Expectations as a key element in trusting

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Trusting in a process perspective

Just like the river, the sun and fire trust has many faces, ways to occur and to surface. Trust is never static; it is flux and has the potential of changing relations – and thereby organizing practices.

Introduction

We recognize that trust is a part of most organizing practices of organizations of today. Research shows, that the benefits of organizing inter-organizational relationships on trust are many. The majority of the trust literature provides strong arguments that trusting relationships lead to increased knowledge sharing (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Levin, Cross, Abrams, & Lesser, 2002; Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, & Schorrman, 1995). When there is trust, people are much more willing to share and to listen and absorb (Mayer et al., 1995; Tsai, 2001; Zand, 1972). Trust in relationships supports cooperation in and between organizations (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Heckscher & Adler, 2006; Huotari, 2004; van Ees & Bachmann, 2006). Trust has been seen to have a direct or mediating effect on performance in alliances and networks (Powell, 1990; Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998), for individuals and organizations (Zaheer et al., 1998), and across cultures (Child & Mollering, 2003). Trust is a precondition for sharing knowledge, for working in integrated processes, for mutual learning and for participating in consensus oriented decision making. In general the trust-based organizing establish more transparent decision making based on open and honest communication and increased organizational learning based on knowledge sharing (Covey, 2006; Jagd, 2008).

Even though the trust phenomenon is not new, neither to practice or science, there are still things about trust not uncovered. Having worked with trust for some time, we are still challenged when turning to the empirical and analyzing work. We feel on rocky ground when trying to describe the process of trust in our empirical work and find no clear answers to the challenging questions such as – "How do I recognize trust?" And "How is trusting collaboration recognized in regards to routine collaboration?" And "Where and how should I look for trust?"

The aim of this article is to qualify qualitative descriptions of trust as a dynamic interactive micro process. In order to do so there is a need to broaden the discussion on trust. Therefore we find it prudent to develop a theoretical framework that allows us to recognize and describe trust as micro processes.

Trust has often been studied as a static phenomenon even though applying a qualitative perspective. Methods of studying trust have previously been a subject of research. For instance in "Handbook of Research Methods on Trust" (Lyon, Saunders, & Mollering, 2012), to some extend chapter 6 of Trust: Reason, Routine, Reflexivity (Möllering, 2006) and "Process views of trusting and crisis" (Möllering, 2012). Involving different methods qualitative as well quantitative in order to broaden our understanding of trust – and of course to *"encourage trust researchers to reflect on the methods they use"* (Lyon et al., 2012). These contributions has enriched the field with various methods of studying trust, but we find, that a lot of the methods, even the ones with a qualitative starting point, tends to measure and quantify rather than to understand trust.

New research indicates, that trust should be grasped as a process, the idea comes from a frustration with the static term and quantitative measurements, being unable to answer the questions of how and why trust fluctuate and change (Möllering, 2012). We agree with Möllering, who suggests:

> *"A shared point for highlighting the process character of trust could be to speak of trusting, not trust, in order to express that the objective of study is not just a measurable outcome (i.e. attitude or behavior) but the particular way such outcomes are produced and used while*

acknowledging that the ´product´ of trust is always unfinished and needs to be worked upon continuously" (Möllering, 2012:1)

Möllering (2012) argues that applying a process perspective on trusting will produce research that can answer those ´how´ and ´why´ questions. We want to take approaches which tries to understand trusting as a process further, and treat trusting, with Hernes words, in its own *"merits, bringing in its history and antecedents"* (Hernes, 2008: 143). In order to do this we apply a micro process perspective inspired by symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1967). Thus, as described in the call, we find a need to describe how people establish, negotiate and change trust through interaction.

With a departure in Möllerings framework (Möllering, 2012) and his five process views of trusting, we still find ourselves unable to answer the question "How is trusting recognized in an organizing practice?". Richer and more consistent theoretical descriptions are needed to develop our understanding of trusting and thereby enrich our understanding of relations in organizing practices. Accepting that trusting should be seen as a process, in our case a micro process, we find it relevant to turn to theories that focus on micro processes and look for inspiration.

