful skills he had and how valuable I knew they would be, and we started to spark off each other and had a really good, buzzy conversation, seeing the opportunities. But then in the end he decided he didn't want to do it. And in the end it worked out fine and he got a really great new job and I'm pretty sure he's happier now than he was before.

Then, quite recently, we had a short written exchange on our internal social network, which is a bad place to have a conversation, and I think some words got taken the wrong way. I'm not sure of the context, but there was no tone of voice and no eye contact and the meaning was lost. And I felt like I'd started to build up the emotional bank account again and then after that exchange it went all the way back down to zero. He felt really judged and unhappy. So it was a reminder – I think it's difficult, trust does take time to build up.

You said some words got taken the wrong way. But all communication is ambiguous isn't it?



Yea, I can see how someone could have misconstrued... it often makes you sad when someone judges the precise words rather than actually looking for the intent, because you hope that through the actions that you've previously shown they will understand that you do genuinely care about them. But that's not always the case and that's just how we are as humans. Trust can erode incredibly fast.

Insights from literature

Feeling excluded – detrimental for trust?

The other day I was in conversation with the author of a paper on the subject of trust, which included a number of case studies. I noticed that, as people talked about how their sense of trust in someone had changed, they often seemed to be pointing implicitly to feelings of inclusion or exclusion. When I put this point to the author, after a slight delay he said “I don’t quite understand what you mean.” This made me realise that I needed to do a bit more explaining.

I personally first started to notice that feelings of exclusion and inclusion were a constant feature of human relating when I was studying organisational change with Ralph Stacey in the early 2000s.

As I was talking to the author of the paper on trust, I noticed that my theoretical explanation wasn’t helping much, so I decided to give some examples from his own case studies. That helped. It also prompted me to go back to our own case studies, and I realised that the threat of being excluded, even when not mentioned explicitly, had clearly influenced people’s sense of trusting and being trusted, or indeed of feeling distrusted. For example, people spoke of: “not feeling recognised”; “feeling judged”; and “realising x talks about me behind my back”. More positively, a sense of inclusion seemed apparent when people said things like: “y respected my opinion”; “z would back me up in front of others”; and “transparency builds trust”.

What strikes me now is that, even if a person does not mention a particular word (such as “belonging” or “exclusion”), the phenomenon may be very present in the stories they tell. In terms of research methods, this makes me wonder about “thematic analysis” of interview transcripts. If this is strictly confined to the words actually used by interviewees, could it be that there is a risk of missing something important that interviewees are pointing to but not spelling out?

In “Becoming someone: identity and belonging”, John Shotter wrote (among other things) that, to be able to play a proper part in society (or in an organisation or a group), “one must feel able to speak without having to struggle to have one’s voice heard”. Having a voice seems to be essential if trust is to develop and survive.

Norbert Elias. *The established and the outsiders*. Sage Publications, 1994.

John Shotter. *Becoming someone: identity and belonging*. In N. Coupland and J. Nussbaum (Eds.) *Discourse and Lifespan Development*. Sage, 1993, pp.5-27.

Alison Donaldson

Paying attention to the process of trust: the ‘Sheldon dilemma’

In 2014 I was at a leadership conference and listened to a presentation about trust. The researchers were examining people’s experience of trust by using a questionnaire survey. It got me thinking how difficult it is to ‘measure’ trust due to its complex relational and contextual nature and how this plays out over time. It reminded me of the process of exchanging a gift and the sense of expectation that is created between the giver and receiver. And it is in this reciprocity of expectation that relationship continues. Trust can be seen in a similar way, but here the focus is not a tangible item like a gift, but the relationship itself brought to life with confidence-building gestures.

Pierre Bourdieu, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), argued that the tendency of abstraction, free from context and the temporal flow of events, is a fundamental problem of researching how people interact with each other. An objective approach would consider the principle of gift exchange as a form of reversible operation. Here gifts are to be returned by an item of similar value, thus cancelling out the obligation. Or in the case of trust, confidence-building actions are matched by similar actions. However this does not account for the intertwined context that the parties have to navigate, along with feelings of hesitation, possibilities and expectation, and how this fits in with the meshed course of irreversible past events. Bourdieu also considers ‘style’ of gift exchange - the occasion and nature of further gifts - and how this affects the experience of the ongoing process.

To illustrate the point let us take Sheldon Cooper. Sheldon is one of the main characters in the comedy, *The Big Bang Theory*. They are a bunch of rather nerdy physicists and engineers working in a university along with their friend and neighbour, Penny, a waitress who dreams of stardom. Sheldon, bordering on the autistic, sees everything from the perspective of the objective scientist. And it is this mindset that trips him up when he hears that Penny has bought him a Christmas present, (Cendrowski, 2009). Shocked that he has been given an obligation, in the form of a present, he buys a range of gifts of different values. Upon receiving his gift from Penny he plans to quickly check its price on the internet so he can give the one of closest value and return the rest to the store. But of course, Penny gives him something priceless (and worthless): a signed napkin of Sheldon’s hero, Leonard Nimoy. Here the zero-sum game of gift exchange collapses and Sheldon is overcome. How then can we describe trust in a way that gives voice to the relational and anticipatory nature of experience rather than focusing on the abstract notions of exchange? I shall call this the ‘Sheldon Dilemma’.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Cendrowski, M. (2009). *The Bath Item Gift Hypothesis*. *The Big Bang Theory*, Season 2, Episode 11.

What can we do to build trust?

IN OTHER WORDS: CONSCIOUS CHOICES WE MAKE AND RISKS WE TAKE

Extracts and stories from interview-conversations

A boss who acknowledged me as a person

Context: Line relationship, Civil Service

Could you give me an example of how trust developed a work?



I had moved into a new team that was doing a particular piece of work. I was quickly given exciting things to do and it was a team that was allowed to have a fair amount of fun. There was a good atmosphere.

The head of department, who was two tiers up in the hierarchy, so not my immediate boss, was interested in my perspective. He sought my view on things and trusted me in a couple of high profile situations with external people present. He could have stepped in to answer questions (many managers would have done), but he didn't. So I did feel trusted and I managed it alright and he was very appreciative afterwards. I felt very enabled.

Did the trust he placed in you mean you trusted him?



Yes, I did feel very clear that in my absence he would defend me and that his word was to be valued and that, where he had told me that what I had done was good, that was also how he would reflect me to other people. Also, I was a hundred per cent clear that, if I got it wrong, he'd say "I disagree" or "no" and it would be a considered opinion. And clearly if I was a bad performer, he got rid of people who couldn't do the job. There was also a sense that an environment was created where your opinion was respected and there was an ability to make mistakes.

He felt like an open and straightforward person to engage with. I knew where I was. In that team we were an interesting group of people and he knew a bit about everybody. I moved flat and he knew about it. I was very tired and went on holiday and when I came back to work he came to see me. I clearly remember him dropping by my desk. It was acknowledgement of me as a person.

A case of trust breeding trust

Context: Entrepreneurial consulting firm

Could you relate an experience of how trust developed with someone at work?



Following a reorganisation, the consultants working for us had recently been employees and become part of a network. The business really needed one of its former employees, Paul, to continue working on an important project. But trust between Paul and the company was at a low ebb – for a number of reasons.

Paul was perceived as a quite negative, glass-half-empty kind of person. He had been with the company for some time and had reached quite a senior position but he was not feeling recognised – even though he had been incredibly loyal through all the business's ups and downs. I was finding it really difficult to cut through this past history and baggage. The thing that popped into my head and really helped unlock it was something I remembered from Patrick Lencioni's book 'The Five Dysfunctions of a Team'. Lencioni argues that trust is the ultimate foundation for all of us and without it you can't do anything. Often leaders will say 'I need you to trust me', but trust isn't something we can ask for and get from someone else, but what you can do is put your trust in someone else. So I decided just to completely let go of, I guess, the control that I was feeling over this project. And I just made my mind up that I was going to put my trust in Paul.

So we went out for a coffee and I said I was increasing the amount Paul was going to get paid and I was removing any link between his pay and performance. I said 'You're gonna get paid more than you've asked for, you're going to get paid regardless of performance, and I'm going to completely trust you to care about my interests in this project. I'm not going to request that you are accountable to me in any particular way but just trust that you engage with me in whichever way you need to get the job done.' I just made myself completely vulnerable, basically, and it completely disarmed him! I don't think he quite believed that I was saying that, because he thought that I was really untrusting, and that was probably true. But it really unlocked the situation and it's now allowed Paul to run with that project and stand on his own creative authority as the person who can really see things and has a better sense than anyone of what the next steps are. It hasn't been a silver bullet that fixed every aspect of that relationship, because those issues go deep, but I certainly found that just that act of giving him my trust was hugely powerful.

So is Paul still working on the project?



I believe so, yea, but I've not been checking in with him all that regularly. It does make me feel a little bit vulnerable but I think in reality I'm probably in a safer position than I would have been had I tried to be really controlling and not trusting, because Paul would have been less engaged with the work and perhaps more likely to have changed his mind and to have said 'I don't want to do it after all' several months down the line when I won't have time to get someone else to do it, or to do it myself.

How did that conversation with Paul feel?



