

TRUST BEYOND RISK: THE LEAP OF FAITH

Chapter 5 in:

TRUST: REASON, ROUTINE, REFLEXIVITY

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by

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ABSTRACT

Trust is considered to be a precondition for individual action, cooperative relationships and societal order. In the social sciences, researchers have tried to explain trust by identifying – very much in the spirit of risk assessment – the “good reasons” for trust that provide the basis for trusting. This paper argues that although trust has to refer to reason, routine and reflexivity, it has to go beyond “good reasons” and is therefore more than a special form of risk-taking. The leap of faith, i.e. the suspension of uncertainty, should be seen as the essence of trust which gives trust its original meaning beyond risk. Hence, we need to understand how actors achieve the “as if” or the “just do it” in trust which enables them to interact with others, have relationships and be part of society – especially under the notoriously complex, dynamic and also precarious and “risky” conditions that they face today.

5

THE LEAP OF FAITH

5.1 THE MISSING ELEMENT: SUSPENSION

Our understanding of trust is already enhanced significantly if we recognize that all three perspectives introduced in the previous chapters highlight important aspects of the phenomenon we are interested in. Trust is indeed a matter of reason, routine or reflexivity depending on how we look at it. When we look at empirical manifestations of trust, though, we must acknowledge that our analytical distinctions are somewhat artificial and simplistic, even if helpful for systemizing the literature (Lane, 1998), because the three ‘mechanisms’ usually play together. Research focusing on only one of them, for example on cognition, taken-for-grantedness or communication loops, is bound to miss important influences from, and interactions with, other mechanisms that cannot easily be held under *ceteris paribus* conditions. Trust research needs to be broad, applying multiple perspectives in order to form a picture of the enormous elephant called trust, as in the classic Indian fable.

So far, in this book, continuing the fable analogy, I have brought together three of the most important ‘blind men’ who attempt to describe trust. My central argument, however, relates to the fact that they are indeed blind, because they tend to confound reason, routine or reflexivity as bases for trust with the process of reaching the state of trust as such. In trying to explain trust by looking at one or more mechanisms, they cannot see that the essence of trust, by definition, cannot be captured fully by those mechanisms. Put differently, by subsuming trust as a form of ra-

tional choice, routine behaviour or reflexive reinforcement, the concept is stripped of its *unique* explanatory power.

In Chapter 2, we saw that trust only ever enters as a meaningful construct when decisions *cannot* be made in a strictly calculative way, which happens to be the rule rather than the exception. For well-structured problems with clear alternatives and expected values, no reference to trust is necessary. Game-theoretic considerations are mainly instructive in the way they are able to describe the kind of dilemma situations in which trust matters as a solution *outside* of game theory.

In Chapter 3, I outlined an institutional approach to trust as a matter of taken-for-granted routines, in order to highlight a different set of influences on trust which, however, cannot and should not be seen as removing the prevalent social uncertainty and vulnerability implied in all trust. Insofar as institutions are substitutes for trust, they cannot explain it and rather suggest the dispensability of trust. Even in this case, there still remains the problem of trust in institutions since they are also objects of trust. If, however, institutions are seen as promoters of trust, as I have mainly presented it, then we need to recognize that they are only a part of the explanation of trust and probably the more important part is still missing, namely how actors deal with the uncertainty and vulnerability that cannot be reduced by institutions and that may even be a feature of dynamic institutions.

In Chapter 4, trust was explained as the outcome of a gradual process of interaction beginning with small steps, displaying some kind of self-reinforcement and always requiring a certain level of initiative from the actors involved. Once again, it is important to recognize this processual aspect of trust, but if the 'trust process' were inevitable in the sense that actors could be sure that over time their uncertainty and vulnerability will be reduced, then we either assume, ironically, that the outcome of the trust process is that trust is no longer necessary or we ignore the crucial questions of what it takes to start and maintain the trust-building process when uncertainty and vulnerability remain an issue and what trust as such means when it has been produced. Altogether, it is my feeling that the three perspectives I have introduced all miss the point. But what is that point? What is the important missing element which captures the true essence of trust that makes it a unique phenomenon and such a powerful concept?

