

Foreword

‘So how do you define trust?’ From the way the question was put to me, I could sense that this social scientist was not asking out of friendly curiosity in a casual conversation but just lying in wait to catch something he could tear apart. This was in the early 2000s when I was a doctoral candidate in a phase when you know that you should be able to answer such a question but when you are still nervous to do so. ‘Well, first of all, trust is a process’, was how I started my somewhat tentative reply and, to my surprise, my inquisitor’s face lit up and he became very favourably disposed to everything else I mentioned such as uncertainty, vulnerability, interpretation, expectation and even the leap of faith. This was the first time that I realized that a process view of trust is not just sensible for various reasons but also renders the concept highly compatible with other fields of social science.

However, when trust research took off during the 1990s and after, few scholars cared to investigate trust as a process, although foundational contributions from earlier decades should have led them to do so. Instead, much effort went into identifying different types of trust(worthiness) and devising cross-sectional measurements and models of trust. This is why I was delighted when I learned that the ‘Nordic Research Network on Trust in and between Organizations’ (Nordic Trust Network) had been created in Scandinavia in October 2010 and, more to the point, that this network combined a focus on trust in a Nordic context explicitly with process perspectives on trust. I was fortunate to be invited to give a keynote speech at the second network seminar in Roskilde, Denmark, in November 2011 where I met many like-minded researchers who were digging deeper into what it means to explicitly, or just implicitly, define and analyse trust as process (see: trust.ruc.dk).

The Nordic Trust Network’s hard work is now paying off most evidently in this collection of chapters edited by Søren Jagd and Lars Fuglsang. Each contribution to the volume has found its own way of adopting a process view of trust, but reading the chapters, one can also sense the intense exchange of ideas that has taken place between the authors at the network seminars and at various other occasions when discussing their work over the past years. The overall coherence is

maintained by studying the processes that shape trust as well as how trust shapes those processes, which makes perfect sense from a process perspective that points to an encompassing 'trust process'. This notion of entangled and embedded processes also matches the 'flat' ontology of process theory which frowns upon the terminology of 'micro' and 'macro' that some chapters in this book still use, though mostly in a very fluid and dynamic sense.

As reader, you can look forward to a book that stays true to its emphasis on process while accommodating 'weak' and 'strong' process approaches. It is appropriate at the current development stage of trust research to stay inclusive and also recognize the research on trust as process that does not go all the way back and embrace pre-Socratic metaphysics. Some readers might actually suspect, and some hope, that a book on process with mostly Scandinavian authors would be full of impenetrable 'Whiteheadiana'. Not so for the chapters you are about to read. Instead, they offer accessible explorations of trust as process that are meaningful especially because they bring in complementary theoretical traditions such as phenomenology, social constructionism, symbolic interactionism or sensemaking, and because the authors consider, for example, imprinting as well as emergence. Ultimately, as I would infer from the editors' introduction and claims made across chapters, the contributors to this volume are united by their interest in dynamic social interaction.

Another remarkable feature of this volume is how it combines conceptually and theoretically challenging process views with a strong empirical focus and grounding. Readers will be excited to read about trust processes in such diverse contexts as healthcare, consulting, military conflict, innovation networks, hypermarkets, construction projects, youth work, investment management, sports teams, municipalities, homecare and savings banks. While all studies presented apply some form of qualitative method, which I appreciate, the range of techniques for gathering and interpreting data is broad and the contributors display a strong sense of reflexivity regarding the need for data that are suitable for understanding processes. The insights produced are very valuable and still it remains one of the great tasks for future research to get an empirical handle on the trust processes we are interested in, not least bearing in mind that we are likely to become entangled as researchers in those ongoing processes we study.

Readers will realize, at least after reading this book, how much potential lies in studying trust as a process and/or as part of larger social processes, how much a process view can change our understanding of trustors, trustees and their ongoing relationships, and how much work

there is also left to be done. This impressive volume provides a fair bit of reassurance that when somebody asks us how we conceptualize and operationalize trust, we may reply: 'Well, first of all, trust is a process.'

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