It felt wonderful. It felt warm and very human. It also felt a bit mischievous, a bit like when you're giving someone a surprise gift, because it was the last thing Paul was going to expect. I felt really happy and satisfied.

And how did Paul react?



I think I remember him pausing and looking slightly surprised, and then kind of smiling and saying 'wow, thanks'. I don't think we said a huge amount. But I do remember him asking how often I wanted him to check in with him about the project and I said 'Only you know. It's not about you checking in with me for my benefit – it's about you checking in with me as much as you need to.' And he did check in about one specific thing that came up and I provided my input and then let him continue with it.

One of the sticking points was around how the money would work, because it was quite a risky project. It might break even, it might make a small profit, or it could lose money. And the company was underwriting any potential losses. But in the end I thought if someone is worrying about not getting paid, it can only be a distraction.

What was your thinking about paying him more than he was expecting?



We're not talking huge sums of money, because the value of this particular project is the profile that it creates. In many ways it is a marketing thing. But we ended up doubling P's fee as well as making it unconditional. So it wasn't a huge increase, but money can be a useful device to tell a story – a story of trust.

Trust is always about taking a risk, but you were increasing the risks to yourself and the company



Yes, in some ways increasing the stakes – but with faith and a belief that if there's more trust then ultimately things are much more likely to succeed. People will do a much better job if you put your full trust in them. They will then trust you and they will repay that trust. If you make yourself vulnerable, people are potentially more likely to treat you really well. It's that old cliché 'you reap what you sow'. And I did see a bit of a step change in myself from having done that. I think generally I have been quite trusting, but the most difficult relationships you have are the ones where you particularly need the trust of someone else. You have to find ways to trust them.

Developing trust in a board when encounters are fleeting or sporadic

Context: Charity board

Could you say something about your experience of relationships on a charity board?



When non-executives come together, you have to create trusting relationships in a situation where encounters are sporadic. You need to work together as a team and develop some sense of camaraderie without having the classic opportunities to get to know one another through work. I can remember turning up at meetings and wondering, "How well do I know these people? If I object to something, how will they react? Do we have a similar approach?"

There was one situation where I was a trustee of a charity and we didn't really work well together until we had spent a whole day together, with opportunities for dinner and more informal conversation. Being a non-executive is quite lonely. You need determination to do the job without the bedrock of day-to-day working relationships. You can't deliver anything by yourself.

How did the away-day help?



Two things happened. The board was disparate so it wasn't easy to connect in fleeting moments. The dinner allowed us to find out about the expertise and working lives of the other trustees. It definitely did alter the ease with which everybody subsequently contributed in meetings. And the other thing was that, during the away-day, there was a much more normal working-environment type of interaction. So we had workshops and presentations and questions, some opportunities for fun, and discussion groups which were enjoyable. There was a common problem or set of issues that we were discussing but it was creative and the executives were there too, so both sets of relationships were strengthened. It had a totally different quality. Everybody could stick up their hand and say "I haven't understood." We saw one another's working behaviour, which is very difficult sitting round a board table. And it was an opportunity for people to present about their own subject. In one case, when a particular person spoke from professional experience, I found that the analysis was quite superficial and this made me less confident that the Board contributions would be particularly thoughtful.

Is there something about the officialness of board meetings? For example, was there a secretary taking note?



Yes, there is a consciousness that certain things need to be said and recorded in the notes. Also, as in a workplace situation, if you don't have an initial informal conversation and you are thrust into a relatively formal context, it takes time to develop trusting relationships. If you've never had that opportunity, you feel you're not known. For example, if you are irritable, it's okay if people know that's not what you are normally like.

Giving something of yourself

Context: NHS

“We’re the same person whether we’re at home or at work”

I think if you present yourself with a certain level of authenticity, and you’re giving something of your own experience – your own story, your own self – people are much more likely to trust you. It’s about telling somebody something about yourself that lets them in a little bit deeper than just what job you do or what you’re meeting about that day.

I do it a lot actually. I break the mood. If I’m in a meeting and everybody seems to be very serious, it’s often me who’ll make a joke, and often that’s not a work-related thing. It seems to break the ice somehow or it diffuses something.

It happened yesterday in a meeting with people we didn’t know very well. One of them we remembered as being very shy, and it was a bit awkward, a slightly clunky meeting. And that person came in late because she’d been for a job interview. I just asked her what sorts of questions they’d asked, ‘Did they ask you, if you were an animal, what would you be?’ I knew that some people had asked that recently in an interview. And that led to a whole conversation about ‘Well, what animal would you be?’ And I said ‘I’d be a guide dog.’ And then it turned out she’d just been diagnosed as having 50% deafness in one ear. It led to us all sharing information about ourselves which we would never have known otherwise. So what had started off as quite a business meeting became personal.

I don’t know why I said that about the interview questions, but it was fairly spontaneous. If she’d come in and said ‘Sorry I’m late. I’ve just had a job interview,’ I could have said ‘Okay, no problem, let’s carry on with the business.’ Or ‘What job have you applied for?’ But what I chose to say was ‘Did they ask you what animal you would be?’ And that led to a whole discussion.

So if you can give away something about yourself, not in a boring way, but just dropping in something about your weekend or your holiday, so that we don’t just see each other as colleagues but as people with lives, that helps. We’re the same person

Sharing secrets

Context: Public sector

“I’m going to tell you but don’t tell anybody else”

I’ve got lots of different connections in the organisation, lots of different people that tell me stuff, and I sometimes forget who’s told me what, whether it’s meant to be a secret or not. And I’ve almost adopted the policy of not trying to remember it. So if somebody tells me about something, I try and park it at the back of my brain so it doesn’t come out inadvertently, because there is a danger I might let something slip that I shouldn’t. But knowing that, you can control it. You’re saying ‘I can trust you.’ But you’re also saying ‘I know something that you might find interesting.’ So there’s a kind of power in that and you have to watch that a bit.

For example, I know that people are being bullied. I’m going to see the Chairman soon and we’re going to have a conversation using Chatham House rules. But I’m not going to tell him the names because I haven’t got enough permission to do that. Sometimes people do want me to intervene and I will, but if somebody says ‘I’m telling you this deep, dark secret and I can’t do anything about it myself but I just want to talk to you because you’re good at listening,’ that’s completely different. So it’s about being clear about what your role is in that storytelling. Why are they telling you?

In one case I did challenge the person, because we’ve got a confidential bullying reporting line, but she said ‘If I do anything about it, I know that it will get worse. It’ll come back at me in some way.’ That’s why bullies bully. They’re only going to bully somebody who isn’t going to tell. And I guessed, and I was right, that there was some sexual element to it – she’d rejected him and he was married – and she didn’t want to expose it all. And I think you have to try and respect that.

Those are quite difficult boundaries. There’s a great strength in sharing stories and hearing about people’s experiences if you’re somebody who might be able to do something about it.

I know people who use information like currency: ‘I know a secret. I’m going to tell you but don’t tell anybody else.’ And then you discover that everybody knew the secret.

How transparency generated trust and helped decision making

Context: Entrepreneurial consulting firm

Could you relate an experience of how trust developed at work?



One of the beliefs I have is that a great way to create trust in a workplace is through transparency. Since the beginning of the business, we've had a huge amount of transparency over financial information and decision making. Ever since we hired our first employee, we've had open book accounting. So our staff knew what people were paid, the profit and loss, the budgeting process, absolutely everything. I remember the first employee we had – a young graduate – I called him over, opened the internet bank on the computer and said 'Let me talk you through our bank account.' And he said 'Wow, really?' To me it was really powerful – he could see payments from clients, expenses trickling out and the salary bill coming out at the end of the month. It felt like putting trust in someone and I thought it would be a good way to build trust, particularly when you're making decisions about the company.

What kind of trust was this?



I think with transparency it's trust that there isn't some plot or hidden agenda, that you're not going to spin a story that's different to reality, particularly around money. If people can see the bank account, how much new business there is, what the expenses are, that builds trust when you say 'These are my suggestions about how we overcome this issue.'

The other aspect was the transparency we had in the Board meetings. This was an idea we borrowed from Ricardo Semler. His book *Maverick* came out in the late 80s but is still cutting edge in terms of democracy in business practices. And one of the ideas we got from it was the 'open seat' at Board meetings, on a first-come-first-served basis. A week before a Board meeting an email would go out saying 'Who wants an open seat?' And then those employees can come along and they can participate fully.

