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Trust and Confidence in Government and Public Services

Edited by
Sue Llewellyn, Stephen Brookes
and Ann Mahon

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Trust and Confidence in Government and Public Services

Trust and confidence are topical issues. Pundits claim that citizens trust governments and public services increasingly less—identifying a powerful new erosion of confidence that, in the United States, goes back at least to Watergate in the 1970s. Recently, media exposure in the United Kingdom about MP expenses has been extensive, and a court case ruled in favour of publishing expense claims and against exempting MPs from the scrutiny which all citizens are subject to under 'freedom of information'. As a result, revelations about everything from property speculation to bespoke duck pond houses have fuelled public outcry, and survey evidence shows that citizens increasingly distrust the government with public resources.

This book gathers together arguments and evidence to answer questions such as: What is trust? Can trust be boosted through regulation? What role does leadership play in rebuilding trust? How do trust and confidence affect public services? The chapters in this collection explore these questions across several countries and different sectors of public-service provision: health, education, social services, the police, and the third sector. The contributions offer empirical evidence about how the issues of trust and confidence differ across countries and sectors, and develop ideas about how trust and confidence in government and public services may adjust in the information age.

Sue Llewellyn is professor of accountability and management control and director of the Herbert Simon Institute at Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, UK.

Stephen Brookes is a senior fellow in public policy and management at Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, UK. He is editor (with K. Grint) of *The New Public Leadership Challenge* (2010).

Ann Mahon is a senior lecturer in health and public sector management at Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, UK. She is editor (with K. Walshe and N. Chambers) of *A Reader in Health Policy and Management* (2009).

Routledge Critical Studies in Public Management

Edited by Stephen Osborne

The study and practice of public management has undergone profound changes across the world. Over the last quarter century, we have seen

- increasing criticism of public administration as the over-arching framework for the provision of public services,
- the rise (and critical appraisal) of the 'New Public Management' as an emergent paradigm for the provision of public services,
- the transformation of the 'public sector' into the cross-sectoral provision of public services, and
- the growth of the governance of inter-organizational relationships as an essential element in the provision of public services

In reality these trends have not so much replaced each other as elided or co-existed together—the public policy process has not gone away as a legitimate topic of study, intra-organizational management continues to be essential to the efficient provision of public services, whist the governance of inter-organizational and inter-sectoral relationships is now essential to the effective provision of these services.

Further, whilst the study of public management has been enriched by contribution of a range of insights from the 'mainstream' management literature it has also contributed to this literature in such areas as networks and inter-organizational collaboration, innovation and stakeholder theory.

This series is dedicated to presenting and critiquing this important body of theory and empirical study. It will publish books that both explore and evaluate the emergent and developing nature of public administration, management and governance (in theory and practice) and examine the relationship with and contribution to the over-arching disciplines of management and organizational sociology.

Books in the series will be of interest to academics and researchers in this field, students undertaking advanced studies of it as part of their undergraduate or post-graduate degree and reflective policy makers and practitioners.

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Sue Llewellyn, Stephen Brookes, and Ann Mahon
November 2012

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1 Introduction

Trust and Confidence in Government and Public Services

Sue Llewellyn, Stephen Brookes and Ann Mahon

CONTRIBUTIONS AND AIMS OF THE BOOK

This book evolved from a workshop entitled 'Has trust in government and confidence in public services been eroded?' which was hosted in October 2009 by the Herbert Simon Institute for Public Policy and Management at Manchester Business School, University of Manchester. Many contributors to this volume were participants at this workshop, where there was intense debate on many complex issues. In this book we garner arguments and evidence to address some of these contentious issues, such as: What is trust? Is trust different from confidence? Does trust depend on shared values and confidence in performance? Does it make sense to speak about trusting institutions (such as governments) or can we only trust people we know? Does public trust matter for the business of government and the delivery of public services—for example, does declining trust correlate with loss of democratic values and/or tax avoidance? Does transparency (e.g. the provision of information and public inquiries) about the performance of governments and public services increase trust and confidence? Can trust be augmented through regulation? Is trust emergent in networks? What role does leadership and management play in building trust?

