



BOOK REVIEW

Trust: Reason, Routine, Reflexivity

Guido Möllering

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This book is thought provoking, well written and has considerable depth to its citation and cross-referencing.

But first, let me begin this review with the concluding words of Möllering:

... it is crucial to recognise how the leap of faith interacts with reason, routine, and reflexivity in trust. It is not merely the case that trust rests on imperfect bases which leave a residual gap that needs to be crossed. Rather, by successfully crossing the gap, trust also validates those bases. In other words, the leap of faith helps to generate and maintain the reasons, institutions and processes from which it first springs and, hence, it is truly crucial for our understanding of trust and its bases. If this is generally recognised, then I have high positive expectations as to the future benefits that trust research can bring to the social sciences.
(p. 198)

As one might infer from the title, Möllering considers that trust has a basis in reason, in routine and in reflexivity. He carefully takes us through these big topics giving ample citations and his own reasoning as to their worth, or sometimes their failings to capture the essence of 'trust', or perhaps to encapsulate sufficiently well the base that would irrevocably define the notion of trust. Of course, we all have to grasp how to trust others with whom we must interact in the course of our life be they lovers, passers-by or co-workers in a rule-bound institution wherein we develop our reasoning about trust from the routines of our processes, even though we may reflect on their assumptions from time to time. At some stage, Möllering points out, we will have to take on new relationships and have need to make the *leap of faith* in order to progress to our unknown future rather than remain locked in an unresponsive catatonia.

Through Chapters 2, 3 and 4, which discuss in turn reason, routine and reflexivity, he mentions often the final need of a trustor to suspend individual reasoning about their social or personal vulnerability and uncertainty: and in Chapter 5 he addresses this concept. In this chapter, we find that the three Rs are interconnected, and ultimately the trustor, who initially may not trust in the other, be that a person, process or institution, has to suspend his or her feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty and take a leap of faith to proceed to an 'as-if' state. Möllering argues that under the rulings of being calculative (cf. Reasoning: Chapter 2), we cannot receive full and unequivocal data upon which to make a decision; that is, to formulate a calculation as to the trustworthiness of the other. Nor are we particularly effective at subjective Bayesian calculations – being too attached to recent data or being too centralist. To escape the trap of not being able to fulfil our need 'to calculate' we have to leap to a state of trust from an imperfect informational base.

A similar need for relaxation is found within the discussion of Routine (Chapter 3) as we cannot ultimately deconstruct the institutions we have

grown up with, although others may be actively assessing their basic assumptions and foundations of the institutions. We simply do not have the time or the skill to undertake this personal quest for the dissection of the meaning of everything. As Möllering says:

... the fiction co-produced by trustor and trustee remains a fiction, potentially a dangerous fake, and it is still up to the trustor to suspend uncertainty and vulnerability. The trustee's performative acts and a high level of familiarity with the situation merely assist the trustor in making the leap of faith. (p. 114)

Inevitably therefore we are drawn to Reflect on the bases of trust (Chapter 4) and the processes through which we may inculcate trust. Möllering states clearly that actors can engage actively in processes that might create trust, and in doing so modify the processes and assumptions that were in place at the time. They can engage in signalling and in communications in a reflective way that enhances the potential for trust. In this fashion an actor can move forward having 'blind' trust, and hope through an 'as-if' state that trust will develop from the situation that had insufficient data to be 'reasoned', or from situations where there are no 'routines' perceived to be meaningful to the potential trustor. So the potential trustor thinks, or acts intuitively, but really moves forward in an 'as-if' manner so that later data acquisition may confirm trusting behaviour, or suggest the need to cease relationships. Someone somehow has to begin this process, although Möllering has noted there are many researchers who rule out trust in favour of rules or contracts. Nevertheless, I suspect he thinks that such an approach avoids the issue of trust determination.

Following on, Chapter 6 'Studying Trust' recapitulates and builds to a framework for research, which is finely honed through the detailed discussion and categorisations that have gone before. The reader is well prepared for this review and the development of the six heuristics that Möllering uses to capture the empirical research on trust, thereby developing suggestions for future work that will be conceptually rigorous. Although Möllering calls for more qualitative and more quantitative research, he is realistic enough to accept the limitations of time, cost and the methodological limitations of new research: he simply points out, bracketing with citations, the better routes to providing answers to 'what is trust'.

This book, although slim – some 200 pages of tightly argued discussion – is very important. Its eight chapters take us through detailed discussions supported by about 400 citations invoked to make, develop or extend discussions on constructs that fall within the three main categories of Reason, Routine or Reflexivity, and indeed on the development made by Möllering as he introduces the 'leap of faith' as an integral part of the trusting

process. Naturally, with all these citations occupying a central role within the text, the latter is a little fractured. Yet his prose is so good that one (at least this reviewer) does not find it too difficult to read – the threads of the conversations are not broken.

The book is important to those who come to Knowledge Management or Organisational Learning from backgrounds derived from Information Technology or Computer Science: it opens up viewpoints perhaps too embedded in the exactitudes of science to views that require reflection and 'leaps of faith'. IT created the buzz for Artificial Intelligence that promised much but delivered only a few good solutions. However, IT has delivered the means whereby we can all be connected – the Internet – through which we most certainly can exchange data, if not knowledge. And it is the Internet and its Web-based tools that has supported many organisation's modern implementations of Knowledge Management initiatives. Yet at the core of these IT-based systems is the need to trust – in their systems infallibility, and as trusting individuals in the system's honouring our trust at the micro-, meso- and macro-level of their operation. It is individuals – you and me – who have to interact with the computational software. And while their calculations may be subtle, as they are based only on calculations or evaluations derived perhaps from an aggregate population, there will be the ultimate need to be human, and act in faith.

The book is also important to those who work at the super-macro-level. Those decision makers who think they guide nations, working in NGOs or in super-groups like the G8 who pontificate over global matters. Recently, Niall Ferguson (2006) proclaimed that '...the 20th century has proved to be overwhelmingly the most violent, frightening and brutalized in history with fanatical, often genocidal warfare engulfing most societies between the outbreak of the First World War and the end of the Cold War'. Is it surprising therefore that negotiators are wary of the others when brokering deals? For instance, do we really understand the others? Can we trust them? What are the meaningful differences in the potential partner's aims and goals, and what is the importance of the perpetual struggle of Western or Anglo-Saxon capitalism vs Islamic, Confucian, communist or Marxist-Leninist aspirations? Is there not a case therefore to have, as Möllering puts it, 'a leap of faith' and to trust in the other even if we do not yet have enough data to reason about the others?

I would recommend strongly this book. As the back-cover states, '...it is a challenging and provocative critique of the field and it offers a new approach to understanding trust'.

Reference

FERGUSON N (2006) *The War of the World: History's Age of Hatred*. Allen Lane, London.