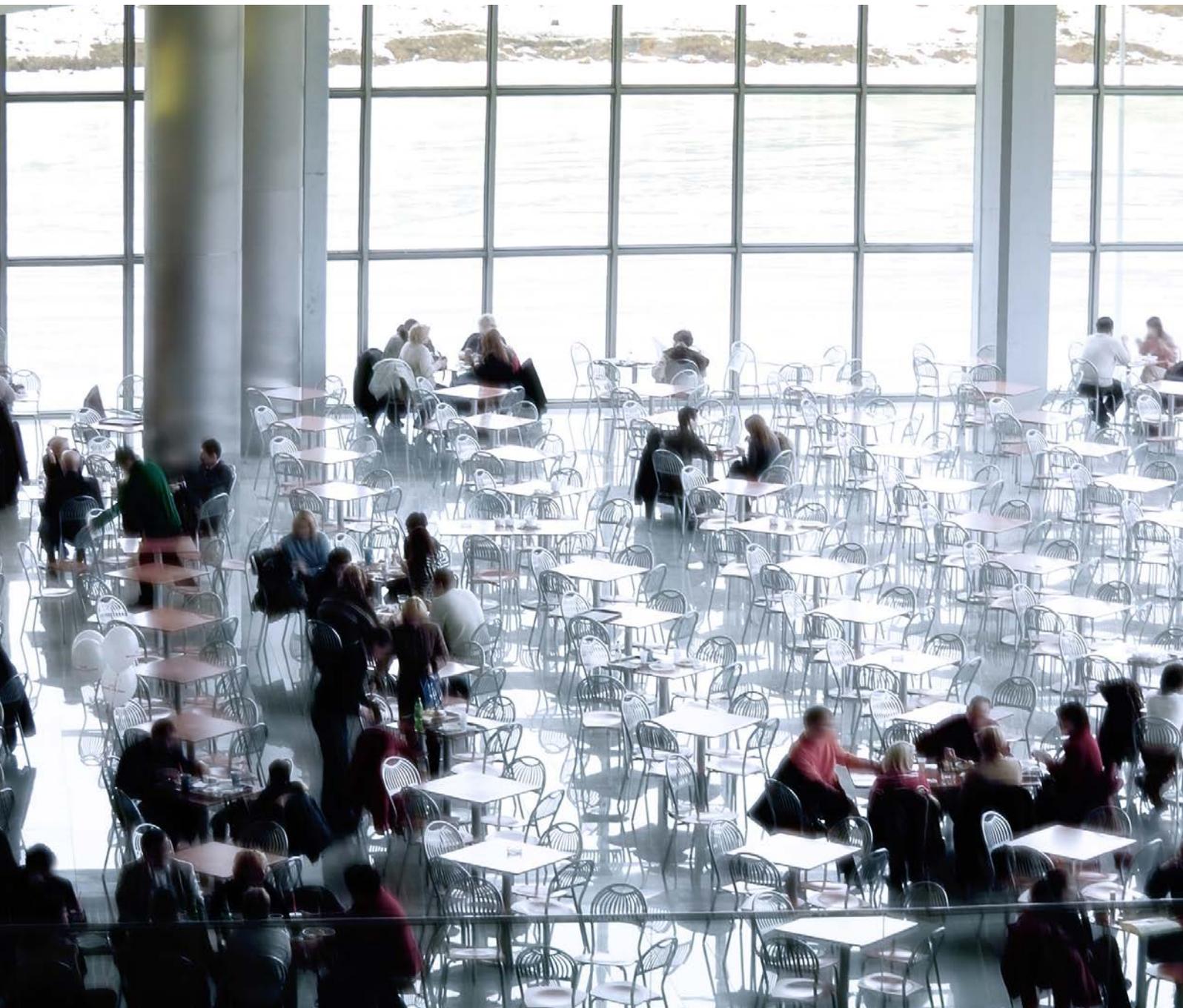
There are all kinds of benefits beyond the trust. People who work at the coal face were often asking really simple but important questions. From a trust perspective it was absolutely invaluable, particularly when there were difficult decisions being made.

A few years ago, the company had gone through quite a big transformation. We drastically repositioned the company and the revenues from the old business were winding down while the revenues from the new direction were starting to build up. But we had a mismatch. We had a whole lot of employees who were about the old. And it was starting to emerge that we would have to make some redundancies from a cost point of view but also from a skills point of view. And we had employees there at all the Board meetings in the run up to the decisions about redundancy. None of it was done behind closed doors. And it was really powerful for the other employees who weren't there to have one of their colleagues witness the meeting. That helped hugely because we had some really challenging moments – redundancy has a legal framework to protect employees from rogue employers and we were genuinely trying to do the right thing. We knew we needed employees to be involved as much as possible. So we ended up in a really difficult position where we had a choice: we could keep certain things secret and stick to the letter of the employment law; or we could stick to our values of openness and involve the team much more, which we knew would get a better result but would leave us vulnerable to a tribunal if someone appealed. A really hard choice – stick to the law or stick to our values. We even had employees who were at risk of redundancy in Board meetings where we were discussing other employees, which I'm sure wouldn't be allowed. You also can't prejudice redundancy decisions by saying to someone 'Oh well, you definitely won't get made redundant.' But at the same time, we've got really good employees who are going to walk because they're afraid and you won't be able to tell them the truth. And so we had this really difficult dilemma and in the end we decided we would stick to our values and keep everything open and we would run the risk of a legal challenge. Everyone would be involved as much as possible, would understand the outcome and feel they had been treated with dignity. And if they did get made redundant, they would be able to walk away with grace. And fortunately that is what happened. We did make a number of people redundant, but we didn't have any appeals or any tribunals.

Did the open seat alter what people felt able to say in Board meetings?



I think it definitely did influence it. But I don't think it made the Board meeting less effective. I think it did provide a check and balance that Board members were acting with integrity towards employees. I can remember thinking 'There's an employee here' and it didn't make me want to hide anything but it did make me want to question my own judgement... But I do think you have to be careful you don't end up with a shadow Board where the real discussions take place. I don't think that happened in our case.



How trust with shareholders smoothed the way to a big decision

Context: Entrepreneurial consulting firm

Could you give another example of trust at work?



Our company recently went through a huge transformation, and it was quite complicated legally, and we were trying to get it done quickly because of commitments to the lease on these premises, which we were trying to get rid of. And I had a plan and I literally just emailed all the shareholders and said 'This is what we're doing, and it is really quite a complicated plan so we are going to need to have a shareholders' meeting so that you can approve everything'. And I just got, within a matter of hours, a reply from everyone saying: 'It's okay, we trust you, just get on with it.'

And then, again, when we had the paperwork drawn up, there were four or five different contracts that the shareholders needed to sign. So I worked round each of them (there were five shareholders altogether, including me). They all said 'We trust you to get on with it'. They were leaving themselves in quite a vulnerable position because, if I'd really decided I wanted to, I could have exploited that. But also, if any of them had really made it difficult and strung the whole thing out, that would have been really risky for them and for everyone else. But I didn't get the sense that they were doing it under duress. I think there was genuine trust there. And I think it's because there is just a sense of integrity around the company. That's what people buy into when they've worked here or they've invested in it. And people just assume that that's going to be upheld.

So I could get it all done incredibly quickly. Once the contract had been drawn up, I went round to all of them in person in the course of one day. Nobody even read any of it, I just told them where to sign and they signed it. And I was so grateful because it meant I could get this thing done really quickly. If I'd had difficult shareholders without any trust, they would naturally have wanted to read through it, or they would have wanted their own lawyers to read through it. And the whole thing would have been impossible, and I will absolutely repay their trust by doing everything I said I was going to do and they will end up in a way better position than they were before by me honouring that. A really lovely example of how trust helped the collective. It got a deal done quickly.

How long had you known John?



Not very long, I think less than a year maybe. I mean that was in the very early days, so there wasn't a whole lot to lose, but I just really had the sense that I was giving him half the company and if it didn't work out he would just give it back, because there wouldn't be any sense in hanging on to half a company if I wasn't motivated to do anything with it.

I had about two and a half years out of the company and then decided to come back, and then John at the same time started to think that he was done. He left and moved to the USA. And then we had the simplest, most cordial negotiation, where I said 'You've left and I think you should give me some of the shares back.' And he said 'Okay, how many?' And I said 'About this many'. And he said 'Okay.' And then he signed them back over to me. It was just done. And all of that creates that feeling of real integrity and it makes me motivated to actually want to work for these shareholders and to see them get something out of it at the end as well, particularly now the business has been radically simplified and has shrunk right down to a much smaller but much more stable base that's got much more potential for the future.

**She supported me
when my personal life fell
apart**

Context: Relationship with boss,
NHS

“If she needed anybody to work for her ever again, I’d go back”

I’ve worked for men and women and the gender issue isn’t a thing for me. But the best person I’ve ever worked for was a woman. She took me from a laboratory background into a governance environment, which is what I do now basically. She wanted me to look after risk management, and I had no experience of risk management – I interviewed well because I had read a book before I went into the interview. The person who interviewed me was not just her. It was also the Chief Executive of the Trust, so it was a very high-powered interview.

Over a period of time, Andrea taught me pretty much everything that she knew. And it made me look at the world differently. It probably has had more effect on me than all my academic education. I’ve got degrees in chemistry, biochemical immunology, and law, and an MBA and a post-graduate certificate in health and safety! But the best educational experience was working for Andrea. I learnt stuff in the technical way, because she’d sit down and explain it to me, and then she’d get me to run through it and apply it. It was the most effective learning I’ve ever had.

When I got about nine months into that job, my personal life fell apart. My wife left me for my best friend. They both worked in the same building as me and I would bump into her virtually every day whilst going through the divorce. It was a remarkably unpleasant time. My productivity – to say it nosedived would have been generous! I’d have to get up and walk around the hospital just to clear my head and then I’d work again very little, but I’d work. And Andrea was unbelievably supportive during that time.