ARGUMENTS AND EVIDENCE ON TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

Trust and confidence are topical issues. On the basis of evidence of declining trust in several advanced democracies (Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom [UK] and the United States [US]), Hardin (2006) questions whether we are now living in an 'age of distrust'. O'Neill (2002, p. 9) speaks of an apparent 'crisis of trust' to the extent that '"loss of trust" has become a cliché of our times.' Many claim that citizens now trust governments and public services much less, identifying a powerful erosion of confidence and credibility that, for example, in the US, goes back to the Vietnam war in the 1960s and Watergate in the early 1970s (see, for example, Hardin, 2006, p. 5; Putnam, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Lynn, this volume). Nye, Zelikow and

King (1997, p. 1) report that back in 1964, three-quarters of Americans trusted the federal government to do the right thing most of the time: thirty years later only one-quarter did. Currently, pollsters in the UK report the following: only 16% of the population trust politicians (Ipsos MORI, 2008); 77% of the population do not trust politicians to tell the truth (ComRes, 2012a); 68% of the public think that most Members of Parliament (MPs) make a lot of money out of using public office improperly (Ipsos MORI, 2009). Over governmental control and competence, only 18% of the public trust the government to regulate the banks (Dispatches, 2012) and over two-thirds of people do not trust the government's handling of the National Health Service [NHS] (ComRes, 2012b). Government is less trusted than other institutions. Ipsos MORI (2008) compared trust across seven prominent UK organizations/collectives: the British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC]; big British companies; the Church of England; the government; the military; media in general; and the NHS. The government was least trusted, with the BBC commanding most trust, closely followed by the NHS. Aside from statistics such as these and other evidence on trust and confidence, this volume adds to the conceptual background on both.

The chapters in this book, as befit their specific questions, adopt somewhat varying definitions of trust, but an overarching theme is citizens' expectations that government (and public officials) will be honest and competent, even without scrutiny. One starting point in understanding trust, therefore, is to suggest that it is most easily established within the context of shared values on honesty and competence along with knowledge gained through experience (Barber, 1983; Coleman, 1988; Gillespie and Mann, 2004; Jones and George, 1998). Such a perspective signals more difficulty in creating trust in institutions and public officials than building trust between individuals who know each other. However, a counter argument is that the public realize that institutions locate individuals in roles that have certain fixed practices and codes of conduct to try to ensure ethical behaviour (Bottery, 2003, p. 249). Within organizations, behaviour and relationships are, at least in part, driven by institutionalized role expectations. Invoking trust as an aspect of social capital within social organization enables trust between individuals and individuals' trust in institutions to be built on the same foundations. For example, Portes (1998) states that Pierre Bourdieu was the first to define social capital as 'the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248). Such a perspective views social capital not just as an individual asset but as inherent in all forms of social organization. Putnam (1993, p. 167) sees social capital as 'features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks.' In consequence, where individuals perceive that an institution, such as government, or a public service, such as healthcare, has social capital, in that it embeds their values, reflects their norms and meets their expectations, trust can form. Although individuals' direct experience may be limited and

intimate knowledge is lacking, the public can and do trust some institutions. For example, the polls (referred to above) show high levels of trust in two UK institutions: the BBC and the NHS. But in the absence of intimate knowledge, such trust may only be sustained through continued positive feedback on institutional integrity in the media. When the institutional integrity of an institution is challenged by the media, levels of trust are likely to decrease unless swift actions are taken to restore trust and rebuild confidence. At the time of writing trust in the BBC is undergoing unprecedented challenge from politicians, the media and the public. The long-term impact of the 'Jimmy Savile scandal' and the management of the 'Newsnight Investigation' on the historically high levels of trust remains to be seen.

Giddens (2002, p. 13) comments on how, in relation to government, the media increasingly structure and filter the dialogue between politicians and citizens, requiring politicians to respond to media stories on a daily basis. This media scrutiny may be most intense for politicians but applies to other institutions, also. For example, although public trust in the UK NHS is still high, it is no longer 'Britain's only immaculate institution' (Klein, 1995, p. 229). There is evidence that less trust in the NHS may be linked to the changing public perception of doctors (Eve and Hodgkin, 1997). Edwards, Kornacki and Silversin (2002) report that doctors, themselves, perceive a loss of public trust which they link to much more media hostility towards the medical profession. The public now seem to have a more instrumental view of all the professions (Broadbent, Dietrich and Roberts, 1997; O'Neill, 2002, pp. 43–59; Mahon, this volume).

