

Foreword

Some years ago, the German Police University in Münster invited me to lecture on trust and I thought I could win my audience over by reporting that the police had been the most trusted institution in Germany. According to survey results over many years, around 80 % of citizens say they trust the police. This fact did not have the intended effect on the young police inspectors studying towards entering the higher echelon of the German police. Instead one of them raised his hand in alarm: “Do you mean one out of five people out there do not trust me?” What looks like a rather flattering statistic for the institution as a whole may not instill the level of confidence required for day-to-day policing, because the rather abstract survey question and the specific issues that prompt interactions between police officers and citizens refer to different notions of trust. How exactly do they differ, though, and how may they still be connected?

These are fundamental questions which the editors Ellie Shockley, Tess Neal, Lisa PytlikZillig, and Brian Bornstein, and their admirable contributors to this volume are not afraid to address and which we discussed, among many related and more specific questions, at the Nebraska Symposium on Motivation and the National Science Foundation (NSF) Workshop on Institutional Trust at the University of Nebraska in April 2014. The notion of institutional trust might come across as unproblematic, but when we take a closer look it turns out to be a rather provocative idea with which to start. Trust seems to be an inherently psychological concept for understanding interpersonal relationships. Its dyadic character suggests there need to be two actors; one who trusts and one who is trusted, maybe reciprocally. But who or what is the actor at the other end, if we talk about institutional trust in the sense of trust in institutions?

It is important to note that institutional trust can have three related meanings. First, trust in institutions points to the institution as trustee. For example, citizens trust the courts. Second, however, institutions can support trust between trustors and a trustees, which is referred to as institution-based or institutional-based trust. Here, the institution is thought of as a third-party guarantor or enforcer which, crucially, has to be trusted by trustor and trustee in order to be able to fulfill this role. For example, presuming that the courts are trusted, citizens trust each other because

they can go to court in case of wrongdoing. Third, we can talk about institutionalized trust when trusting others is the norm in a social system and people rely on this. Referring to the example of the courts once more, trust is institutionalized when the possibility to go to court is very much in the background and people usually interact without considering or expecting that it might be necessary.

If we define institutions, provisionally, as abstract systems of taken-for-granted rules and practices, then it is tempting and sensible to point to the representatives of such systems as the ultimate recipients of institutional trust. However, these people cannot be reduced to their role as interchangeable office holders; they are involved as individuals even though they are restricted and empowered in what they do on behalf of the institution. Moreover, institutional trust seems to contain a kind of generalized trust towards typical system representatives which shapes trust in specific encounters without predetermining how the interaction unfolds. In return, repeated positive encounters build and confirm institutional trust so that trust in the institution as such emerges over and above any trust in its representatives.

The starting point just described has motivated many of the chapters in this volume in one way or another. The contributions are connected by the appreciation that institutional trust is a multi- and cross-level phenomenon which can be understood better if the scientific disciplines that have specialized in studying different levels and different institutional systems work together. Interdisciplinarity has been a great opportunity for trust research but one that has been difficult to seize and develop. This volume, clearly marked by its title, is fully committed to interdisciplinary perspectives and it is evidence for the richer and clearer picture this can produce.

The process of interdisciplinary inquiry, as documented in the chapters and as experienced by all participants of the NSF Trust Workshop at the University of Nebraska, can be tough, mind-blowing and frustrating, if only because we often have to go back to basics and at the same time open up to unfamiliar views on familiar topics. This may explain partly why interdisciplinary work is often called for but seldom accomplished in trust research just as in other fields. However, the outcomes of the Nebraska initiative prove that it is worthwhile—and even highly enjoyable, going by the collegial and friendly atmosphere at the Workshop—to actively connect knowledge on trust from different disciplines. For example, political scientists might have a tendency to black-box or simplify citizens' motivations whilst psychologists may underestimate the political forces that produce the incentives that citizens perceive. Together, as political psychology, these disciplines achieve more relevant insights, for example, on trust-related topics such as intergroup reconciliation.

The multilevel conceptualization of trust is one important tool for this edited volume which allows its editors and contributors to present trust as a coherent and at the same time differentiated phenomenon. Another tool is the discussion of different domains, notably trust in public administration, policing, state courts, medicine, and science. By comparing trust across these domains as well as the same domain in different cultural or political contexts, it is possible to identify what might be called the universal features of trust as well as domain-specific drivers, mechanisms, and patterns. Whilst there may be an emerging consensus that there is a universal core to the trust problem but not a universal process of dealing with it,

any research that provides specific insights into different domains is highly valuable and this edited volume makes an important contribution in this respect. Readers will appreciate how the different chapters display conceptual sophistication paired with a deep practical knowledge of domains such as police work and courts.

The topic of institutional trust is not only conceptually deep and complex but also very timely. Sticking to the example of the police and policing, I can only observe from far away the recent public debates, peaceful protests, and sometimes violent outbreaks triggered by altercations between citizens and police officers like in Ferguson, Missouri, in the USA. Amnesty International reports incidents of police brutality from around the world, including Germany. Whenever they take place, the question is always whether they are indeed just “incidents” that do not undermine the trustworthiness of the police as an institution, because they can be explained by the wrongdoing of individual police officers, or whether they are evidence of systematic institutional shortcomings and failure. The interdisciplinary perspective on institutional trust offered in this volume contributes to a more nuanced interpretation of such cases and, hopefully, to more effective institutional trust repair efforts, including any necessary reforms.

At the First International Network on Trust (FINT) Workshop in Coventry in the UK in November 2014, I shared my experience from lecturing at the German Police University, mentioned at the beginning of this foreword, with George Hamilton, Chief Constable of the Northern Ireland Police Service. He had presented unique insights into how, in his challenging context, institutional trust in the police was built up from an unfavorable base, compared to Germany, through active engagement with the community and especially with those citizens who find it difficult to trust the police. His account confirmed the importance of treating trust as an ongoing, dynamic process in which institutions and actions are entangled. I could not help but notice, though, that the Chief Constable was preoccupied with citizens’ trust in the police and spoke much less about how the police also have to trust citizens, which for institutional and historical reasons may not come naturally and has to be learned as well. This may be one of the avenues for further research and debate on institutional trust that can build upon the concepts and theories presented in this unique and remarkable interdisciplinary volume.

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