I kept walking into them and I then felt ‘I’ve just got to leave.’ So, after I’d been with this fantastic boss for about 15 months, I told her I was going. If you think about it from her point of view, she had taken me on with no experience, got me out of a really bad situation in the relationship with my previous boss, trained me in a really good way, put a lot of time and effort into me, supported me through a personal crisis, and now I’m leaving. And yet she supported me every single step of the way. And thanks to what I’d learned from her, I went zooming up the career ladder.

We see each other about once every six months still (we’re presidents of neighbouring Rotary Clubs). If I have an issue with anything, I still phone her up, and she provides me with materials and so on.

She was very, very supportive as a boss. Some of it is what you would expect somebody to do as a line manager but some of it is above and beyond the call of duty. And because of that, if she needed anybody to work for her ever again, I’d go back.



Everything depends on people making relationships

Context: Team relationships

All these management theories – Porter's Five Forces, for instance – are great, but when it comes down to the nuts and bolts of everything, it all depends on people making relationships with each other. And that's why so much of this theory works in general but not in specific.

I've come to this in a very strange way. I started as a scientist and for me it was laboratories and test tubes and all that stuff. And when I did an MBA at the Open University an awful lot of the learning was mechanistic – one module was on strategy and everything was a model. But it didn't matter which model you looked at, there was always an exception to the rule, and all of those exceptions exist because people make them exist.

In the final year, there was a module in which you write up a change that you're making in the business in which you work. Mine was the application of British Standards in our work. I started off 'This is about the standards, the application of the standards, and the systems that you need to apply.' And then the tutor (Mike Dempsey) – a really good guy – said 'That's great, but who's going to implement it for you?' And it was that that pulled me up and got me into all sorts of things. The first was reflective learning – which you can imagine for a scientist isn't the most natural thing to do. And then it was 'How are you going to manage these people?' and he got me into coaching and mentoring. So that's how I did my project – I didn't do it by implementing a system, I did it by coaching and mentoring people. Even something that's pretty levers-driven is effectively about the people implementing the systems at the bottom end.

Today I've got a team of five that report to me, fantastic people. And they've come from various different backgrounds. To begin with it was a very disparate little group and I co-ordinated the effort but I didn't co-ordinate the people. Nowadays I'm into development of the individuals. So there's one guy who wasn't at all academic, but he has done an MSc in risk management, and he did so well that now he is working on a PhD – I'm so proud. Another guy is more academic but lacks confidence, and I'm trying to develop him to gain some more management experience. I've also brought the whole team together into one building, so now they're a unified unit and they work together. And all I've done really is to provide them with the space to do things. For instance, the first guy was a policeman in a former life and he's perfectly used to dealing with people. By bringing him into the same environment as the guy who is a bit shy, they're learning from each other. They're much more likely to bounce ideas off each other and they're working much more closely together.



Insights from literature

The creative mingling of trust and misunderstanding

To stay ahead, organisations need to innovate: creating new services, products and value for the customer. And here there is an essential connection between trust and misunderstanding.

First, misunderstanding: I argue that for something new to emerge it helps if people see and experience things differently. This might be brought about by different people and groups working together and/or changing the way they do things - for example, people who might not otherwise work with each other being put into a project or product development team. By asking simple, but often awkward, questions they start to unpick each other's assumptions and ways of seeing the world. Sometimes it can feel like walking into a glass wall resulting in argument or hurt. But in this jolting, new patterns of noticing are established in conversations and people relate to each other, and sometimes themselves, differently. Far from being a problem, misunderstanding creates the opportunity.

And now for trust: for the process of innovation to work there needs to be enough trust and willingness to put faith in each other. This means an acceptance of vulnerability to the actions of others over and above one's need to monitor and control the actions of others (Mayer et al., 1995). This feels risky, particularly in the face of hurtful misunderstanding. Risk, vulnerability and a developing reciprocity of action and gestures are all essential in developing trust. In other words, we are increasingly invested in each other's success and failure, and we need to understand how each of us can play our part.

But there is a tension between misunderstanding and trust, a dynamic paradox. It is not a case of one or the other but both. The nature of this 'both-ness' can be messy, but it is in this that trust, newness and innovation can emerge.

Mayer RC, Davis JH and Schoorman FD (1995) *An Integrative Model of Trust*. The Academy of Management Review, 20(3), 709–734

Rob Warwick

Shadow side of vulnerability (and trust)

The word vulnerability has cropped up a number of times in this paper and elsewhere in the literature on trust. For example, the CIPD in a recent report stated:

As we know, trusting others means accepting vulnerability (Rousseau et al 1998). Human leaders recognise that in order to build trust and create sustainable trust environments, they need to share some of that vulnerability with their followers in order to signal to them their trustworthiness. (CIPD, 2014, p18)

I agree, but there is a shadow side that is worth exploring that has implications for trust itself. On the one hand vulnerability could be seen as a 'sugary' term that implies

goodness. I will put forward another view of vulnerability, one that is enmeshed in the goings-on of the workplace, which can be toxic and corrupt. The picture I will paint is of a fictitious police department in a small provincial city. Here there is a young moral police officer who is keen to progress through the ranks. She is new to the area and is keen to fit in. The team she is joining is longstanding and some of the members have worked with each other for many years. She is accepted politely but cautiously. Over the years it has become customary to engage in certain activities that are against rules such as clocking more overtime than actually took place and taking as much sickness leave as possible. Everyone in the department knows this goes on, even the senior managers, who did this when they were younger.

To be trusted, what does the young officer need to do? Perhaps to indulge in one of the practices she sees going on? As soon as this happens she becomes enmeshed in a web of longstanding mutual culpability. At this point she can be trusted to know more secrets, perhaps involving more serious activities. Over a period of time this once moral and honest person becomes a part of the criminality she was so keen to fight. And in a few years when a new member of the team joins she talks with them discreetly as to 'how things are done around here'.

The point I'm making is that vulnerability is neutral, it is neither good nor bad. It only becomes so in practice. And the same goes for trust.

CIPD (2014) *Experiencing trustworthy leadership*. Research Report, September 2014.

Rob Warwick

Pitfalls and opportunities of frameworks for building trust

I am interested in the possible role of frameworks in developing trusting relationships. Here I define a framework as any predefined means of addressing a problem, opportunity or issue. As I will come to explain, these might include predefined standards or expectations and the means to achieve them in order to reach a desired goal. It is important to talk about frameworks, because they are seen as the way to get things done in organisational life.

Here is the situation. Something goes wrong, there is a public outcry (quite rightly), and the call for 'something must be done' goes up. The result is some type of framework. Perhaps this means a set of uniform standards to be adhered to along with a means of verifying this, plus targets and an inspection regime. Organisations such as the Care Quality Commission or OFSTED are born, to watch over the framework and report back. In the wake of the MPs' expenses scandal in the UK, politicians even invented one for themselves – IPSA. The people on the frontline, now including politicians, complain that they spend their time filling in forms and awaiting dreaded inspections. Some of the people I come across during the course of my work spend much of their energy reconciling a growing gap between the needs of inspection regimes and the needs of customers, such as older people in care homes or children at school.

It is not just governments that have this tendency. Large organisations are quite adept at inventing frameworks. Although responding to a legitimate need, they seem to do little to develop trusting relationships and sustainable ways of working. We are putting greater trust in these frameworks rather than those people with local expertise and knowledge. A dynamic develops whereby another problem occurs, perhaps another scandal, and a further tightening of these frameworks occurs: another inspection body, more powers, harsher targets and the requirement for more evidence. The result perversely is that senior leaders' attention is drawn towards these frameworks and less to what occurs on the ground.

There is another perspective. Instead of trust being thought about on a larger scale, now let us consider it at the human-to-human level, and then explore if there might be some reconciliation between the two.

Elsewhere in this paper I have talked about trust as an exchange of gifts. In summary, to build a trusting relationship, so the argument goes, you need to offer something - a vulnerability. By this I mean some piece of information or insight about you that enables the other party to demonstrate that they can be trusted. Nothing too significant, it is just a first step that over time can be responded to in the development of shared obligations. You get to know each other and develop an understanding of one another's world - what is it that is important to the other person? You develop a sense of their network of relationships, by which I mean obligations they have to others and vice versa. You are now becoming a part of that network. And in this developing relationship, style is important as well as substance: style that comes with intuition and judgement of your expertise in the social melee.

There can be no shorthand list of do's and don'ts that will guarantee success. Instead it takes vulnerability, practice and reflection and the learning from a few hard knocks along the way. Reflection is key: what you have done, how this has been responded to and the actions that then occur.

In her 2013 TED talk Onora O'Neill encourages people to ask themselves: is the person with whom one is developing a relationship honest, competent and reliable? But to ask those questions in the context of a specific issue of trust - for example, can I trust this person to take my child to school and not in a blanket way? These seem sensible prompts to have in the back of our minds as we develop relationships. But I would add one thing: as well as asking those questions in relation to the other person we should ask ourselves too. In other words, we need to increase our own awareness of strengths and weaknesses that we all have, albeit with different degrees of personal understanding. It is in this light that we can offer, and expect in return, meaningful vulnerabilities and insights from which to build.

Is what I have just described a framework? It is certainly different from those that governments and organisations adopt, but it does tick the boxes that I set out at the beginning of this post with respect to some predefined means of addressing a problem, opportunity or issue. It can act as a useful prompt.