Although this book is about public trust, we should mention, briefly, that 'trust' is experienced by individuals and, therefore, has a psychological dimension. Jones and George (1998) suggest that an individual's propensity to trust is driven by their values, attitudes, moods and emotions. Rotter (1980) studied the characteristics of trusting individuals, he found that those who trust other people are more likely to be trustworthy themselves and that trust is psychologically rewarding. 'Trusters don't need immediate reciprocity: their faith in others rests on an optimistic world view and a sense of personal control that gives them a psychological cushion against occasional bad experiences' (Uslaner and Badescu, 2002, p. 31). Such perspectives imply that any decline in public (or collective) trust in government and/or public services may have a negative impact on any individual's propensity to trust which, in turn, damages their psychological well-being.

If there is a meaningful distinction between public trust and confidence, public confidence may be more linked to indications of good performance, whilst trust is more driven by perceptions of public integrity and shared values (Hardin, 2006, p. 69). So paradoxically, although trust and confidence are clearly interwoven, it may be possible to maintain value-based trust in a relatively low-performing institution or have confidence in the performance of a less-than-principled public service. For government, economic performance appears to be the main confidence issue (see Lynn, this volume). The

declining trust in government charted by Nye, Zelikow and King (1997, p. 6) was accompanied by judgements that government was 'wasteful and inefficient' (81% of respondents) and 'spent too much money on the wrong things' (79% of respondents). For public services, personal experience and media exposure drive confidence judgements (see Gunter and Hall, this volume). Having said this, if the concept of trust shifts to that of 'trustworthiness', the latter seems to reflect judgements over both integrity and motivation *and* confidence over performance (cf. Hardin, 2006, p. 36; O'Neill, 2002, pp. 8–14). So, for example, the 68% of the UK public who think that most MPs make a lot of money out of using public office improperly are questioning trustworthiness from the point of view of integrity and motivation. At the same time, the 'trustworthiness judgements' of the 82% of the UK population who do not trust the government to regulate the banks are more focused on competence than integrity and motivation.

Despite the arguments and evidence, already discussed, on a general global decline in trust, judgements over trustworthiness still vary considerably between different countries. The World Values Survey (2005–2008) includes a question which asks respondents to choose between 'Most people can be trusted' and 'You need to be very careful when you are dealing with people.' Over 57 countries, only 26% felt that 'Most people can be trusted.' But there was considerable variation: 68% of Swedes 'trusted' as compared to only 4% in Trinidad and Tobago, 5% in Turkey and 9% in Brazil. The US and UK occupied intermediate positions, with 39% and 30% 'trusting', respectively. Unsurprisingly, such national variation in the propensity for 'generalized trust in others' has been linked to issues of legitimacy, for example, the absence of corruption and high to above average levels of economic equality (Uslaner, 2008, p. 215). Nordic countries have the most trusting citizens, the least corruption and the least economic inequality, whereas countries with the highest levels of corruption and the lowest perceptions of government legitimacy (e.g. Brazil, the Philippines and Turkey) have the least trusting citizens and high levels of economic inequality (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005).

It has been argued that social trust in other people forms as a consequence of a reasonable level of economic equality between citizens and a belief that national government policy enables legitimate equality of opportunity (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005; see also Manning and Guerrero, this volume).

Although evidence from the World Values Survey (2005–2008) shows considerable national variation over 'trusting others', it does support a worldwide general decline in confidence in government and, hence, perceived government legitimacy. Even in a 'trusting' nation like Sweden, when asked about confidence in government, 58% of respondents had 'not very much' or 'none at all'. Although, unsurprisingly, confidence in government was lowest in countries such as Peru and Poland (89% and 82%, respectively, had 'not very much' or 'none at all'), even in an economically prosperous country such as Germany, 77% of citizens said they had 'not very much' or 'none at all' confidence in government. In contrast, other public

institutions and public services tended to fare rather better than government. When asked about confidence in the police, the percentage of respondents who replied 'A great deal' or 'Quite a lot' was 78% in Sweden, 74% in Germany and 47% in Poland but only 16% in Peru. When asked about confidence in the armed forces, the percentage of respondents who replied 'A great deal' or 'Quite a lot' was 47% in Sweden, 50% in Germany, 67% in Poland and 23% in Peru. On confidence in the third sector (defined as charitable and humanitarian organizations), there was less variability: the percentage of respondents who replied 'A great deal' or 'Quite a lot' was 66% in Sweden, 65% in Germany, 66% in Poland and 43% in Peru.