Before I explore these questions and offer an answer to what the essential element in trust could be, the well-known study of 'swift trust' by Debra Meyerson, Karl Weick and Roderick Kramer can serve as an illus-

tration of how the different perspectives on trust presented in previous chapters can contribute individually and in combination to our understanding of trust – and, equally, of how they miss the point (see also Möllering, 2005b). The empirical situation that Meyerson et al. (1996) have in mind is the development of trust in temporary work groups. The authors cite numerous examples of such groups and note that they are increasingly formed both within and between organizations, but the prime example to which they keep referring is the film production crew.

Temporary work groups are typically formed in order to accomplish a specific, often complex and critical project through the collaboration of specialists who possess very different but interdependent skills. These experts may have little opportunity to get to know each other in advance of the project. Nor do they know if they will be working together again after the project is completed. That the latter is not necessarily the case has been highlighted by research identifying ‘project networks’ as an organizational form, where the formation of short-term project teams is strongly dependent on the existence of long-term social networks (DeFilippi and Arthur, 1998; Windeler and Sydow, 2001), but we can assume nevertheless that a temporary work group commonly does not have a strong history. Meyerson et al. (1996) are fascinated by the paradox that such ‘temporary systems act as if trust were present, but their histories seem to preclude its development’ (p. 167).

The three perspectives introduced earlier give partial explanations for this ‘swift trust’. It could be a matter of reason, since the group members know that their interests are encapsulated in so far as their own performance will be measured in terms of the overall project success. There may also be a ‘shadow of the future’ (see Chapter 2) in that team members might meet again on future projects and need to maintain their professional reputation. Hence, good reasons for trusting can be found, but the danger of opportunistic behaviour in the group remains. Members stay vulnerable and lack certainty that the others are professionally committed and resistant to short-term temptations. Therefore, swift trust ‘may rest upon particular reasons, but is not explained by them’ (Simmel, 1990, p. 179).

Alternatively, swift trust could be described as a matter of routine. When embarking on a new project, team members will take many written and unwritten rules for granted. They are assigned specific roles on the team and by referring to such roles everybody knows fairly well what is expected of them and what they can expect of others. Accordingly, Meyerson et al. (1996) note that ‘an increase in role clarity leads to a decrease

in expected ill will, and an increase in trust presumes that roles in temporary systems are clear' (p. 173). When people deal with each other more as roles than as individuals, they can trust routinely. In other words, the natural attitude in temporary teams may be to comply with the usual roles and routines. Nevertheless, this can only be an incomplete and probably misleading explanation, too, because there is no certainty for the trustor that everybody on the team knows the roles and routines and is competent and willing to perform them. If this certainty existed, trust would be obsolete. Since it cannot exist and since there is always role negotiability (Seligman, 1997), trust refers to role expectations but requires more than that.

Third, swift trust may develop almost instantaneously but there is still a reflexive process to be observed. As Meyerson et al. show, the team members tend not to commit themselves too much in the beginning and remain more cautious than they appear. They follow the 'principle of gradualness' (Luhmann, 1979) and the main difference to other situations could be that, by the nature of the project, the intensity of interaction between team members is very great from the start so that, even within hours of working together, trust builds up reflexively and the stakes can be raised relatively quickly. Frequent communication is required on projects and this may facilitate the maintenance of trust even when there are changes in the project. Team members are thus able to work on trust as envisaged by Giddens (1994b). The first encounters that set the reflexive trust-building process in motion remain crucial, though, and Meyerson et al. (1996) observe that 'people have to wade in on trust rather than wait while experience gradually shows who can be trusted and with what' (p. 170). Swift trust is therefore a very active trust. This said, there is no guarantee that a self-reinforcing spiral of trust development will emerge from initial interactions. Meyerson and her colleagues remind us that many temporary work groups fail to develop swift trust and quite a number of projects go wrong, especially in the early stages, when a cooperative team can turn into a competitive one, jeopardizing its chances of success. Once again, although it is instructive to consider the processual element even in swift trust, the problem of uncertainty and vulnerability on the part of the actors involved is not explained away, but rather emphasized, when we consider situations in which people on a team just have to get on with it pragmatically.