The frameworks associated with government and organisational policy work on the basis that there is little trust, requiring evidence that this or that has been done to a predefined standard. Here the trust is placed in the framework itself rather than the people whose work is governed by it. Once set up, it reduces the need for thinking, offering some assurance that the problem has been sorted. The other type of framework - the prompt - enables us to think and talk about the subject, to see trust developing in ourselves and others and to notice the trusting process that we are a part of. In other words it enables us to pay attention, to think and to be reflective.

You may think that I would be in favour of the second type over the first. That is not entirely true. When I go to a hospital I want to have some assurance that I will be treated to a good standard. The days of the consultants strutting the wards striking fear into staff and patients are thankfully long gone. So some form of standards and joint expectations is helpful, but not to the extent that I see staff living in dread of the inspection and allowing that dread to harm what they do.

If one accepts my observation that many people on the front line feel that their work is directed more towards satisfying the demands of the frameworks than those they are there to serve, what can be done?

This might require a loosening of the policymakers 'grip', or put bluntly, increasing trust. What are the means by which the policymaker might do this? To return to O'Neill's three prompts, we have competency, honesty and reliability. Are we saying that there are grounds for concern on any of these in relation to the carefully defined tasks that people have been given? After all, opinion surveys constantly rate the likes of doctors, nurses and teachers as being trustworthy. For policymakers to start the process of trust what might they do? Or, what vulnerability might they offer? I would suggest a careful look at the inspection frameworks and seeking other ways to achieve the objective of providing reasonable assurance. This might include increasingly being part of those social processes of frontline staff, to inhabit their world to get a deeper understanding. From my own research (Warwick and Board, 2013), this will result in different and richer conversations and understanding between all parties and the development of a more grounded trust.

In letting go, there are risks, but these need to be set in context of broader less tangible long-term risks. On the one hand there are immediate risks of harm, for example to the patient. But the broader and less tangible risks include the pernicious degrading of morale and feeling of worth that will come to undermine the sustainability of services such as health and education. For the policymaker this might seem uncomfortable and counter-intuitive. But building trustworthy relationships can be uncomfortable, particularly taking the first step.

O'Neill O (2002) *A Question of Trust*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

O'Neill O (2013) *What we don't understand about trust*. TED, Available from: http://www.ted.com/talks/onora_o_neill_what_we_don_t_understand_about_trust#t-5789 (accessed 24 May 2015).

Warwick R and Board D (2013) *The Social Development of Leadership and Knowledge: A Reflexive Inquiry Into Research and Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rob Warwick

Joining the dots: from macro-themes to micro-interactions

It is striking how much of what is written about trust points to either local interactions between people on a very small scale, for example two people having a conversation over a coffee, or to the wider abstract organisational level. But it is the interaction between the two that I find particularly interesting. In a 2001 paper Bachmann and Inkpen puzzled:

While the existing literature makes a very convincing case for the importance of institutions in the process of trust building in relationships between individual and collective actors, there is no clear understanding of how institutional arrangements precisely find their way into the decisions and actions of (potential) trustors and trustees. In other words, it is unclear what it means when we say that institutional arrangements are a constitutive part of a relationship based on institutional trust and that trust is developed by references made to strong and reliable institutional arrangements in which a relationship is embedded. (Bachmann and Inkpen, 2011, p27).

Perhaps the subject is just too big to think of holistically. That said, there are some thoughts that might be helpful based upon the ideas of Ralph Stacey and colleagues (Stacey et al., 2000), who pay attention to such everyday interactions by using complexity as an analogy.

Interactions between two or three people often unfold in directions not anticipated by either of the parties. Words are said and reacted to in ways that are both expected and unexpected. Conversations are constrained. By this I mean there are things that can be spoken about easily and agendas that are encouraged. And those that are not. These conversations are fashioned by the 'propositional themes' of the organisation. Sometimes these themes are deliberate in the form policies, strategies, targets or values. Or by an unsaid culture that has been fashioned by interactions between people spanning years. But more often it's a bumpy combination of the two.

These propositional themes have their beginnings in similar small conversations. A policy for example is developed by a small group, often quite senior, who themselves are constrained by culture and other propositional themes that they are experiencing at the time of their conversation. What I'm pointing to is a widespread patterning of interactions between people leading to constraint, novelty and transformation.

This way of talking about organisational life enables attention to be paid to conflicting and paradoxical processes. It

enables us to develop an understanding of the connections between local interactions, for example a conversation between two colleagues, and the wider organisational story. They unfold and impact on each other.

This way of thinking offers a possibility to make connections between those micro-interactions and what this might tell us about the wider themes that can come to define an organisation. These insights, drawn from the narratives of people involved, can never be perfect but they can offer useful clues that help us join the dots.

Bachmann R and Inkpen A (2011) *Understanding institutional-based trust building processes in inter-organizational relationships*. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0170840610397477>.

Stacey R, Griffin D and Shaw P (2000) *Complexity and Management - Fad or Radical Challenge to Systems Thinking?* Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Rob Warwick

Building bridges, or not

It occurs to me there are parallels between how we build trust and how a relationship develops between the writer and reader. Much of the literature I am drawn to stresses that trust is a process, of taking the first step, of risk and of developing a stake in the other person's interests. Each party need to identify with the other in some way or another, including the credibility of each other, of being moved emotionally with any gift or expectation of trust or the straightforward logic of the process. And it should be similar with literature - an exchange, albeit one divided by time between 'nib-to-paper' through to 'paper-to-eye'.

But often it isn't. The conventions of academic writing seem to dull all but those logical senses. When I read papers crafted towards the academic game I'm left unmoved. I am particularly critical of those that base most of their argument on what other people have said on trust and shy away from discussing actual experience, their own or others. If we don't build effective bridges between the reader and the author how can we affect people's practice and how they think of their practice?

Rob Warwick

Do we trust, and do we feel trusted by, 'the system'?

IN OTHER WORDS: HOW DO PEOPLE COME TO MISTRUST THOSE IN CHARGE?

Extracts and stories from interview-conversations

Leaders who don't engage with people

Context: NHS Leadership

There's a core group of people in senior management in this organisation who know and trust each other. We have worked together for a long time – we know each other's frailties, our strengths, we know who we can rely on, we know who to ring up rather than email. We've got these relationships and it has always been a brilliant organisation for that. Perhaps it's because of the nature of what we do – doing something really important and really trying to do the best for people in our part of the country.

Not long ago our Chief Executive left after 12 years, and some people left with him. And the new Chief Executive came in with a lot of promises about doing things differently. I was hoping that this new Chief Executive would bring in some strategic thinking, but what actually happened was that she brought in a whole new raft of Directors all of whom she had worked with in her previous role. And now performance against our targets is appalling. It wasn't only her fault. Lots of things have conspired to lead to the situation we are in now. But suddenly we began to feel we were in a struggling Trust, and whilst she certainly came in and did things differently, she didn't engage with people very well, and she said some very arrogant things in meetings.

She had a long history of NHS management, but she didn't have that people thing. I can give you an example. Along this corridor at that time, we had our Patient Experiences team, who deal with all the complaints, compliments and so on. And then we had the Recruitment team, and then my team – Patient Engagement. On that day she was due to meet myself and the head of Patient Experiences, Steve. She came to see me first, and as I was walking her down to her meeting with Steve, I said 'This is the Recruitment team.' And she said to them 'I'm not meeting with you today,' and just walked off. Not 'Oh, you're doing a great job, we're recruiting so many people, how nice to meet you all, I'll come and see you another day.'

That's just one example, but she alienated a lot of people, and she and the people that she recruited seemed to have an air of feeling that they knew how to do it already and anything we'd done in the past was wrong. I think if I went into a new organisation, before I started going on about all the experience I'd had, I might find out who the people are and what they've done. And that didn't really happen.

She didn't survive – when it became obvious our performance was suffering, she left pretty suddenly. But when she went, people she had appointed stayed here. I was hoping they would all go as well and they haven't. It's as if she poisoned the water. She wasn't a horrible person. She was perfectly nice to me and she asked me my opinion about things. So the bad stuff is not necessarily something that I experienced myself, but other people tell me things.

I'm not sure to what extent we can blame things on the change in culture, or whether it's just what happens to an organisation when it's stressed. While we were riding high, meeting our targets, we felt like we were part of a good organisation. And then, because of all the different things that have happened, people became more suspicious, more protective of their areas. People are thinking 'If there have to be cuts will it be us?' and that affects the extent to which people trust each other, express their fears and concerns and work together. People become protective of their own areas and suspicious of people coming in. They put their drawbridge up.

When a leadership team makes itself less accessible

Context: How can you build up a trusting relationship with somebody that you never see?

There is an executive corridor at our HQ and, under the previous Chief Exec, the Directors had their doors open, and they would all go to lunch together every day in the canteen. So if you happened to be in the canteen at that time, you could talk to them about what they'd done at the weekend, what film they'd seen, or what their daughter was doing, and we felt connected. And because you had that connection, it meant you could approach them about other things.