Although, generally, trust in government and public services is viewed positively as it encourages cooperation and civic participation, citizens' distrust is clearly sometimes justified and appropriate. Institutional corruption also works through trust, although this is 'particularized trust' between 'in-groups', political elites or others in positions of power (Uslaner, 2000). Clearly, it would be wrong for citizens to trust corrupt political elites or public officials; such a situation would only increase levels of corruption. Moreover, corrupt elites pass corrupt practices on; they create the conditions within which corruption grows more widely throughout society (Uslaner, 2004). But knowledge is required to form a view on corruption. Trust or distrust in people or institutions will be mistaken if the information about them is wrong (Hardin, 2006, p. 18). In the absence of citizens' personal experience with most politicians, government officials and public services, the contemporary importance of the media in providing knowledge to enable the public to form views has been mentioned above. But the media are not the only conduit. Networks are significant organizational forms in the complex and diverse societies most citizens now inhabit; networks can also convey knowledge (see Klijn and Eshuis, this volume). Networks form between individuals, but networks can also bring institutions together. One section of this book is concerned with trust between public institutions, for example, between the government and the third sector, where informal network contacts prevail. Generalized trust can emerge in networks as knowledge is gained through reciprocal interaction based on some degree of trust. This point emphasizes that trust is both an input and an output. Trust invites trust and reciprocity; trust can be a 'virtuous spiral', but placing trust can be risky—vulnerability and even misfortune and deceit can result (O'Neill, 2002, p. 25). This is why there is always a question mark over whether to trust others and why we chose the question of trust and confidence in government and public services as the central focus for this book.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

We explore questions on trust and confidence from an international perspective, across several public institutions (the BBC, the military, local government and the third sector) and for different sectors of public service

provision, including education, health, social services and the police. The book has introductory and concluding chapters by the editors and three main parts: 'Understanding trust and confidence'; 'Trust in government and major public institutions'; and 'Trust and citizens' confidence in public services'.

Part I: Understanding Trust and Confidence

This section addresses some fundamental issues. Does public trust matter to governments? What are the correlates of high/low trust in government? Does information on the performance of public services increase public trust? How does trust emerge in networks? Can trust within public-service networks be actively managed?

In chapter two, Laurence Lynn explores the question of whether public trust matters to government. Specifically how does public trust and confidence impact on the governing of the US? For anti-statist and individualistic Americans, low levels of trust in government may be somewhat inevitable. Over and above this, do we know the correlates of low trust? Lynn reports evidence for several: the performance of the national economy; socio-cultural indicators (e.g. rising crime, infant mortality and divorce rates); citizens' evaluations of political actors and institutions; incivility in public discourse; and civic participation. Does low trust have political consequences? Whereas, over fifty years, there is no clear narrative concerning trust and US election results, Lynn argues that citizens' trust is necessary for political leaders to secure citizens' compliance without state-based force, make binding decisions and commit resources to attain societal goals. This seems borne out by the experience of the current US president, Barack Obama. Obama was warned that low trust in government would limit his freedom to pursue bold initiatives but he appeared to judge that this would be outweighed by high trust in him, backed by his personal popularity and capital. In the event, it seems that Obama was wrong. He failed to push through a major healthcare initiative, along with a financial rescue plan. Commentators judged they had no real chance of enactment while the economic downturn dominated the political landscape. On the basis of such evidence, Lynn concludes that for the US's complex democracy, you can trust in trust but you can't count on it!

In chapter three, Christopher Pollitt and Naomi Chambers argue against the claim that performance information on public services will increase public trust. They declare that this simple equation (better performance information = higher public trust) is multiply mistaken. The argument is not concerned with government but with specific public services, such as the health service, schools and the police. They draw on evidence from the developed liberal democratic states of north-west Europe and North America. The logic is that the circumstances under which performance information *could* increase public trust are rare; i.e. the information would have to reach citizens, command their attention, be understood, be trusted and report performances that exceed the citizens' expectations. It is often thought that trust

increases with knowledge, indeed cognitive 'knowledge-based trust' has been distinguished from 'identification-based trust' where the latter is emotional and stems from shared values. Pollitt and Chambers argue that 'knowledge-based trust' is best seen as 'confidence', whereas 'true trust' goes beyond any immediate information. Indeed, if trust is defined as citizens' expectations that public services will be honest and competent, *even without scrutiny*, the provision of performance information appears to be a low-trust alternative to trust. Pollitt and Chambers end by emphasizing that although performance measurement probably does *not* promote public trust, it is important in helping managers and professionals focus on critical performance dimensions and may, sometimes, be necessary to hold people to account.