Considering the need for a tangible focus for qualitative research on trusting, we propose that expectations to the behavior of others can provide that. By focusing on expectations, researchers can produce narrative descriptions that explains how trusting develops and changes. Then the key theoretical question is "How do we describe and understand expectations in a micro perspective?" In this article we turn to Luhmann, Mead, Denzin and Blumer, to gain a better understanding of expectations.

Overall we hope this paper contributes with a framework for research on trusting, which frames and supports the *"shapeless data spaghetti toward some kind of theoretical understanding that does not betray the richness, dynamism, and complexity of the data"* (Langley, 1999: 694)*.*

Thus, we develop a theoretical framework that enables future qualitative research in a micro-perspective, to describe expectations as an element in the process of trusting.

Our research question is as follows:

How do expectations create a theoretical framework for studying trusting in a micro process perspective?

The article will be structured as follow. First, we highlight the particular theoretical contribution the process perspective offers when studying trusting, our main focus being Möllerings article "Process views of trusting and crisis" (Möllering, 2012). Secondly, based on previous research we define expectations as a key element in trust. Third, we further unfold expectations as a key element in trusting in a process perspective in order to qualify future trust research. Finally, we summarize and discuss the framework and thereby frame future research.

Trusting - in a process perspective

Process studies have the ability to explore micro-processes which occur in situated, face-to-face interactions. Process studies can explore phenomena, or clarify aspects of phenomena, that are less explainable through rational means because it takes into account the development over time. *"Applying process thinking to seemingly obvious organizational phenomena can inspire some new ideas about how things are and how they become"* (Hernes, 2008: xxi). Process methodology focuses on situated practices of organizing, and enables researchers to explain how events unfolds over time; *"such an approach does not deny the existence of events, states, or entities, but insists on unpacking them to reveal the complex activities and transactions that take place and contribute to their constitution"* (Ann Langley & Tsoukas, 2010: 2). Looking at micro processes provides a way to focus on how people interact and establish joint action (Blumer, 1986: 73). As we seek to understand how people establish, negotiate and change expectations it is a highly relevant perspective. As such it is relevant to study trusting through a micro process perspective. Agreeing with Möllering we accept that trusting should be studied as a phenomenon in relationships – developed and created in intersubjective relations – and observed / studied where people

"engage in extensive signaling, communication, interaction and interpretation in order to maintain the continuous process of trust constitution"(Möllering, 2006: 79). Following that we agree with Möllering who propose that*: "Process views of ´trusting´ emphasize that trust is always ´in process´ and is even a process in itself"* (Möllering, 2012: 2).

It is important for the study of trusting, that the analytical framework chosen to support the analysis is well suited for describing temporality. The ontological assumption in process thinking is; "*that the world exists as flows in which entities are in a state of becoming rather than as a final state of being*" (Hernes, 2008: 128). Studying the temporal nature of trust also influences how the research should be approached methodologically and since *"Process research is concerned with understanding how things evolve over time and why they evolve in this way"* (Langley, 1999: 692) it is considered a useful approach to apply.

Möllering summarizes the existing literature on trusting as a process and suggests 5 process views of trusting. He establishes a framework where future research on trusting can be positioned within. The 5 views are as follows:

- Trust as continuing - Trust needs to be continuously (re)produced and has a temporal dimension. Studies within this view focus on trust levels at different points in time. Trust is still seen as the result of the process and not as a process in itself.

- Trusting as processing – is concerned with how people generate and process information. Studies within this view focus on constructing rational models. Trusting is the decisive link between various antecedents of trust and trust as an outcome.

- Trusting as learning – Trust is not just the outcome of learning but part of it. Studies within this view, focus on how trusting enables learning and vice versa. The quantity and quality of trust changes through learning and trusting as learning potentially also changes the trustor's and trustees themselves.

- Trusting as becoming - Not histories but actors' identities are at the center of this view. Trusting is seen as a part of the actors' continuous becoming. Trusting is highly dependent on the individual actor and her willingness to belong to a collective.

- Trusting as constituting – Studies within this view emphasize social structures. Trusting is to be studied as one practice in the larger, reflexive process of social

systems. How people trust is a noteworthy element in how social systems are constituted.

