



RESEARCH PAPERS

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Institut for Samfundsvidenskab og Erhvervsøkonomi

Research Paper no. 3/01

**WHAT ROLE DOES TRUST PLAY IN
NETWORK STEERING?**

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Research Papers from the Department of Social Sciences, Roskilde University, Denmark.

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Abstract

The term trust seems to acquire increasing relevance in both political science and public administration as the development from government to governance (Rhodes, 1997; Kickert, 1997; Kooiman, 1993) challenges the traditional way of analyzing and understanding the public sector. Governance refers to a certain understanding where networks and collaboration replace or supplement steering by hierarchy and formal rules. In the first part of this paper the concept of governance will be presented as a core argument for the relevance of closer study of the term trust. In the second part of the paper the term trust will be discussed and defined (Warren, 1999; Fukuyama, (1995); Putnam, (1993); Gambetta (1988); Luhmann (1979)). In the third part the term trust will be put in relation to the governance process or maybe more precisely the role of networks in the way of steering the public sector. A central question in the paper will, as the title indicates, be around: "What role does trust play in network steering? "

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WHAT ROLE DOES TRUST PLAY IN NETWORK STEERING?

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1. Introduction

My interest in the concept of trust must be seen in relation to my earlier research in the role that public managers play in and around networks (Andersen 2000). Networks seen both as networks crossing the traditional boundaries between the public and private sectors, but also networks as a way of steering and developing the public sector and the processes and results of the policies. Central questions in my research are

“What different kinds of trust evolve in these networks?”

“What kind of roles do the public managers play in these trust relations?”

The next step in my research is a casestudy in two municipalities in Denmark, where my main interest - and the puzzle presented in this paper - is to develop a means of tracking down trust and trust relations. What to observe, what questions to ask, and how are these observations to take place?

The point of departure in this discussion paper is a governance perspective. So in good manner I will elaborate on the existing literature of governance by giving a short introduction of this concept. The reason for this is that they have obtained a great deal of attention in the most recent theoretical discussion of and around the public sector (Andersen, 1999; Ferlie, 1996; Kickert, 1997; Kooiman, 1993).

Before introducing the concept of governance, I will put focus on the government model, in the form of the parliamentary chain of command which is central and serves as a form of a base model for our understanding of steering public policies. In government thinking, public management is characterized by formal rule-setting, hierarchy and a clear role distinction between politics and administration.

The government perspective

The steering understanding of the parliamentary chain of command is hierarchical, where legitimate decisions are based on formal rules systems (Olsen, 1978). The citizens are the foundation of legitimate political authority and by voting they assure the basis of democracy. Two basic conditions make the public politics representative: the free political competition and bureaucracy (Olsen, 1978: 27; Andersen, 1999: 70). The logic of bureaucracy concerns: centralization, work separation and formal authority, whereby the main steering understanding is hierarchical. In the hierarchy the public managers are expected to be neutral or objective experts and bureaucratic implementers.

Furthermore, the relationship between politics and administration in the government perspective is characterized by clear separation. In other words, there is a clear distinction between the political and the administrative levels, caused by the rules of the hierarchy that define two different roles of the politicians and the bureaucrats. The relationship between politics and administration in government is characterized by a clear distinction between politics and administration. The main steering form is hierarchy and the rationality behind is bureaucratic.

The concept of governance

Governance is, as mentioned earlier, the overriding perspective for the further presentation and discussion. The term governance indicates a process:

“This is where the concept of governance becomes important as an underlying principle, as opposed to government - process as opposed to organization.”

(Bogason, 1996: 83)

In the Danish public sector through the last thirty years there has been a lot of delegation, decentralization, user influence, contracting out, etc. This has been done crossing the traditional boundaries between public and private tasks and responsibilities in the Danish welfare state. Many argue that the concept of government has lost its right meaning as the focus point for analysis.

It no longer makes sense to speak exclusively in terms of chains of command, hierarchies, from top to bottom. Fox and Miller (1995) talk about energy centers, Bang, Dyrberg and Hansen about polycenters (1997) and even more refer to the tendency as a process from government to governance (Bogason, 1996; Kooiman, 1993).

"...we are witnessing the transformation of the structure of government into a system of local governance, involving complex sets of organizations drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors."

(King and Stoker, 1996: 1)

There are innumerable understandings and definitions of the concept of governance and, as always, the discussion is not characterized by agreement.

