

The How's and Why's of Trust: On Goals, Mind-sets and Trust

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Introduction

How does trust form? A large and growing literature has sought to describe and explain trust formation and development (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001).

Yet, to fully understand how trust forms we also need to understand why people trust.

Conventionally, the “how’s” and the “why’s” have been seen as intertwined; people trust because their experience or other sources of information suggest that they have good reason to trust someone. In this paper we seek to disentangle goals and trust, and argue that people’s goals in interacting with other people influence the experience of trust. The experience of trust is not merely a cause of interaction and risk taking but the behavior and the commitments people make to specific courses of action also influence peoples’ experience of trust. Goals we suggest influence peoples’ experience of trust in ways that are likely to facilitate the attainment of these goals.

Thus, this paper adopts a pragmatic perspective on trust: Paraphrasing Fiske (1992) and replacing thinking with trusting we argue that “trusting is for doing”. People’s experience of trust constitutes not only a basis for decisions but serves important ends in its own right and enable people to interact with ease and confidence. The effects of goals on trust we suggest tend to be automatic, often unconscious and uncontrolled (Bargh & Williams, 2008). Depictions of trust formation typically see trust as an intention or willingness to engage in risk taking in relationships based on (i) a general propensity to trust and (ii) beliefs about the trustworthiness of the trustee formed through experience (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Subsequent contributions have included other bases including categorizations (e.g. in-group versus out-group), institutional safeguards and normalcy beliefs (McKnight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998).

Yet, a core set of assumptions remain unaltered; trust is assumed to reflect peoples' experience and beliefs with respect to properties of the trustee (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995; Butler, 1991). The specific set of properties that influences trust reflects the nature of the dependency between the trustor and the trustee and the trustor's goals in a specific situation and determines "what trust is all about".

Here we seek to redress what we see as a limited depiction of trust and trust-formation by offering a different conceptualization of trust which links goals and goal striving with trust formation. We define trust as a "psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability" (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998: 395).

People trust other people in the context of interacting (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). A trustor is usually not a disinterested observer but is actively engaged in interacting with and seeking to influence the trustee. How we see, categorize, understand, remember and feel about other people partially at least reflects our interactive goals in that situation (Hilton & Darley, 1991). People moreover not only select goals but strive to attain them (Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, 1987). Selecting goals versus striving to attain goals once selected involves different motivational processes that influence trust in different ways (Gollwitzer, 1990).

People also commit to actions, and social relationships for reasons other than trust. Such reasons can be affective or practical, brought on by choice or imposed on people from the outside. Whereas conventional models of trust formation tend to focus exclusively on trust as the sole reason for commitments, trust constitutes only one of several possible reasons for committing. Other reasons may include habits, norms, values, a need for self-expression or self-respect or pragmatic and utilitarian reasons. Thus, rather than trust leading up to a decision, trust may in some cases begin with a decision or a commitment (Koller, 1988).

People's experience of trust not only influences peoples' selection of goals but also influences peoples' ability to attain those goals once selected. Trust enhances peoples' ability to effectively influence other people in that people tend to trust people who trust (Williams, 2007, Weber, Malhotra & Murnighan, 2005). Trusting likewise reduces the load on peoples' information processing capacity, and enables people to more effectively focus on task-interaction enhancing task performance (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004).

The relevance of goals on cognition, perception, liking and information processing is well documented. Ferguson & Bargh (2004) for instance demonstrates how the goal relevance of objects influences immediate liking. A large and growing literature on affect-regulation shows how people routinely regulate their own emotions in ways that facilitate goal attainment in social relationships (Gross & Thompson, 2008). In the following we concern ourselves with the effects that goals and more specifically, goal pursuit and the different phases of goal pursuit influences trust.

On action phases and mindsets

Existing models on trust formation builds on earlier models of risk taking that attempts to integrate both goal selection and goal striving within one conceptual model (Atkinson, 1957). The "Rubicon model" of action phases brings a temporal perspective to goal-oriented behavior that begins "with the awakening of a person's wishes prior to goal setting and continues through the evaluative thoughts entertained after goals striving has ended" (Gollwitzer, 1990: 55). The model differentiates between goal-selection and goal striving while introducing four distinct phases (Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, 1987): A pre-decisional action phase in which people deliberate and ponder the expected outcome of behavioral options, a pre-actional phase in which people have chosen one behavioral option and are determined to follow this through. People start to plan, addressing specific questions about how and when and where they are supposed to

start acting. In the action initiation and actional-phase people seek to implement their goal and effort in this phase is assumed to be related to the volitional strength of the goal intention. Finally in the post-actional phase people reappraise their performance.

Associated with different phases are four different mindsets or cognitive modes geared towards addressing the particular challenges and goals associated with the different action phases (Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, 1987): A *deliberate mindset* is associated with a pre-decisional phase, an *implemental mindset* with a post-decisional pre-action phase, an *actional mindset* with an actional phase and an *evaluative mindset* with a post-actional phase. Here we focus on the first two: In a pre-decisional or *deliberative* stage the primary challenge lies in making a correct decision (as of whether to work with someone or not). People deliberate not only to determine which of their wishes are the most desirable but also whether they are feasible. People thus seek information about the positivity-negativity of the consequences of different goals as well as information about whether a given goal is attainable. This requires an impartial, unbiased and open-ended search for information (Gollwitzer, 1990). People need to be sensitive and open minded towards information in general, including peripheral information that may impact outcomes or feasibility.