You never see any of them in the canteen now, or they might just go to pick something up and then leave. And on the executive corridor they're all solid doors. So a distance has been created, and it's really tangible. So there is something about accessibility – how can you build up a trusting relationship with somebody that you never see, when every time you walk along the corridor their door's closed and you don't know whether they're free or not? And that was a really dramatic change.

After the second Chief Executive left, she was replaced by an internal person we knew and trusted. She's got a high level of credibility – a very clever appointment. So I'm watching to see what changes, because can she alone switch that culture back? You'd have to be quite strong to be able to do that, wouldn't you?

She has picked up one thing that the old Chief Exec used to do, which is to do a series of roadshows around all our sites. She does about three a day – an hour's presentation and an hour for questions – and everybody is encouraged to come. Staff are pretty tough on these people, and she's put herself in that position to start trying to engage again in a meaningful way. It is very much her giving her presentation and then inviting questions – I might do it the other way round if it were me – but I'm hopeful that it might generate a little shift again. But I'd be very careful who I discuss this with – I would only mention it to my trusted people.





A new Director and a 'stroppy email'

Context: Leadership, NHS ambulance service

In our Finance department there had previously been a very inclusive, expansive, expressive Director who would talk to anybody – about Strictly, when our children were younger, and all that sort of thing. And then a new Director coming in really affected the functioning of that department. The people in that team, even the ones who had a trusting relationship previously, became more questioning, more demanding, less helpful, less likely to respond to their emails. People like me would normally have gone for financial advice or a question – now we avoid them, we circumvent Finance. So that's a shift in relationships. And it's affected my day-to-day life quite dramatically.

If we feel that generally we're all on the same side, and we're all trying to achieve the same aims for the organisation, then trust is in that mix somewhere. But if people's behaviour suddenly changes, it's not that they don't seem trustworthy but I don't want to engage with them anymore.

I think that could be resolved with different leadership, or maybe with some work done with that team. Or with the contentious issue being removed – because the reason I fell out with Finance was about a particular project where we're being asked to generate income, but they can't work out the cost. It's a multi-agency project – a road safety campaign for 16-17 year-olds – and Finance wanted information about the fees for our people who will help to run the campaign so they could work out the costings. Every time we answer their questions they come back with more questions, which is causing a delay.

I had emailed the person doing the costing to say 'The project starts next week – can't we just go with the costs that we had last year, or add on 20%?' And she copied that to her manager, who then wrote me a really long email saying 'Don't you realise the Trust is in deficit and we all have to make sure we're covering our expenditure?'

There's a tendency in this organisation when there's a difficult email trail going on that the person who's a bit unsure about how to go forward copies in their manager, and the whole thing escalates. That's what happened in this case. So I sent the next email saying 'I think this is escalating unnecessarily, I can easily answer all your questions, let's meet rather than trying to do it by email and copying in a lot of people.' But nobody replied and the next I heard was the Directors were talking about my 'stroppy' email – I think what triggered that comment was that I appeared to be saying 'Isn't there a fudge – can't we just do this the quick-and-easy way, rather than it taking months?'

It's been going on for about eight months now. And that affects how much I trust them to do something like this in future.



It's so Big Brother it's beyond belief

Context: NHS ambulance service

There's a massive thing around our frontline staff not being trusted to do a good job, or feeling they're not being trusted, even if they are. It feels like a fairly autonomous job because you go from job to job and you see quite a variety of patients, and you've got your crew mates. It sounds quite nice. But now they have to press a button when they're available, they have to press another button when they get to hospital, and press another button when they've done their paperwork. If they don't do it within so many minutes they get a phone call. So they're all monitored. If you go to a control room you can see where all our ambulances are, whether they're moving, how fast they're going, who's on board. It's so Big Brother it's beyond belief.

So they don't feel trusted, and often when people are talking about problems in the whole organisation, the ambulance staff get blamed for taking too long to turn around at hospital or spending too long at the scene.

Meanwhile, the world has changed. In the old days, if you joined an ambulance service, you would work on an ambulance basically until your back would give up or you retired. And nowadays there are far more opportunities. So if you're a paramedic, you might be offered a job in a walk-in centre or a resuscitation room or a community nursing service, because people have recognised the skills that paramedics have that are useful in other settings. And it's much nicer to work in a community nursing team or in a walk-in centre, where you can go to the loo when you need to. You don't have to ask permission, which our ambulance staff do have to do when they're out on the road.

So people started to leave to take up all sorts of jobs, and nobody noticed for a year. There used to be a group that met weekly looking at numbers of leavers and joiners, and nobody ever left. When our patient forum used to say 'You need a more diverse workforce – what are you doing about recruiting more BME people?', I used to laugh and say 'Well, nobody ever leaves!' But in the last three years they've been flooding out. By the time we realised, there was a massive gap, so we've been charging to catch up.

This has certainly affected performance, because if you haven't got enough staff, your performance is going to drop. And it affects financial performance too. So we've ended up in deficit because we're paying private ambulance services, and we're paying our staff overtime to plug the gaps, and we've had to do three recruitment campaigns.

**When senior managers
feel over-controlled**

Context: NHS senior
management

“You can’t do anything without approval”

The decision-making processes have changed in this organisation. Our Executive Team has brought all of their decision making into the centre. Those of us who are quite senior managers, who have been running our department for years, we’re used to spending our own money, making decisions about our staffing and activities. In the last three years, that has gradually diminished. So now we can’t do anything without it going to the Executive Team for approval.

Two things have happened. They now have to meet every week because they’ve got such a massive agenda. And secondly, they’ve become part of the problem. Because it takes so long to get everything through, they’re causing delays. So, if there’s something new we want to implement, they don’t get to it on the agenda because they’ve got other things that are more pressing. So your thing is always bounced. You’re stymied because you can’t do anything without their approval.

People like me, the rebellious ones, just find other ways of doing things. We make it look like a minor change, or we have informal conversations with people to say ‘Is it okay if I just go ahead?’ And so you’ve done it but not quite in the way you’re meant to – without producing a paper. I’ve never written so many policies and papers! Even when I was responsible for policy I didn’t write as many as I have in the last two years. So what the Exec Team has created is the opposite of what they wanted. They wanted central control, but by doing that they force us all to find ways round it.

We used to pretty much run our own departments and let our Director know if there was a problem, or if we needed to get something big through. Now even a tiny thing – we were producing a new patient information leaflet and we copied the format and wording of the leaflet word-for-word from NHS England guidance. And that had to go to the Executive Team for approval. In the past we produced loads of materials and it wouldn’t have entered my head to go to the Executive Team.

I said to the new Chief Executive ‘If you do anything as Chief Exec, my plea would be to give us our decision-making power, because we’re all experienced senior managers, and I’ve never overspent on my budget in 25 years of being a budget holder. So trust us.’ And she said ‘That’s a really good point. I’ll take that away.’

People at the top are protected, and that’s not new. People don’t want to present them with bad news. So they would say they had done things when they hadn’t. I’ve witnessed somebody doing that – lying just so they don’t get into trouble. It must be so in every organisation – very senior people don’t always know exactly what’s going on, because people don’t tell them. The Directors want to know what’s going on. The question then is what do they do about it?



APPROVED



The cutback loop in the NHS

'It's difficult to get people to understand that smoothing the bumps is the key skill'

If you look at the management cycle in the NHS, what tends to happen is there will be some criticism, usually financial criticism, and the Chief Executive will be fired. They'll get a new Chief Executive in to sort out the financial problems, and they usually do it by slimming down staff, because 85-90% of the NHS budget is staff.

Now the largest staff group by a long way are nurses. So that's the first thing we look at. So we thin down the number of nurses. We don't tend to cut down on our doctors, because the number of doctors determines how many patients you can get through the front door and the patients determine the amount of money that you get. You get rid of other things as well and you do some stuff around the edges – so you don't order any computers in February and you stop having sandwiches at board meetings.

So everything gets sorted out. But of course what nobody has seen yet is that the quality of clinical care has dropped, and staff morale too. And then eventually the CQC will come in, or whichever regulatory body it is this week. And that might happen two or three times, but eventually somebody will say 'This is a problem. This care isn't good enough.' The Director of Nursing or somebody will come down and say 'We need more nurses.' So they will recruit more nurses, the clinical care will go up and the CQC will come in and say 'You're doing a wonderful job and the Chief Executive is fantastic.' At which point, they then look at the balance sheet and of course financially they're going downhill. So eventually they will say to the Chief Executive 'I'm really sorry.' And the Chief Executive will move on and they'll appoint a new one, who will go 'They had financial problems.' And this loop will go again and again and again. I've seen it go through several cycles.

What you actually need is somebody to say 'We need to get our finances on an even keel, and perhaps we need to stand up to the Government and say we need more money,' and to make it really clear that sacking the Chief Executive will be a negative thing.

It's very difficult to get people to understand that the key skill is smoothing the bumps. It would be much better for patient care and much better for the employment of our staff. The trouble is, because you get a new Chief Executive at every cycle, they don't know how to ride the wave.

Insights from literature

Insights from Mary Parker Follett into developing trust

Mary Parker Follett was an incredible woman. She was interested in organisational behaviour and theory, a management guru for a world hardly prepared for her insights in the early twentieth century, nor indeed today. She did not propose beguiling simple solutions, instead she was keen to describe the flux of social interaction in ways that are useful. I'm going to offer three quotations. The challenge is this: if they resonate with your experience of working in organisations what are the implications for how we might think about trust?