Even if swift trust is only a cursory example intended as an illustration of the argument so far, it seems fair to note that we regularly arrive at the point where reason, routine and/or reflexivity are mechanisms that pro-

vide a basis for trust but do not explain how irreducible uncertainty and vulnerability are dealt with in trust. By focusing on the bases for trust only, we run the risk of explaining away trust itself or, at least, of explaining anything but trust.

As I have already claimed elsewhere (Möllering, 2001), I believe that Georg Simmel identified the missing element in the concept of trust about a century ago, but we lost sight of it again even though his original ideas had a strong influence on some important contributions to the trust literature (notably Frankel, 1977; Luhmann, 1979; Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Giddens, 1990; Misztal, 1996; Lane, 1998). Simmel ([1907] 1990) notes that trust needs to be ‘as strong as, or stronger than, rational proof or personal observation’ for social relationships to endure, and he gives examples of one kind of trust which ‘is only a weak form of inductive knowledge’ (p. 179). The examples are the farmer’s belief that his crops will grow and the trader’s belief that his goods will be desired. The important detail here is that Simmel does not regard mere weak inductive knowledge as proper trust (Giddens, 1991). Within trust there is a ‘further element of socio-psychological quasi-religious faith’ (Simmel, 1990, p. 179).

In the same source, Simmel expresses that he finds this element ‘hard to describe’ and thinks of it as ‘a state of mind which has nothing to do with knowledge, which is both less and more than knowledge’. He expresses this element of faith as ‘the feeling that there exists between our idea of a being and the being itself a definite connection and unity, a certain consistency in our conception of it, an assurance and lack of resistance in the surrender of the Ego to this conception, which may rest upon particular reasons, but is not explained by them’.

In another source, Simmel (1950, p. 318) describes trust as ‘an antecedent or subsequent form of knowledge’ that is ‘intermediate between knowledge and ignorance about a man’. Complete knowledge or ignorance would eliminate the need for or possibility of trust. He explains that there is a type of trust that stands outside the categories of knowledge and ignorance. Accordingly, trust combines weak inductive knowledge with some mysterious, unaccountable faith: ‘On the other hand, even in the social forms of confidence, no matter how exactly and intellectually grounded they may appear to be, there may yet be some additional affective, even mystical, “faith” of man in man’. Anthony Giddens (1990) recognizes that Simmel believes that trust differs from weak inductive knowledge and he strongly supports the view that trust ‘presumes a leap to commitment, a quality of “faith” which is irreducible’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 19).