In an *implemental* mindset people plan how and where to act in order to promote action initiation. In order for people to effectively solve the task the individual concerns him/herself primarily with information related to the task at hand. Effectively solving the task requires that individuals forms an initiation intention or commit themselves to act. Closed-mindedness enhances performance at this stage (Gollwitzer, 1990; Gollwitzer & Kinney, 1989). Thus, emphasis in an implemental phase is on the effective implementation of a chosen course of action. A highly critical evaluative stance would interfere with performance once people seek to implement their chosen course of action. In this stage people have been found to shift to a more narrowly focused style of information processing in which people focus on the immediate task and challenges at expense of more distant concerns or threats. To sustain the effort, people engage in

slightly biased thinking and produce more positive affect when compared to an earlier more critical stance adopted in the pre-decisional mindset (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995).

Goals, action phases, mindsets and trust

Goal pursuit influences peoples' experience of trust: First, different goals have different implications for how people meet and see other people. Goals emphasizing outcomes that can only be attained in cooperation with others is more likely to offset activities likely to strengthen the experience of trust. Pro-social goals emphasizing the value of social companionship and social interaction for its own is also likely to offset activities that help develop trust. On the other hand, goals emphasizing minimizing risk, self-protection or even self-enrichment on the expense of others is unlikely to offset behaviors that lead to the formation of trust (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

In addition to the type of goals people pursue, the process of selecting and pursuing goals influence peoples' experience and the nature of trust. Specific events, cues or commitments to decisions or actions here initiate processes that mark the transition between different action phases and different mindsets (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Having decided on a goal people need to transform the goal into an intention. In forming goal intentions people move to a preactional phase, and forming behavioral intentions. Completing or attaining a goal or failing moreover leads to a postactional phase that shares some of the characteristics of the pre-decisional phase (Gollwitzer, 1990).

Different occasions thus mark transitions to different action phases that present people with different demands and dilemmas, activating different mind-sets. Thus, committing to goals and forming goal intentions is likely to activate an implemental mindset whereas cues, events or shocks that causes people to reappraise their priorities or choices is likely to activate a deliberative mindset. Mindsets influence peoples' attention to and memory of peripheral or incongruent

information, how people process information, illusion of control, degree of optimism, attitude strength and general affect (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995; Gollwitzer, 1990).

A deliberative mindset thus appears to be associated with a broader, less biased search for information, a more realistic appraisal of skills and probabilities, with more critical and even handed information processing, less positive affect and weaker attitudes whereas an implemental mindset is associated with a more focused or closed search for information (Gollwitzer, 1990), elevated illusion of control (Gollwitzer & Kinney, 1989), more positive affect (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995) and stronger attitudes (Henderson, De Liver & Gollwitzer, 2008).

The effects of mindsets on information processing are also likely to influence peoples' experience of trust. As the experience of trust reflects how people process information and evaluate probabilities as well as peoples' general affective stance, we suggest that mindsets will also shape individuals experience of trust (Gollwitzer, 1990; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005).

Positive affect even where unrelated or incidental to social interaction has been found to increase initial trust (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Lount, 2010). The illusion of control has been linked to initial trust (McKnight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998; Kramer, 1994, Langer, 1975). An increase in attitude strength may be linked to stronger trust (yet could also fortify distrust). Mindsets are also associated with styles of information processing and information search that are likely to influence peoples' experience of trust. A broader, less biased search for information characteristic of a deliberative mindset is more likely to reveal uncertainty and risks than the more closed, focused search associated with an implemental mindset (Gollwitzer & Kinney, 1989).

Mindsets influence how people process information, peoples' appraisal of risks and their own control over outcomes and as a result shape peoples experience of trust. The type of trust associated with different mindsets is likely to closely reflect these different mindsets. Deliberative trust is likely to reflect the characteristics associated with a deliberative mindset and is likely to be

more tentative, more calculative, and more open to incongruent or disconfirming evidence and information. Deliberative trust is likely to be associated with less positive emotions, more critical processing of information and to be more easily revoked than implemental trust. Deliberative trust thus strongly resemble other descriptions of trust in the literature including fragile trust (Ring, 1996), calculative trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996) or cognitive trust (McAllister, 1995). Deliberative trust is still a form of trust but an apprehensive trust in which a trustor decides to wait and see and is prepared to easily revoke the trust if called for.

Implemental trust on the other hand reflects the characteristics of an implemental mindset. Implemental trust is likely to be associated with more positive emotions, less critical processing of information and a greater commitment to trust. Unlike deliberative trust, implemental trust is not easily revoked and if revoked, but is only likely to happen at a great cost to the trustor.

Implemental trust accordingly has similarities to other forms of trust described in the literature, including resilient trust (Ring, 1996), affective trust (McAllister, 1995), identity based trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996).

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