- The individual is not a unit, but a centre of forces ... and consequently society is not a collection of units, but a complex of radiating and converging, crossing and re-crossing energies. Society is a dynamic process rather than a crowd or a collection of already developed individuals (Follett, M, 1918).
- In social situations you cannot compare what you bring and what you find because these have already influenced each other. Not to understand this is the onlooker fallacy: you cannot see experience without being a part of it (Follett, M, 1924).
- The leader must understand the situation, must see it as a whole, he must see the interrelation of all the parts. He must do more than this. He must see the evolving situation, the developing situation. His wisdom, his judgment, is used, not on a situation that is stationary, but on one that is changing all the time. The ablest administrators do not merely draw logical conclusions from the array of facts of the past which their expert assistants bring to them, they have a vision of the future (Follett, M, 2013).

This is my interpretation, yours may differ: I strongly identify with her comments that we are part of the action, there is no standing aside. And as we interact we are changing those around us as we in turn are being changed in both predictable and unpredictable ways as we develop new relationships. I ask myself, how do I think about trust before I meet someone for the first time or work with them in another capacity? I have an imagined idea, perhaps shaped by what I've heard, their reputation or that of the organisation. I might be mindful of the expectations of those around me, or what might be at stake. Perhaps I might remember the conversations about trust itself or what I have read in terms of models and approaches to trust. All of this is in the mix as I wait to meet them. When I meet them the subtle process of trust begins its work. Intuition and the rational me intermingle as we both navigate and develop understanding of each other, staying mindful of what I want to achieve and those around us that have an interest in any progress we might make. In the conversations I notice how our interactions are developing, perhaps a few trust-enabling gestures which I can respond to.

The conversation ends, a relationship has started, there is much to build upon. Mary Parker Follett challenges us to think about what organisations are (or should we instead think of the activity of organising?) and how we can be aware of the interconnections that we are all part of. All vital as we develop trusting relationships. As with other aspects of organisational life, there are no beguilingly simple solutions.

Follett, M P (1918) *The New State: Group Organization, the Solution of Popular Government*. Literary Licensing LLC.

Follett, M P (1924) *Creative experience*. Volume 3 of Organization behaviour. Reprint. Рипол Классик.

Follett, M P (2013) *Freedom and Co-ordination*, Lectures in Business Organization, Vol 15. London and New York: Routledge.

Noticing the complex web of trust

In the process of developing a trusting relationship something does not seem quite right. You perceive a mismatch between the trust you are aiming to develop and what you are noticing. Not that you can put your finger on it; perhaps you doubt the other person's ability, their reliability, or even their honesty. There is something from your previous experience, your intuition, which is niggling away. You call a couple of people in your network whom you trust and speak with them about your concerns, but subtly. In the back of your mind you are thinking about the consequences of things going wrong and the obligations that you have to others and your possible loss of credibility. In talking to other people you come to a decision, perhaps a hesitant one. You may decide to trust the person, or set your expectations a little lower. Or to carry out more checks as your project develops. You might delicately ask others to get involved. Not that you would say 'I don't trust...'. As time goes on there are conversations with the individual, those around him or her, and others that you have obligations to. You adjust your views on expectations in light of your experience and your growing understanding, as do others.

What we are talking about is power (Lukes, 1986). Power of the here and now and of anticipatory power as we put our faith in others. The 20th century sociologist Norbert Elias stressed that power was not an object that one person owns over another. Instead he viewed power as an elastic array of figurations and he used game theory to explain that:

... It is obvious that a player's playing strength varies in relation to his opponent's. The same goes for power and for many other concepts in our language. The game models help to show how much clearer sociological problems become, and how much easier it is to deal with them, if one recognises them in terms of balances rather than reifying terms. Concepts of balance are far more adequate for what can actually be observed in investigating the nexus of functions which interdependent human beings have for each other, ... (Elias, 1978, p75)

What I'm pointing to is the social nature of trust, even in a straightforward case. Very soon it becomes enmeshed in a social web of interconnections, some of which one is aware of, others less so. Within this mesh some people have more influence than others. The experienced player will navigate these, often subconsciously.

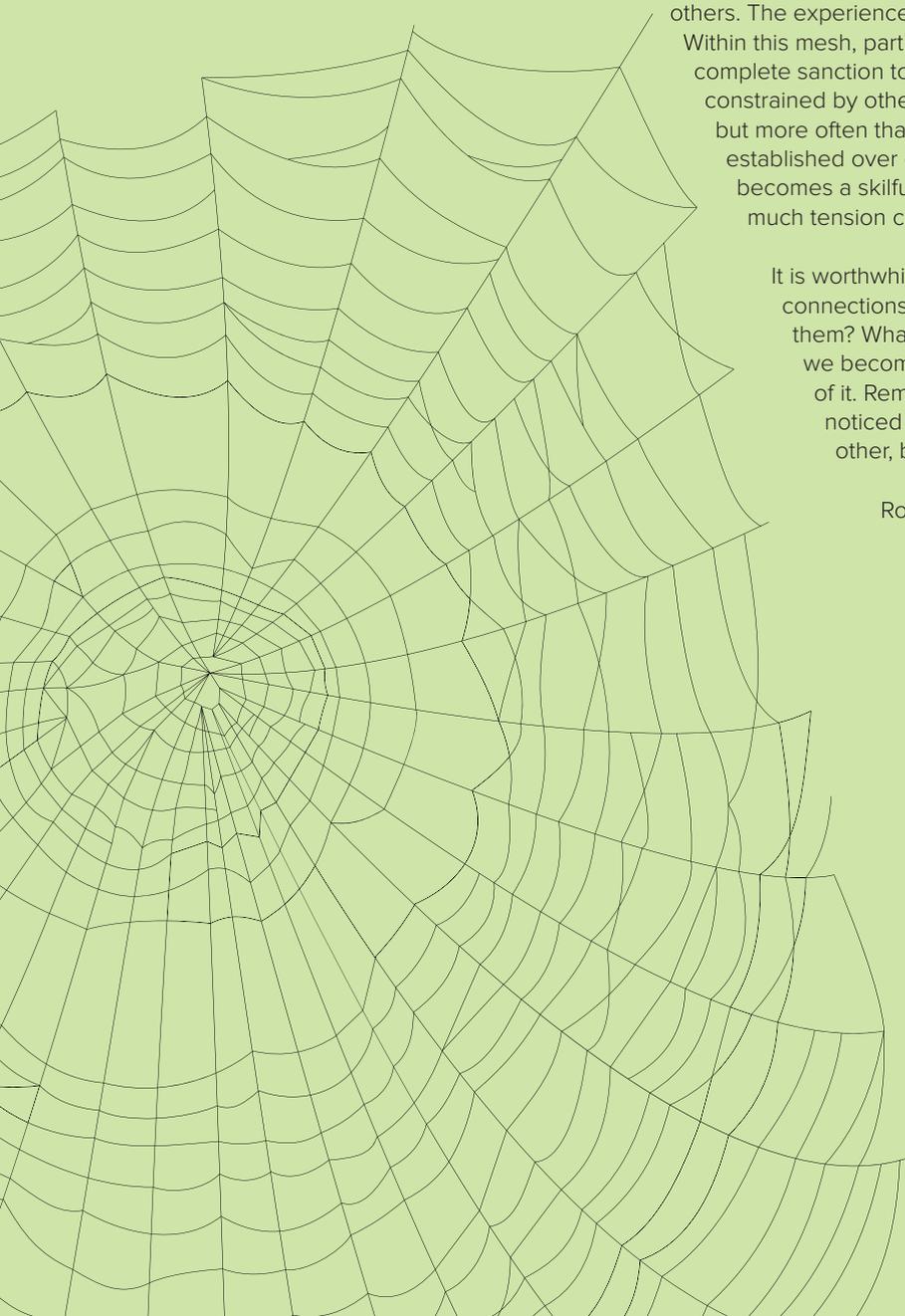
Within this mesh, particularly in our organisational lives, no one has complete sanction to trust or be trusted. Everyone is enabled and constrained by others. This may be explicit, in written procedures, but more often than not implicit in the way things are done, often established over decades. Navigating and stretching this mesh becomes a skilful act in order to effect change. In other words how much tension can be applied before problems occur?

It is worthwhile considering what can be done to make these connections more available for discussion – how do we notice them? What conversations can be initiated and with whom? As we become expert in a social setting we become less noticing of it. Remember the first day of your job, how acutely you noticed what was happening and how people related to each other, but as you settled in your ability to notice diminished.

Rob Warwick, 26 May 2015

Elias N (1978) *What is Sociology?*
New York: Columbia University Press.

Lukes S (1986) *Power*. New York:
New York University Press



Trust, social capital and lessons from West Virginia

I want to return to the connection between what people do on the ground and how this comes to affect the culture of an organisation, and in turn how culture comes to influence people. This time from a different angle, that of social capital. This should be of major concern for those interested in organisational health and development.