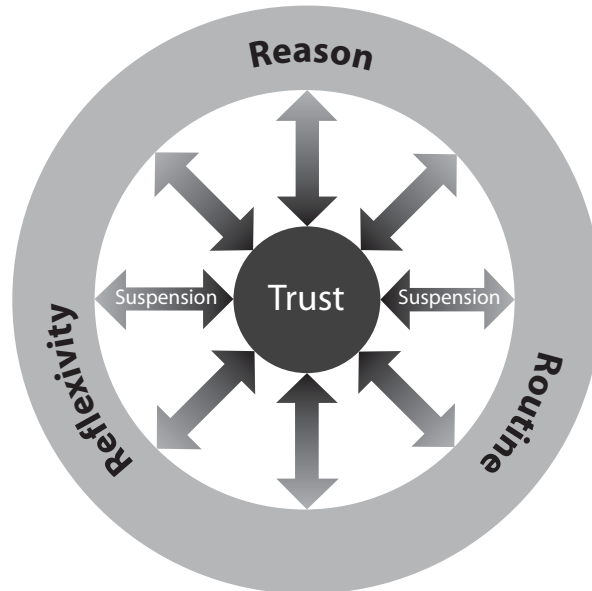


Figure 5.1 The Trust Wheel – An Integrative Framework

In the remainder of this chapter, I will analyse the meaning of the ‘leap of faith’ as the essential feature of trust. A rather extreme and, for most of us, highly disconcerting notion of the leap of faith appears in Søren Kierkegaard’s work, in particular when he discusses Abraham’s decision to sacrifice his son Isaac by God’s will (Kierkegaard, [1843] 1985, see also below). However, sociologists such as Anthony Giddens (1991), Adam Seligman (1997) and Piotr Sztompka (1999) refer to the leap of faith in less existentialist terms and it has even found its way into organization theory (for example Bradach and Eccles, 1989; Zaheer et al., 1998). Although the image of the leap of faith is a very fortunate one since it connotes agency without suggesting perfect control or certainty, I prefer to speak of ‘suspension’ as the process that enables actors to deal with irreducible uncertainty and vulnerability. Suspension is the essence of trust, because trust as a state of positive expectation of others can only be reached when reason, routine and reflexivity are combined with suspension.

At this point, suspension is only a vague notion and in the following sections I will suggest a number of ways to give more concrete meaning

to it. However, an integrative framework illustrating how suspension connects trust and the bases for trust can already be introduced here (Figure 5.1). In this visualization, trust is the hub of a wheel surrounded by reason, routine and reflexivity in the rim. Suspension is depicted as the spokes that connect hub and rim.

It should be clear immediately that the 'Trust Wheel' is no more than a simple heuristic. However, even this simple visual expresses a number of abstract ideas that might inspire further theorizing. For example, trust corresponds via suspension with reason, routine and reflexivity as bases for trust. This means also that trust is not identical to nor directly connected with these trust bases. And, without suspension, the bases for trust cannot lead to trust. The Trust Wheel implies feedback mechanisms, suggesting that, when trust is reached, this will have an effect on the trust bases, too. There is learning. Moreover, reason, routine and reflexivity are connected and may interact. They may also vary in the degree of influence that they have on trust, and they could reinforce each other or compensate for each other.

These are merely tentative propositions emerging from the framework and the concept of trust suggested so far. It can be summarized as follows: trust is an ongoing process of building on reason, routine and reflexivity, suspending irreducible social vulnerability and uncertainty *as if* they were favourably resolved, and maintaining thereby a state of favourable expectation towards the actions and intentions of more or less specific others.

It is clear that suspension is at the heart of this concept and that the wheel will fall apart unless we get a better notion of this 'mystical' (Simmel) element. I suggest three ways of coming to terms with suspension. First, I will return to the idea that trust implies an 'as-if attitude'. I will show that 'as if' is a rather common expression in the literature on trust which, however, is generally taken far too lightly. Is trust essentially a form of fiction if it is reached on an as-if basis? Second, the term 'bracketing' is common in phenomenology and it expresses a kind of temporary blending out. Perhaps in trust uncertainty and vulnerability are bracketed, but how is this achieved? Third, trust might be a matter of willpower and, more specifically, William James' notion of the will to believe could be instructive. The leap of faith is evident here but where does the will come from? In the last part of this chapter, I will review empirical work to date that gives evidence of suspension in practice. Can we observe leaps of faith in real life? How important are they? This section also prepares the ground for the following chapters on studying and experiencing trust.

5.2 AS IF: TRUST AS FICTION

In Chapter 4, I have already discussed the idea suggested by several authors that actors might pretend to trust in order to start building trust. This ‘as-if trust’ (Hardin, 1993) is not considered to be proper trust. For example, Meyerson et al. (1996) clarify that their ‘swift trust’ is ‘not a sort of pseudo-trust or “trustoid” behavior’ (p. 192) as might be suspected. In this section, however, I will focus on another idea already suggested to some extent in Chapter 4: *all* trust requires a kind of as-if attitude on the part of trustors towards the social reality they face. David Lewis and Andrew Weigert (1985) express this most clearly when they state that ‘to trust is to live *as if* certain rationally possible futures will not occur’ (p. 969, emphasis in original) and that ‘to trust is to act as if the uncertain future actions of others were indeed certain’ (p. 971). Another example is Piotr Sztompka’s (1999) remark that ‘[p]lacing trust we behave “as if” we knew the future’ (pp. 25–26), which refers to Niklas Luhmann’s (1979) statement that to show trust is ‘to behave as though the future were certain’ (p. 10). The power, but also the fragility, of the ‘as if’ must not be underestimated. Trust does not rest on objective certainty but on ‘illusion’ (p. 32). It rests on the fiction of a reality in which social uncertainty and vulnerability are unproblematic. And this fiction of trust needs to be achieved and sustained psychologically by the individual, even though it is also a ‘socially constructed fiction of trust’ (Beckert, 2005, p. 19) produced intersubjectively through interaction with others and through institutionalized practices.