In chapter four, Erik Hans Klijn and Jasper Eshuis point out that, contemporarily, many complex public-service issues are addressed within networks of actors. These groups have their own histories, cultures and strategies. These are, sometimes, at variance. Mutuality, coordination and network management are important to ensure effective communication and to avoid misunderstandings or even conflict. As the professional groups are autonomous, and some have more power than others, some network actors can still act opportunistically in pursuit of their own strategies. In consequence, effective service delivery in networks is difficult. Trust can, therefore, improve the performance of networks. Klijn and Eshuis argue that trust is not automatically present in networks. Trust cannot be 'stored' and then deployed when needed. Rather, trust in networks is active trust; it needs to be actively developed and nurtured. They argue that the development and maintenance of trust within networks is a managerial challenge. Managerial activities that facilitate the emergence of trust in networks include: implementing agreements over which processes to use, searching for goal congruency, creating new organizational forms which transcend professional boundaries and creating incentives for cooperation.

Many of the fundamental issues raised in Part I are explored further in later chapters. The issues of whether trust matters and whether performance information increases trust are explored in the context of the future projects of UK local government by Greasley. On the basis of data from Colombia, Manning and Guerrero argue that local government can capitalize on trust to implement reforms. The chapter by Dudau and Kominis in Part III looks at an empirical example of trust in networks: children's services are a network of social workers, the police, health professionals, teachers, educationalists and youth offending officers.

Part II: Trust in Government and Major Public Institutions

Along with exploring trust in government, Part II also addresses public trust in three major public institutions: the BBC, the military and the third sector. The issue of trust between institutions (the BBC and the government, the military and the government and the public and the third sector) is also discussed.

In chapter five, Stephen Greasley addresses two questions: first, how does a public decide whether its government is trustworthy, and, second, how do government actions influence the public's perceptions of government trustworthiness? He explores these questions through data on the relationship between information on local government performance and citizens' perceptions of government trustworthiness. His focus is on the 'political-citizen' rather than the 'client-citizen' who has experienced specific public services. He contends that it would be foolish to trust on the basis of no information about reliability, and yet the supply of detailed and comprehensive information on government motives and competences may entirely eradicate any need for political trust! A way around this seeming paradox is to recognize that a government record of good performance in specific areas may enable citizens to trust their government to embark on new projects into the future. In relation to local government, citizens now inhabit a richer information environment that is more easily understood than it was in the past. Data show that there is a positive and fairly substantial relationship between measures of local government performance and its perceived trustworthiness. Greasley concludes that local governments should be formulating strategies for performance dissemination to attract the attention of a somewhat disinterested public!

In chapter six, Nick Manning at the World Bank and Alejandro Guerrero at the Inter-American Development Bank address the question of whether local politicians' knowledge of the drivers of trust drives their reforms. Manning and Guerrero argue that trust matters to politicians because it reduces transaction costs between governments and citizens, facilitates tax collection and compliance with other regulations and, if general trust in government extends to incumbent politicians, provides the political capital necessary for policy reform. They are sceptical about cross-country meta-narratives on trust, arguing that local data can tell a clearer story. Citizens are likely to be more familiar with local organizations and officials and better able to assess their trustworthiness based on direct and, sometimes, frequent interaction with them. The municipality of Medellin, in Colombia, has been one of the world's most violent, crime-ridden, drug cartel–controlled cities; the state had, generally, retreated. More recently, the rule of law has been reinstated, the drug cartels almost defeated and murder rates much reduced. The municipality now guarantees almost universal access to relatively high-quality basic public services (energy, water and sewage and gas), with subsidies for the less affluent. The mayor is seen as leading these improvements. Manning and Guerrero conclude that at the local level rapid turnaround can happen when political leaders spot signals that initial, visible improvements in service delivery are associated with increases in trust and compliance with tax collection and then capitalize on trust and revenues to implement further reforms.

In chapter seven, Greg Dyke and Nick Clifford argue that, contemporarily, people form views and negotiate their lives largely through media information. In consequence, if that information misleads and people become aware of this, trust and confidence in the media is lost. More important,