In the description of the 5 process views of trusting, we find that there is a lack of concreteness. We are missing an answer to how these different views can be applied in the study of trusting in micro processes and interaction. Another issue that is relevant to discuss is the lack of explicit positioning in the article, which perspective is most relevant for studying trusting as a process. It is unclear to us whether Möllering is merely summarizing existing research positions or if he is actively establishing concepts. More important these five process views of trusting do not meet our need for a practice oriented vocabulary allowing for descriptions of trusting as a micro process. Through this article we see the relevance of focusing on trusting as a temporal phenomenon in process or a process in itself, but we are left wanting when it comes to the tools needed for a qualitative analysis.

Trust and expectations

In the following section we review and position our understanding of trust and define expectations as a key element of trust. The trust concept is rich in meaning in everyday life and it is a daily used term in the descriptions of relationships among people in organizing practice. Trust is considered a social and dynamic mechanism which develop in the relationship between two or more people, and as suggested by Möllering: *"Trust is generated and extended step by step" (Möllering, 2006: 85)*.

Though there is no generally accepted definition of trust (Möllering, 2006) most conceptions of trust highlights the role of positive expectations to the behavior of others and vulnerability to that behavior. (Adobor, 2005; Blomqvist & Snow, 2010; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Ellonen, Blomqvist, & Puumalainen, 2008; Jagd, 2008; Kramer & Lewicki, 2010; Luhmann, 1979; Mayer et al., 1995; Möllering, 2006; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007; Zaheer, 2008). Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) propose that trust is *"the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectations that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or*

*control the other party" (Mayer et al., 1995: 712).*Whereas Rousseau describe that trust *"is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intention or behaviors of another" (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998).*Lewicki et al suggest that trust is based on *"confident positive expectations"* (Lewicki et al. 1998) and rather similar Maguire and Philips (2008) define trust as *"the expectation that some other will act with predictability and benevolence"*(Maguire & Phillips, 2008: 374) and Zaheer (2008) suggests that "*actors can only trust those others with whom they share a particular set of expectations" (Zaheer, 2008: 358)* following that expectations of behavior and anticipated collaboration (Maguire & Phillips, 2008).Luhmann (1979) argues, *"Whoever wants to win trust must take part in social life and be in a position to build the expectations of others into his own self-representation"* (Luhmann, 1979: 62). Möllering see trust as favorable expectation regarding other people's actions and intentions (Möllering, 2001: 404).

As it comes forth above two elements are central in the trust definitions; expectations and vulnerability. The focus in this article is on expectations as a key element in trusting, since the theoretical perspectives indicate that an unfolding of this notion, establish advantages when studying trust. Saying that, unfolding the understanding of vulnerability could also add to the understanding of trusting, but in this article it is not within our focus.

When relating to an organizing practice, trusting is based on expectations, where 'colleagues' can rely on each other to fulfill obligations. With Zaheer words, trust is established *"When actors involved in an exchange share a set of expectations constituted in social rules and legitimate processes, they can trust each other with regard to the fulfillment and maintenance of those expectation. By the same token, actors can only trust those others with whom they share a particular set of expectations. Either way, trust hinges on the actors´ natural ability to have a world in common with other and rely on it"* (Zaheer, 2008: 358).

Trust is formed in relationships and can be defined as mutual expectations about others' intentions and actions. Trust is considered a condition that goes beyond the content of formal contract and job descriptions. Uncertainty regarding other's actions is central to keep in mind. In social relationships, people have expectations about what other chooses to do. These expectations are related to the future where there will be an evaluation of whether

the other person's intended action is appropriate (Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011; van Ees & Bachmann, 2006).

In the following we grasp expectations in a process perspective in order to qualify the understanding of trusting. We do so by applying a relational focus needed for qualitative micro process studies of trusting.

Grasping expectations in a micro process perspective

Since expectations are established as a key element in trusting, we try to take this understanding further, in order to unfold the understanding of trusting. As shown above, theoretical perspectives agree that expectations and trusting are closely linked. By applying the theoretical understandings of Luhmann, Blumer, Denzin and Meads process theory (Blumer, 1986; Denzin, 1969; Mead, 1967) and thereby adding a relational focus to the present process perspective, we provide a substance upon which future qualitative studies of trusting can build. To make trusting tangible in interactions we focus on expectations and elaborate how these are negotiated, established and changed.