How do actors create the fiction that enables them to trust? As a first attempt in answering this question, consider the concept of ‘overdrawn information’ (*überzogene Information*) introduced by Luhmann (1979, p. 32). When actors overdraw information they make inferences beyond what the underlying information can actually support. In the face of a deficit of information, they deliberately overinterpret whatever information is available to ‘serve as a springboard into uncertainty’ (p. 33). Simmel (1950) mentions that for the individual actor trust is ‘a hypothesis *certain enough* to serve as a basis for practical conduct’ (p. 318, emphasis added). This implies that it is possible to arrive at the state of trust from an imperfect informational basis, if and when actors are able to make the leap from that basis.

We are reminded of the search for indicators of trustworthiness discussed in Chapter 2, the signals perceived by taxi drivers (Henslin, 1968;

Gambetta and Hamill, 2005) and Zucker's (1986) 'characteristic-based trust'. However, while 'overdrawn information' is a plausible idea that confirms the need for at least some kind of basis for trust ('the leap of trust cannot be made from nowhere nor from anywhere', Möllering, 2001, p. 414), we still need to be able to specify the conditions under which actors come to not only accept but also go beyond a given level of information and construct a fiction of reality that allows them to trust.

Jens Beckert (2005) has recently reminded us that the trustee plays a very important part in creating the trustor's fiction. Through his performance the trustee offers 'a definition of himself' (Henslin, 1968, p. 54) as well as a definition of the situation (Wenzel, 2001) and does so with empathy for the trustor's needs, 'creating the impression of trustworthiness' (Beckert, 2005, p. 19). Such an approach is more easily said than done and goes beyond the mechanistic signalling games suggested by Michael Bacharach and Diego Gambetta (2001; see also Chapter 2). The trustee's performative acts require impression management (Goffman, 1959), self-confidence and ontological security (Erikson, 1965) and an active engagement in social relations (Giddens, 1994b): 'Whoever wants to win trust must take part in social life and be in a position to build the expectations of others into his own self-presentation' (Luhmann, 1979, p. 62).

Steven Maguire, Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy have studied how, in the relationships between pharmaceutical companies and HIV/AIDS community organizations in Canada, identification-based trust could be generated over time through the discursive construction of new categories of identity or through changes in existing ones. Starting out from a highly antagonistic set-up, the parties involved essentially had to partly redefine themselves and construct a new fiction that would enable them to trust each other. The original myth of 'patients to be protected from pharmaceutical companies' first deteriorated into 'activists in conflict with pill-pushing profiteers' but then turned into 'advocates collaborating with compassionate and consultative partners' (Maguire et al., 2001, pp. 295–99). This process required discursive interaction and performances over many years.

To give just one other example, Nicole Gillespie and Leon Mann (2004) show that in R&D teams the team members' trust in their leaders depends significantly on leadership practices. Leaders 'earn' trust through performative action, for example consultative instead of top-down decision-making, by which they signal to team members their openness and respect (on trust and leadership, see also Dirks and Ferrin, 2002).

In sum, somewhat paradoxically, trustors rely to a great extent on trustees when constructing an image of those trustees as worthy of trust or not. Nevertheless, the fiction co-produced by trustor and trustee remains a fiction, potentially a dangerous 'fake', and it is ultimately 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.

Another, slightly evasive approach to explaining the maintenance of an as-if attitude for trust could return to the kind of theories introduced in Chapter 3. There we saw that the 'natural attitude' enables actors to have 'lifeworlds' as a stable fiction of reality, as it were. We saw that society and actors are socially constructed, that a kind of drama comes to life by being performed and that actors engage in normalizing to preserve their fiction as normality. They even put up façades and dwell in myths and ceremony. This sociological approach is supported by a broad range of psychological work, for example gestalt theory or research demonstrating the confirmation-seeking bias that individuals display especially when confronted by uncertainty and ambiguity (see Good, 1988). It makes trust relatively robust because a fiction of reality tends to be maintained and may even become 'real' in the sense of a social fact. In other words, all social life is 'fictional' and the fictions needed for trust are only one part of this. It is all the more important that we gain an understanding of the underlying processes as they occur at different levels, for instance at the level of abstract systems, such as the fiction of an effective medical system, or at the interpersonal level, where an actor infers from a number of cues a broad image of another as trustworthy or untrustworthy.