“Finer (1970:3-4) treats government and governance as synonyms but in current use governance stands for a change in the meaning of government, referring to: a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed. Inevitably, there are several contending meanings for the term. It refers to, for example, the minimal state; corporate governance; the new public management; and ‘good governance’ (see Rhodes, 1997: ch. 3).”(Rhodes in Kickert et al, 1997a: xi)

Governance thinking therefore involves policymaking as process-oriented, created in a network involving collaboration between a large group of actors (Bogason, 1996; Kickert, 1997; Rhodes, 1997). In these networks the formal legislation created in national parliament merely functions as a framework deciding questions about budget frames and the legal rights and foundations. For this reason it does not seem feasible to maintain the distinction between the formulation of politics and the administration of policymaking from a governance perspective. This distinction is used in the government perspective towards an explanation of the political process, but from a governance perspective one can argue that the purpose of this distinction is to simplify our perception of policies by the division into different steps of policy creation. By removing the distinction between politics and administration in a governance perspective, it becomes possible to recognize the significant processes from both politics and administration.

In this paper, when speaking of governance I refer to the following characteristic, where governance refers to self-organizing, inter-organizational networks (Rhodes, 1997b: 53).

- "1. Interdependence between organizations. Governance is broader than government, covering non-state actors. Changing the boundaries of the state means the boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors become shifting and opaque.
2. Continuing interactions between network members, caused by the need to exchange resources and negotiate shared purposes.
3. Game-like interactions, rooted in trust and regulated by rules of the game negotiated and agreed by network participants.
4. A significant degree of autonomy from the state. Networks are not accountable to the State; they are self-organizing. Although the state does not occupy a sovereign position, it can indirectly and imperfectly steer networks."

(Rhodes 1997b: 53)

The steering perspective also differs in the two models. In government, the main steering process was influenced by hierarchy, and in a governance perspective the main steering understanding is networks.

Networks and negotiation of different interest and contradictions affect the steering form in governance. Much negotiating is taking place in everyday practices where values and routines are an important part in the negotiating processes, here described as pol-admini-duction (Andersen and Reff, 2001). In a governance perspective it is possible that co-operation between formal and informal actors from different fields play an important role in the pol-admini-duction process in the networks.

A significant element in the governance understanding presented above is trust. Instead of hierarchical rule-oriented ways of steering the public sector, the role of trust is of central importance: "Game-like interactions, rooted in trust". The classical role understanding between the politician, the administrator and the citizen is also at stake when analyzing and discussing from a governance perspective. The clear division of labor in a governance perspective is not so clear. The rules and the roles of the game are negotiated in the network.

Based on this argumentation on the governance perspective and the following implication for our traditional way of understanding and analyzing the public sector I focus on the concept of trust. If we can agree on the importance and the relevance of trust, the next step is to go closer on the concept and try to grasp the different meanings, understandings and thereby implications of the term.

Trust in the different traditions

The relevance, problems and the characteristics of trust have especially been a study within the sociological tradition (Luhmann, 1979; Sztompka, 1999). Within economics, political science and public administration the concerns of trust have not had the same autonomy. This being said the context of this paper is within

public administration, and based on a belief and an understanding of development of the public sector in a more governance-like context, calls for a better conceptualization and operationalizing of the concept.

“We have moved from societies based on fate to those moved by human agency. In order to face the future actively and constructively, we need to deploy trust.”
(Sztompka, 1999: 12)

Another characteristic trend is the world-wide interdependency, both within the single community and between countries. As we become increasingly dependent on others and their co-operation, the more the relevance of trust comes into focus.

“The ongoing process of global interdependency will only increase the demand for trust as an essential condition for cooperation.”
(Miształ, 1996: 269)

The world is becoming more and more complex. Who can claim full knowledge in this chaotic information society with an overload of goods, news, and technology? In many of the daily practices of everyday life you must rely on trust.

“More often than ever before we have to act in the dark, as if facing a huge black box, on the proper functioning of which our needs and interests increasingly depend. Trust becomes an indispensable strategy to deal with the opaqueness of our social environment. Without trust we would be paralyzed and unable to act.”
(Sztompka, 1999: 13)

To act in a complex society trust becomes a basic element. Earlier trust was merely treated as a personal attitude, later it has also become an approach to interpersonal relations. It is within this understanding that this paper will proceed. And more specifically, within the context of the public sector and even more specifically within the context of networks.

Trust – an attempt at a definition

Putnam has had great influence within the social capital tradition. Putnam defines social capital as consisting of networks of spontaneous, voluntary associations, spread to every part of trust.

“The theory of social capital presumes that, generally speaking, the more we connect with other people, the more we trust them, and vice versa.”
(Putnam, 1995b: 665)

Putnam links participation and trust closely together, the more we participate the more we trust – but could it not just as well be the other way around?

As indicated earlier in this paper, trust becomes relevant when dealing and interacting in an uncertain and uncontrollable future. Trust can be seen as, a way of making a simple strategy that makes it possible for individuals to act and adapt to a complex social environment. (Earle and Cvetkovich, 1995: 38).