Luhmann considers the future beyond the imagination of human potential which problematize trust, because the future involves more options than the ones obvious in the present (Luhmann, 1979). As Luhmann notes: *"To show trust is to anticipate the future. It is to behave as though the future were certain" (Luhmann, 1979: 10)*. The uncertainty of the future relate strongly to mutual expectations, because how can trust be established based upon the unknown? Luhmann expect to experience trust in relations with changing interdependence and uncertainty (Luhmann, 1979) and that's why the following try to make a distinction on familiarity and trust. Luhmann conclude:

> *"In familiar worlds, the past prevails over the present and the future. The past does not contain any ´other possibilities´; complexity is reduces at the outset. Thus an orientation to things past can simplify the world and render it harmless.* (Luhmann, 1979: 19+21)

Luhmann consider familiarity and trust as different modes of emphasizing expectations (Luhmann, 2000) because *"The path to trust is by way of entering into the expectations of others in a very general, loose, way: one can fulfill them better that expected, or in a different way"* (Luhmann, 1979: 62). Luhmann focus towards familiarity as a routinized way of socializing. Another way to look at this is to relate familiarity to the past and trust to future. By making this distinction, it comes forth that relations based on familiarity, is relations based on stable and established expectations – and business go on as usual. One could say that trust is not needed in a familiar world. Familiarity is based on the past, which means that novelty to some extent none exists. Consequently, relations without novelty are relations without trust – stated in a very strict way. On the contrary, trusting relations have to contain some kind of novelty, and this could come forth in changing mutual expectations. Trusting presupposes a situation of changing expectation. Although trusting relations contains some kind of familiarity since some kind of familiarity is needed as a precondition for trust (Luhmann, 1979: 19). Thus, familiarity is some kind of guidelines to our way of socializing and thereby familiarity is the first step towards trusting. Nevertheless, it is when familiarity no longer is enough and expectations are changing, that trusting comes forth and can be followed. Summing up, trusting can be studied as changing expectations and will come forth as changing interdependence and uncertainty in relations.

Luhmann describes that *"The possibilities for action increase proportionately to the increase of trust – trust in one´s own self-presentation and in other people´s interpretation of it"* (Luhmann, 1979: 40). This means that people in trusting relations should see more opportunities. In addition when people develop relationships and mobilize activities it creates uncertainty and thus situations where trusting plays an important role (Luhmann, 2000: 100). When a person changes position in the collective awareness from being an object to a part of the relations, the established understandings are challenged and novelty might appear (Luhmann, 1979: 19). When researching trusting a good idea would be to study how people adjust to each other, because *"Whoever wants to win trust must take part in social life and be in a position to build the expectations of others into his own self-representation"* (Luhmann, 1979: 62). Hence it is in this process of understanding the position of the other that the adjustments of expectations occur. Luhmann draws on Mead

in his description of this process, and thus we find it relevant to look more closely at how Mead describes this process. Mead´s (1967) concepts of "the generalized other" and "self" provides a better understanding of how people grasp the direction of the acts of the others. Mead states that; "*…those gestures which in affecting us as they affect others call out the attitude which the other takes, and that we take in so far as we assume his role*" (Mead, 1967: 97). Mead describes how people when they make a gesture to others they at the same time make them to themselves. In addition they respond to their own gesture and expect how others will respond, in such a way that they put themselves in the position of the other (Mead, 1967: 96).

Denzin also draw on Meads (1967) concepts of "the generalized other" and "self" to develop a better understanding of the process of grasping the direction of the acts of the others. It is through the lodging of self in interaction and the generalized other of the others in the interaction that stable definitions of self and identity emerge. In this process of defining the situation, each other and selves, people also develop preliminary "rules of conduct" (Denzin, 1969).

> "*While participants may initially agree on definitions, rules of conduct, and images of self, these definitions may be so vague as to permit conflicting points of view to later emerge to challenge the entire basis of joint action*" (Denzin, 1969).