Moreover, we have to remain aware that actors are also the creators of the fictions they live in (McCloskey, 1994), which implies that uncertainty and vulnerability are not removed by creating fictions, but only suspended. Which fictions are maintained and which are changed or challenged is also at least partly a matter of interests, power and politics. This suggests yet another way of accounting for fictions and it also underlines the fact that fictions are indeed real in the sense that they have consequences, not only for trust. Günther Ortman (2004) shows that countless daily activities and interactions rely on fictions and only become possible because people act *as if* they were possible.

Ortman also points out convincingly that the 'as if' can have many different meanings. First, the 'as if' in the sense of the Schützian natural attitude refers to the action-enabling qualities of taken-for-grantedness and

continuity. We have already seen how this can support trust. Second, 'as if' can also refer to the more performative 'taking something for something' or 'defining something as something'. With reference to trust, this comes close to Hardin's (1993) 'as-if trust', where trust and trustworthiness are produced by trust-like interaction. An actor becomes trustworthy because others treat him more or less deliberately as if he were trustworthy. They take him for a trustworthy person and thus they also define him as a trustworthy person, irrespective of the 'true' underlying facts. Note the 'almost compulsory power' that Simmel (1950, p. 348) attributes to trust. Third, the concept of 'as if' can also refer to the construction of unrealistic but nevertheless helpful idealizations. For example, the image of an 'ideal' institution, organization, person or practice as being trustful and trustworthy may never be realized fully in reality, but by actors behaving as if it were reality or, at least, as if the 'ideal' were seriously pursued, trust is facilitated. Ortmann's (2004) analysis of the different forms and effects of 'as if' is, of course, much more detailed and elaborate than the few ideas I have just mentioned. At any rate, to make progress on understanding the as-if element in trust, further research on the meaning of 'as if' appears to be particularly helpful.

5.3 BRACKETING: JUST DO IT

The above considerations focused mainly on the idea that a holistic fiction can be created from incomplete pieces of information by reference to the 'as if'. Actors are seen as able to trust if and when they manage to fill the gaps and make up missing pieces. This is certainly one instructive way of interpreting the leap of faith; however, I will suggest in this section that the more important approach holds that trust is possible because actors manage to live with the fact that there are gaps and missing pieces. The 'as if' here means that actors interact with each other as if ignorance, doubts and dangers that exist alongside knowledge, convictions and assurances are unproblematic and can be set aside, at least for the time being. The result is also a fiction of reality, but in this case it is the result of blending out issues that actors might be aware of but cannot penetrate or resolve fully. Specifically, they bracket out irreducible social vulnerability and uncertainty as if they were favourably resolved. This is the main underlying idea of suspension. The logic of the 'as if' in trust is specified further as a logic of 'despite', 'although' and 'nevertheless'.

Once again, Niklas Luhmann (1979) developed key initial ideas for this approach. Although, as we have just seen, he also talks about ‘overdrawn information’ as a basis for trust, he mainly sees trust as a mechanism of *reducing complexity* rather than inflating it. As Poggi (1979) notes, Luhmann argues that ‘successful responses to the problem of complexity ... typically do not eliminate complexity, but rather reduce it: that is, make it “livable with” while in some sense preserving it’ (p. x). Interestingly, Poggi also suggests that Luhmann could have used the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*: the dialectical principle of synthesis transcending thesis and antithesis, thereby simultaneously preserving and rescinding them (Hegel, [1807] 1973). And, indeed, Luhmann argues that trust involves ‘a type of system-internal “suspension” (*Aufhebung*)’ (Luhmann, 1979, p. 79). When actors achieve suspension they treat uncertainty and vulnerability as unproblematic, even if it could turn out that they are problematic. Luhmann (1979) describes trust as ‘a movement towards *indifference*: by introducing trust, certain possibilities of development can be excluded from consideration. Certain dangers which cannot be removed but which should not disrupt action are neutralized’ (p. 25, emphasis in original).