“Trust is particularly relevant in conditions of ignorance or uncertainty with respect to unknown or unknowable actions of others.”

(Gambetta 1988: 218)

Like Gambetta, Sztompka (1999), in his attempt to make trust a sociological theory, has an emphasis on action in the definition and understanding of trust. In this understanding, trust is close to risk taking, gambling.

“Trust is a bet about the future contingent actions of others.”

(Sztompka, 1999: 25)

You can never be sure of the outcome of trusting somebody, the risk is always present, so defining trust as a bet is closely related to risk.

“Trust is a solution for specific problems of risk.”

(Luhmann, 1988: 95)

Every time we take the chance to trust somebody and their future actions we are making a bet. In this way of understanding trust, action comes into our center of attention. Distrust also involves a bet, but a negative bet. The other side of the coin, so to speak. Mistrust in Sztompka’s view, is a neutral situation.

“I use the term mistrust to indicate a temporary, intermediate phase in the dynamics of trust-building, or trust-depletion.”

(Sztompka, 1999: 26)

Mistrust coming from a breach of trust, very easily results in distrust, where not justified distrust only slowly elaborates into a trust situation, Sztompka refers to this as the asymmetry of trust-building and trust-destroying. (1999: 27)

Trust is not per definition either good or bad. If a group is pervaded by a strong, but exclusive trust, the Mafia is a good example of this kind of trust going inwards the group, but a trust no very desirable for the Italian society as a whole. The case in this paper is not determine, whether or not trust is a positive concept in the general and the specific, but only to make the first step analyze the role of trust when steering by networks.

The spreading or diffusion of trust or distrust quite often spreads from one level to another.

“In many cases trust seems to spread out from above toward lower levels, and distrust, from the bottom upwards.”

(Sztompka, 1999: 50)

Sztompka sees trust as involving three types of commitment (1999: 28):

- anticipatory trust
- responsive trust
- evocative trust

In the evocative form trust is perceived as a possibility to evoke trust in the relationship with others. This kind of commitment is characteristic of close relationships such as family and friends. Responsive trust is typical of a situation

where you trust somebody to take care of some valuable object, an example could be the situation where you employ trust in a babysitter. And finally the anticipatory trust is a form of trust where you anticipate that the act that is carried out anyway will be good for you and your interest. And again the trust accompanying can again have various degrees.

Trust also has various targets. The two poles:

- interpersonal trust
- social trust

Where interpersonal trust refers to face to face related trust (Earle and Cvetkovich, 1995) and social trust to “faceless commitments” (Giddens, 1990: 88). Social trust refers to social groups, roles, institutions, organizations and institutionalized practices and procedures. Social trust in this understanding seems close to the notion of legitimacy.

Luhmann has analyzed the differences between interpersonal and institutionalized trust in detail (1979, 1988). He notes that social systems can gain the advantages of complexity only when exchanges can be secured in ways that become semi-autonomous of face-to-face relations. This does not have the consequence that semi-autonomous institutions do not rely upon interpersonal trust for their functioning, but that institutionalized ways of trust give a form of assurance that takes away the full burden of trust from the interpersonal and culturally sanctioned forms of trust. (Warren, 1999)

“But in the case of traditional legitimacy, no form of trust is necessarily presupposed. Traditional legitimacy does not *per se* imply trust of any kind. This is so because tradition, as soon as it prevails, may substitute for trust. It replaces trust with the sanction of ancient and eternal routine. In this way tradition reduces uncertainty and contingency – preconditions for the salience of trust. When tradition stops playing a major role, as in “post-traditional society”, trust becomes crucial.”

(Sztompka, 1999: 45)

Trust is in the former discussed in a broader context in the next paragraph. I will narrow down the focus to the context of the public sector. Mark E. Warren offers an outline for democratic theory of trust. This outline I will shortly introduce in the following.

Democracy and trust

Warren reconstructs and assesses neoconservative, rational choice and deliberative approaches to relating trust to democracy. In the following presentation the emphasis is on the steering problems and challenges.

There is an essential tension between trust and politics in the neoconservative approach, as it is seen as belonging to different and distinct spheres: the society and the state. Warren puts Fukuyama (1995) forward as a good example of the difficulties with the neoconservative approach.