Denzin focuses on how interaction and joint action requires the actors to understand and incorporate the interpretations and expectations of others into the definition of the situation and their own course of action. Denzin condenses Blumer (1966) the following way: "*Joint actions, which represent the generic form of all interaction, rest on the ability of the human to grasp the direction of the acts of others*" (Denzin, 1969).

The mutual expectation of how to act and engage in daily practice is like Blumer describes "grasped" in the relations and enables shared actions. Blumer writes that individuals and groups continually attend to the contexts of their situation, interpret those contexts, and select a plan of action based on the interpretation (Blumer, 1986). Those situations where the mutual expectations become tangible to researchers in interaction are when someone

or something does not live up to the expectations of the other and expectations have to be adjusted. These situations are bound to occur because:

> *"However carefully we plan the future it always is different from that which we can previse, and this something that we are continually bringing in and adding to is what we identify with the self that comes into the level of our experience only in the completion of the act"* (Mead, 1967: 203).

As such the negotiation of expectations is ongoing since *"One makes contracts and promises, and one is bound by them. The situation may change, the act may be different from that which the individual himself expected to carry out, but he is held to the contract which he has made"* (Mead, 1967: 203). Since the expectations should be understood as something that is changed through ongoing interaction, it serves as a relevant focal point, for studies of trusting as a micro process.

Similar to Luhmann, Blumer and Mead focus on how interaction and joint action requires the actors to understand and incorporate the interpretations and expectations of others into the definition of the situation and their own course of action. The mutual expectation of how to act and engage in daily practice is like Blumer describes grasped in the relations and enables shared actions. As Denzin puts it *"The meaning of an object resides not in the object itself but in the definitions brought to it, and hence must be located in the interaction process" (Denzin, 1969: 923).*

The above establish a frame for the following discussion of our main finding which implies demands for future empirical research.

Main findings

In this article we take a step into unfolding the understanding of trusting further. Möllerings (2012) focus on seeing trust as trusting has a developing perspective. The strong emphasis on trusting as a process in itself inspired us to look more closely at trusting in a micro

perspective - which leads us to an understanding of expectations as a key element in trusting.

His framework of five different process views of trusting provides an overview of existing research, but does not necessarily enable better qualitative research of trusting.

Luhmann's understanding of expectations related to future actions provides an understanding of how novelty and expectations are intertwined, Mead and Blumer deepens our understanding of how situations where people grasp the understandings of the others are connected to changing expectations.

We have proposed a framework for understanding trust defined as expectations in order to enable qualitative descriptions of situations of trusting. By discussion how trusting and expectations are intertwined we provide a framework through which we can study how relations change by following expectations. Through the theoretical discussion we became aware, that novelty is a dynamic which can guide our view, because novelty is likewise intertwined with changing expectations. Thus, expectations, trusting and novelty is intertwined and looking for trusting is looking for changing expectations and novelty. And these situations are situations of trusting. We find that a theoretical framework that focuses on how expectations change in interaction enables empirical research that explains how and why trusting changes and fluctuates. By following Mead and Blumer the theoretical framework provides an insight into how expectations change through the ongoing adjustment between people. It is when people incorporate their expectations about the other into their own behavior that this mutual adjustment takes place.

Qualitative descriptions can provide insight into how expectations change, when the descriptions are sensitive to how people adjust to each other, by grasping the position of the other. Furthermore novelty is central. Because trusting relations increase the possibilities for action, situations where people describe novelty should be the focus of these descriptions. Future qualitative studies of trusting should focus on how expectations change in interaction and to recognize these changes is sensitive to when novelty appears.

Perhaps there is room for another process view of trusting – trusting as micro processes!

Methodological implications

When studying trusting as a micro process there are certain methodological aspects, researchers need to consider. First of all this perspective calls for a qualitative approach, because the object of study is the interaction between people. It could be beneficial to produce narrative logs that describe change in expectations. In order to describe change in expectations the research must be planned as a longitudinal study, where there is a continuous contact to empirical field. In order to capture interaction and understand how expectations change, it would be a good idea to apply participative observation, so that the researcher gains access to everyday interactions. When conducting participative observation, the researcher should be particularly sensitive to situations that are described as novel by the participants and situations where they describe new possible actions.

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