This comes very close to the phenomenological concept of bracketing to which Anthony Giddens, among others, refers prominently in defining trust as ‘the vesting of confidence in persons or in abstract systems, made on the basis of a “leap into faith” which brackets ignorance or lack of information’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 244). More generally, Giddens discusses trust initially as a matter of ‘ontological security’ (Giddens, 1979) in the sense of ‘basic trust’, drawing on particular aspects in the work of Erikson (1965) and Goffman (1963; see Giddens, 1984). Essentially, Giddens captures how individual actors require and ascertain through trust constancy in their self-identity, that is their own being-in-the-world generally and their social being in interactions and relationships with others in particular (Giddens, 1990, 1991). By reference to Garfinkel’s breaching experiments, Giddens illustrates the significance of basic trust and links it conceptually to the natural attitude in sociological phenomenology. Like the natural attitude, basic trust presumes a suspension of doubt, but Giddens (1990) points out with Garfinkel the fragility of this state and the possibility of a ‘suspension of trust’ that threatens to bring back existential anxiety. The paramount importance of the suspension of doubt for the actor is thus emphasized.

In particular, Giddens (1990) argues that the suspension that enables trust has to be learned in infancy through the ambivalent experience of love

from caretakers on the one hand and the caretakers' temporary absence on the other, whereby the infant develops the ability to reach a state of trust which 'brackets distance in time and space and so blocks off existential anxieties' (p. 97). This trust as a kind of skill learned in infancy remains essential as actors grow up to become adults. According to Giddens, the faith in the loving caretaker's return 'is the essence of that leap to commitment which basic trust – and all forms of trust thereafter – presumes' (p. 95). The infant's anxiety can be generalized to the problem of ignorance that actors face in any social encounters with others whose actions and intentions they cannot fully know or control (Giddens, 1991). Generally, trust presumes 'a leap to commitment, a quality of "faith" which is irreducible' (p. 19).

In Giddens (1990), the author does not go into further detail as to how exactly this solution is achieved, except to note that it is an 'extremely sophisticated methodology of practical consciousness' (p. 99), in other words not primarily a cognitive achievement, but a tacit, continuous monitoring of the normality of the situation. In Giddens (1991) this 'methodology' is described in more detail: 'Practical consciousness, together with the day-to-day routines reproduced by it, help bracket such anxieties not only, or even primarily, because of the social stability that they imply, but because of their constitutive role in organizing an "as if" environment in relation to existential issues' (p. 37).

As briefly mentioned earlier on, another source that may enhance our understanding of suspension is Kierkegaard ([1843] 1985), who presents a highly disturbing view of the leap of faith in his essay *Fear and Trembling*, where he refers to Abraham's 'teleological suspension of the ethical' (p. 83) when he is supposed to sacrifice his son Isaac by God's will. It is the extraordinariness of the situation faced by Abraham which reveals very strongly the essential meaning and quality of the leap of faith. Abraham cannot justify the sacrifice of Isaac to himself or anybody else on utilitarian grounds nor on any moral (or institutional) grounds. His faith is the absurd and unfounded belief that Isaac, if sacrificed, will be restored. He thus suspends 'the ethical' for an unknowable higher end (*telos*), which, however, does not make his decision ethical in a round-about way. The act of killing Isaac – which Abraham is ultimately spared from carrying out – is not simply a proof of his belief in the existence of God but of his belief (without resignation) that the absurd or at least improbable will happen after all, due to forces above human expression and comprehension.

