Call for Papers for a Special Issue on

‘Trust In Crisis: Organizational and Institutional Trust, Failures and Repair’

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Recent global events have shaken society’s trust in institutions and organizations. Taking the financial crisis as one prominent example, many analysts and scholars have identified that it is trust, more than anything, which has been damaged through the economic crisis. In particular, the public’s confidence in banks and investment firms, credit-rating agencies, business schools, and government regulators, has been undermined. Many leading businesses across a variety of industries have survived only through massive state intervention (e.g. UBS, Citigroup, General Motors). The flow-on effects of the credit-crunch, such as widespread bankruptcies, layoffs and tightening budgets, have resulted in the loss of trust from multiple stakeholders: many investors feel burnt, many employees feel their ‘psychological contracts’ have been violated, and the public becomes cynical as governments spend billions of tax payers’ money bailing out and shoring up failing banks and corporates. A trust failure of such historical dimension raises a number of serious questions at the individual, organizational, institutional and societal level, and provides potential for learning valuable and insightful lessons.

The breakdown of trust in institutions and their leaders is a pervasive global challenge that is not limited to the effects of the financial crisis. Rather, it has occurred in the context of a plethora of prominent organizational failures and trust betrayals (e.g. Enron, Parmalat, AIG, Societe Generale, German retailer Lidl, United Nations Oil-for-food program). The recent UK parliamentary expenses scandal revealed pervasive misuse of tax payers’ money bailing out and shoring up failing banks and corporates. A trust failure of such historical dimension raises a number of serious questions at the individual, organizational, institutional and societal level, and provides potential for learning valuable and insightful lessons.

Despite recognition that trust operates at multiple levels (see Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer, AMR 1998), and that an organization’s reputation for trustworthiness is a key ‘source of competitive advantage’ (Barney and Hansen, SMJ 1994: 175), research has been slow to conceptualise trust at the institutional and organizational levels as distinct from interpersonal trust. Relatively few attempts have been made to capture the essence of impersonal trust (for foundational work see Shapiro (1987) and Zucker (1986)) and how macro and micro level forces influence trust dynamics at the institutional level. Furthermore, there is only little research or theory to guide a comprehensive understanding of the processes of trust destruction and repair (Dirks, Lewicki & Zaheer, AMR 2009). The emerging research has focused largely on trust repair at the interpersonal or group level, drawing on a psychological
perspective which highlights micro-level phenomena. Yet, recent research suggests that the processes of trust repair are fundamentally different at the organizational and institutional levels, with several dilemmas and problems arising for institutions that do not pertain to interpersonal contexts (see Gillespie & Dietz, AMR 2009).

The aim of this Special Issue is to focus attention squarely on trust at the macro level, and help to clarify theoretically and/or empirically the antecedents, processes and consequences of organizational and institutional trust, and its destruction and repair. We seek to draw on transdisciplinary perspectives to offer a critical space in which to conceptually unpack the notion of organization-level and institutional-based trust, and importantly the dynamic interplay between interpersonal, group, organizational, institutional and societal trust. We encourage potential contributors to consider the most challenging questions regarding macro-level trust and distrust, recognising the systemic interrelationships between factors such as individual level employee behaviour, management practice and discourse, organizational strategy, cultural and structural influences, and the organization’s institutional (regulatory and historical) context.

We invite submissions that present theoretical and/or empirical advancements in our understanding on macro-level trust, and its breakdown and repair. While our focus is primarily at the organizational or institutional level of analysis, we will consider contributions that examine trust across multiple levels of analysis. We encourage submissions that adopt novel, as well as traditional, methodologies that are appropriate for the study of macro-level trust processes and dynamics, including case-studies, ethnographic and other qualitative methods, mixed, grounded and critical approaches, conjoint analysis and vignettes, survey studies and experiments.

Some of the challenging questions to address include, but are not limited to, the following:

- How can organizational and institutional trust be conceptualised and understood? Do the antecedents and processes of trust vary across different organizational, institutional and cultural contexts?
- To what extent do the antecedents and processes of trust vary across different stakeholder groups (e.g. employees, customers, investors, suppliers etc.)? How can organizations deal with incompatible expectations from various stakeholder groups? Are different strategies required to repair the trust of different stakeholder groups?
- How can organizations repair a reputation for trustworthiness once damaged? What strategies and approaches are most effective for restoring trust? Under what circumstances and in what contexts do these approaches result in enduring outcomes?
- What insights into the antecedents and facilitators of trust failures can be gained from an analysis of case studies and the global financial crisis? What structurally-embedded pressures (e.g. short-term gains) and lack of countervailing constraints (e.g. regulatory controls, accountability and transparency) contribute to such failures?
- What insights can be learnt from the analysis of the various responses by organizations to the global financial crisis or other trust failures? Are some strategies more effective than others for retaining and/or repairing trust? To what extent and in what ways can trust in organizations and institutions be maintained in the face of large-scale change and layoffs?
- Trust is context-specific. At the level of organizations, to what extent are trust failures and repair influenced by the broader legal, political, regulatory and cultural environment? How might institutional trust repair differ across sectors (e.g. government, private sector, not-for-profit) and industries (e.g. financial, legal, health, education)?
- Is it possible or appropriate to repair trust in organizations and institutions that have repeatedly violated their stakeholders’ trust? When is ‘distrust’ an asset? Under what circumstances is distrust a problem?
- In response to the crisis, there has been a shift to greater regulation and control over financial institutions and markets (e.g. government bailouts, guarantees of bank deposits, regulations). Under what conditions can new regulations create, even restore, or substitute for damaged trust? How do these controls affect individual, organizational, institutional and societal trust?
Submissions

Please submit papers through the journal’s online submission system, SAGE track. Please visit SAGE track http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/orgstudies, create your user account (if you have not done so already), and on “Manuscript Type” choose the following: SI: Trust In Crisis: Organizational and Institutional Trust, Failures and Repair. All papers that will enter the reviewing process will be double-blindly reviewed following the journal’s normal review process and criteria.

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