Social capital provides a way of understanding the currency from which trust develops or withers away over time. Robert Putnam became interested in the idea and history of social capital in his analysis of trust in the US (Putnam, 2000), tracing it back to a 1916 paper by Lyda Hanifan (Hanifan, 1916). Putnam makes the point that social capital is the fertile soil from which trust can grow. Hanifan was an educationalist with an interest in the social flux between education and society. Instead of abstract theory he was interested in the goings on of his local community of West Virginia, USA.

Here he defines social capital as being:

... that in life which tends to make ... tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of a people, namely, good will, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit. ...

The individual is helpless socially, if left entirely to himself (p130).

Like other forms of capital, social capital can grow and develop or be wasted. So what can be done to nurture this valuable resource? Hanifan points to the value of 'sociables', of picnics and community gatherings and having the opportunity to get to know each other; and to form a habit of doing this. And once this starts to grow and connections are made, the capital increases. There is also the role of education and the powerful effect of learning together. Education was not confined to schooling children, but also evening classes for adults. Hanifan also noted the importance of history and belonging and how this comes to develop individual and group identity. Even the quality of the local roads attracts his attention.

He paints a picture of an endeavour that requires leadership, organisation and time; not effort that is focused on individual activity, but effort that has its eye firmly set holistically on how it all comes together. Hanifan goes on to say:

If he may come into contact with his neighbour, and they with other neighbours, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, sympathy, and the fellowship of neighbours.

Note Hanifan's attention to the dynamic process between the individual and the group. This is an important point. For those in a leadership role, there can be no certainty of success, no cause and effect. In other words there is a complexity in this highly networked process, whereby small interventions

might have larger effects than those anticipated, and vice versa. But we can at least increase our chances of success in encouraging the potential for social capital and therefore trust.

Hanifan concludes with the following observation on leadership: 'It is not what they did for the people that counts for most in what was achieved; it was what they led the people to do for themselves that was really important' (p138). In other words, developing social capital is a social endeavour; with good leadership it can be prompted and encouraged.

Hanifan was writing in the context of communities and networks and the implications for leadership. The challenge for us is to think of this in the context of building trusting relationships in organisations and the leadership challenges that this poses.

Hanifan L (1916) *The Rural School Community Centre*. American Academy of Political and Social Science, 67(May), 130–138.

Putnam R (2000) *Bowling Alone - The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Rob Warwick



How do we come to trust institutions?

An article by Bachmann, "At the crossroads: future directions in trust research", urges us to take the institutional context into account. However, the author never spells out exactly what he means by the institutional arrangements that must be in place if people are to trust unknown collectives like banks, retailers, doctors and so on. The furthest he goes is to say that we only trust these collectives if there are rules and norms in place. (When I think about my relationship with representatives of these collectives, I think rules are a necessary but not sufficient condition for trusting them.)

It is clear to me that we do need to be able to make sense of how people come to trust whole institutions, or representatives of those institutions. This is particularly important given that people often have no face-to-face contact with those they need to trust (though some people do seem to develop trusting relationships via telephone, internet and letter writing).

I also accept that institutional arrangements play an important part. But who establishes these arrangements, if not human beings interacting with one another? These may be committee members, senior managers, policy makers, ministers, etc. etc. Bachmann hints at the local interactions that give rise to our sense of trusting, or being trusted by, the institutions and systems we are part of:

In our view, institutional-based trust develops in concrete relationships between two actors who not only unavoidably orient their behaviour to the relevant institutional arrangements but also enact and constantly reproduce the meaning, power and legitimacy of the institutional order in which their decisions and actions are embedded (Giddens, 1990; Kroeger, 2011). (Bachmann 2011, my emphasis)

Reinhard Bachmann (2011). At the crossroads: Future directions in trust research, *Journal of Trust Research*, 1:2, 203-213.

Alison Donaldson

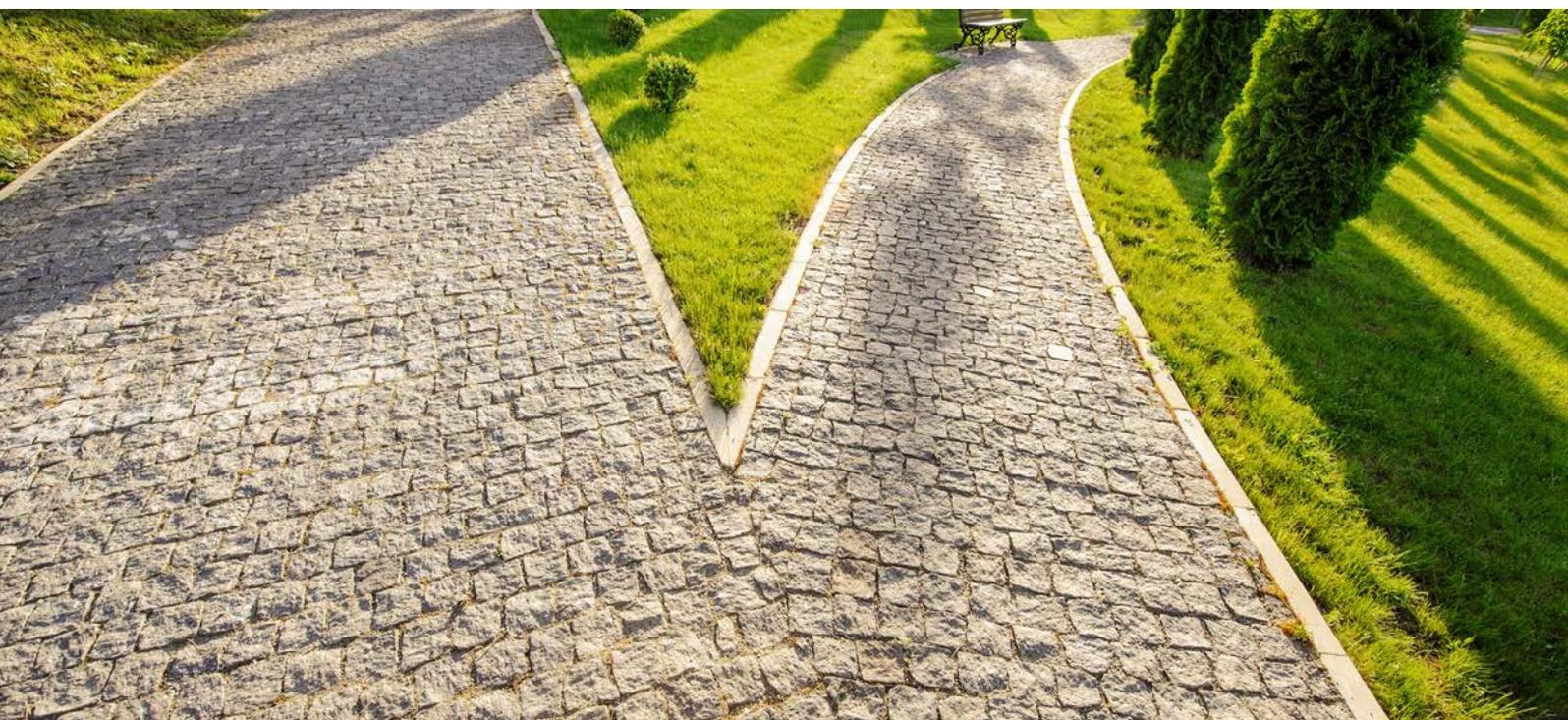
A short note on Onora O'Neill's Reith Lectures on Trust

In her 2002 Reith Lectures, Onora O'Neill finds no convincing evidence to diagnose a crisis of trust in our society today. But she does see massive evidence of a culture of suspicion. And she has her own suspicions. If we are to avoid a real crisis of trust, she suggests, "we need to think less about accountability through micro-management and control, and more about good governance; less about transparency and more about limiting deception" (page 99).

O'Neill also points out that, in the information age, "communication is often between strangers and one-way" (page 84), so we need to find ways of checking who is providing the information and whether they are trustworthy.

O'Neill (2002), *A Question of Trust*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Alison Donaldson



Appendix: About the research team

DR ROB WARWICK

Senior Lecturer in Business Strategy, University of Chichester:

Rob is an experienced change management practitioner and academic. Rob's doctorate was in Government policy formulation and how this affects frontline practice, paying attention to power, changing relationships, risk and complexity. He is experienced in action research and action learning and has researched social processes by which people develop knowledge and leadership. This led to a co-authored book titled 'The Social Development of Leadership and Knowledge – A Reflexive Inquiry into Research and Practice' (Warwick and Board, 2013). Rob can be contacted at: rwarwick@chi.ac.uk.

DR ALISON DONALDSON

Independent writer and consultant

Alison writes about organisational change, learning and communication. Her doctorate examined the part played by writing in the organisational conversation. Over the last 10 years, she has developed a practice of narrative evaluation in collaboration with Macmillan Cancer Support, which led to a co-authored book: 'Communities of Influence – improving healthcare through conversations and connections' (Donaldson et al., 2011). Alison's blog on 'human relating' can be found at www.writinginorganisations.uk

PUBLICATIONS

Donaldson A, Lank E and Maher J (2011) *Communities of Influence - Improving healthcare through conversations and connections*. London: Radcliffe Publishing

Warwick R and Board D (2013) *The Social Development of Leadership and Knowledge: A Reflexive Inquiry Into Research and Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

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