“Fukuyama’s thesis is that many of the differences in economic success among countries can be explained by whether or not communities defined by their shared ethical horizons bind people into a network of trust. “Trust,” he writes, “is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, cooperative behavior, based on communally shared norms, on the part of other members of that community”. For Fukuyama, trust is primarily cultural in nature and is inherited from “preexisting communities of shared moral norms or values.” (1999: 318)

Warren is seeing Fukuyama’s conception of trust as being inadequate to the basic demands of democratic theory, as his view on trust is premodern with his emphasis on trust as stemming from “inherited ethical habit” (1995: 34). Warren argues:

“But there are ways of creating trust, some of which are distinctively modern. And wherever trust can be encouraged by institutional artifice, we have a

form of trust of interest to democratic theory.” (1999: 320)

Fukuyama focuses on the close relationship between stable expectations and social embeddedness, and in contrast to this approach is the rational choice approach, most developed by Russell Hardin (1991, 1993, 1995). In this approach the emphasis is on the vulnerability inherent in trust relations. The starting point is the rational self-optimizing actor having the focus on optimizing his or her own preferences. The knowledge about what will maximize the preferences is a cost. So the actor will weigh the cost of the information to the expected use of the information.

The rational choice approach to trust is characterized by a paradox. On the one hand trust can decrease the cost of information and increase the utility of cooperation. On the other hand, because of the view on the actor as self-optimizing, those who trust would seem to act irrationally as it increases their vulnerability towards others.

The context of interest in this paper is a politicized context. Warren (1999) argues for the relevance of the rational choice theory.

“In a political environment, commonalities of interests and identities may exist, but they cannot be taken for granted, so that individuals and groups are more likely to think and act in strategic ways. In such situations, rational choice axioms help to focus on interests and judgements in contexts that combine potential vulnerabilities with apparently insufficient information – contexts typical of politics.” (1999: 329)

The third approach, deliberative democracy, has not had much focus on problems of trust. Warren elaborates on the theory of deliberative democracy putting emphasis on two possibilities:

“1) that trust complements and supports deliberative resolutions of political conflict; and 2) that deliberative approaches to political conflict can generate trust, both among individuals and between individuals and institutions.” (1999: 337)

Trust and deliberative democracy are distinct but also complementary. It is a well-known problem about deliberative democracy that it can be quite time-consuming and long lasting. Maybe trust can make a difference and mitigate these constraints upon deliberation. In the Danish public sector context, one sees many deliberative ways of steering the public sector, underlining the need for and the necessity to analyze the pros and cons around the concept of trust.

“If institutions can be designed in ways that mitigate these tensions, then we shall have taken an important step toward meeting the challenges of the late-modern/postmodern era. Ultimately democracy and trust do not need to refer to anything outside of the potentials already embedded in contingent social relations; they do not need metaphysics, nor do they need to rely on unquestioned tradition. Yet they together name and evoke the normative potentials already existing within social relationships for a good society of reflective, selfgoverning individuals.” (Warren, 1999: 343)

How to analyze trust

In the first part of this paper, I ended up concluding that we now have one more way of steering the public sector, adding governance to the government model. In the second part I concluded following the line of Sztompka, as basically seeing trust “as making a bet on another actors action.” In relation hereto I presented some of Sztompka’s bids on different forms of trust. Then I got closer to the context I want to analyze the public sector by presenting the three approaches by Warren, with a specific focus on the deliberative approach.

The next step in this paper is then to confront the network perspective with the concept of trust around the main question for my further research, how to analyze the different kinds of trust that evolve in the networks and the roles that public managers play in these trust relations. Two main approaches have been presented in this paper, The one by Sztompka is within the sociological tradition and the other by Warren is within democratic theory. My aim is to outline a way of analyzing trust within a public administration tradition, a tradition that is characterized by the interdisciplinary approaches crossing the borderlines between political, sociological and economic science.

Sztompka refers to the two targets of trust the interpersonal trust and the social trust, or in a Luhmanian terminology an institutionalized trust. I prefer to see it as the level of analysis. And my interest goes on neither exclusively the interpersonal nor the social trust. My interest goes more on the cross of them both. The hope is to find and operationalize trust or maybe processes of trust in the networks.

In the most basic form the understanding of trust is in this paper “a bet about the future contingent actions of others” (Sztompka, 1999: 25). So getting close to the concept of trust, is the ways or the processes where somebody dares betting on the action of the other, or maybe not dare.

The three approaches presented by Warren the neoconservative, the rational choice and the deliberative, will serve as an analytical framework with the main emphasis on the deliberative and less on the rational choice and least on the neoconservative.

The next step in my study

The big questions now are how to do this tracking down of the trust and the trust relations. In the concrete study in the two municipalities we are putting focus on two policy processes, where a number of different actors have been involved. We are not doing a close up policy process study, but using the concrete processes to get close to the everyday practices of the different actors, and in my study with specific focus on the public managers.

So the big struggle is how to do this study in the field. What questions to ask? Maybe it would be an idea to complement with some observation studies?

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