Even though the gravity and intensity of Abraham's leap of faith is extraordinary and untypical for most practical situations that we face, the incident illustrates how the suspension required for all trust overcomes the irreducible uncertainty and vulnerability of the trustor towards the trustee. As Seligman (1997) puts it elliptically, in trust between socially embedded people 'Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" become[s] oriented towards a mundane other' (p. 74). In the same way that Abraham could not have constructed a perfectly justified and acceptable argument for sacrificing Isaac, every trustor – by definition – lacks certainty about the consequences of his trust and can only reach the state of trust through a kind of faith which Simmel (1950) called the 'affective, even mystical, "faith" of man in man' (p. 318). Suspension itself is 'irreducible' (Giddens, 1991, p. 19). It may be identified and described, but not explained or justified. It is not the whole of trust, but the defining element.

Admittedly, especially after this reference to Kierkegaard, the idea that trust requires bracketing or, more generally, suspension may not be a very welcome one, as it might be taken to suggest that actors should heroically or foolishly ignore the perils of life in order to trust. Moreover, the underlying notion of 'just do it' (see also Möllering, 2005b) could be more disconcerting than actually encouraging. In response to this, it should be noted that, while on the one hand actors make more leaps of faith every day than they realize, and do so without experiencing existential angst, on the other hand they also face situations in which they find it impossible to suspend uncertainty and vulnerability or in which they can only take one very small leap of faith after the other (see also the final section of this chapter). By highlighting the essential role of suspension in trust, we merely clarify when it is justified to speak of trust and when it is not. It is a different question how big or small, difficult or easy the leap of faith actually is.

For example, I would challenge Saunders and Thornhill's (2004) conclusion that there is little support for the notion of the trust-enabling leap of faith when respondents can rationalize their feelings about trust and mistrust. First of all, as Luhmann (1979) puts it: 'Although the one who trusts is never at a loss for reasons and is quite capable of giving an account of why he shows trust in this or that case, the point of such reasons is really to uphold his self-respect and justify him socially' (p. 26). More importantly, though, this process of rationalization obscures the leaps of faith which the actors, including Saunders and Thornhill's respondents, still make if they genuinely trust. After all, a perfect rationale would make

trust obsolete altogether. As I have pointed out elsewhere before, the concept of suspension implies the methodological challenge to grasp what constitutes the unknowable from the point of view of the trustor (Möllerling, 2001). It may be necessary to discourage respondents from over-rationalization and to probe specifically for references to information that trustors consciously miss or dismiss as well as to the ways they generally deal with the Socratic conundrum of knowing that one knows nothing.

Further, despite the paramount importance attributed to trust generally, authors who argue that there are many interactions in which trust is not really necessary also have a point (see for example Cook et al., 2005a). Finally, suspension has a strong element of agency, implying that although many leaps of faith may not be made consciously, they are not made unwillingly either. On the contrary, without denying social embeddedness, it is hard to see how the ‘leap’ or the ‘faith’ necessary for trust as a state of expectation could be forced. We would speak of compliance, not trust, if suspension were not voluntary.

5.4 THE WILL TO BELIEVE

This brings us to Luhmann’s (1979) remark that trust is an ‘operation of the will’ where ‘the actor willingly surmounts this deficit of information’ (p. 32). Trust goes beyond that which can be justified in any terms by the actor, but the actor exercises agency through his will to either suspend uncertainty and vulnerability or not. Luhmann’s reference to ‘will’ in the context of trust and suspension inspires a closer look at William James’ essay on *The Will to Believe*, a pragmatist approach to the theme of faith which Jens Beckert (2005) has also identified as highly instructive for understanding trust. James ([1896] 1948) defends the actor’s right to believe – in religious matters but also generally, for instance in social relations – even when there is no conclusive evidence. Such a belief would be called faith: ‘we have the right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will’ (p. 107). Note that by introducing the condition that the hypothesis has to be ‘live enough’, James points out that actors should not be allowed to believe anything but that ‘which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed’ (p. 89).

Implicitly, he thus refers back to his essay *The Sentiment of Rationality* (James, [1879] 1948) and major principles of his pragmatist philosophy. In this earlier source, he says that faith is ‘synonymous with working

hypothesis' (p. 25). The ability to have faith is distinctly human according to James and he defines faith as follows: 'Faith means belief in something concerning which doubt is still possible; and as the test of belief is willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance' (p. 22).

From the standpoint of James' pragmatism, faith requires the 'sentiment of rationality', in other words the actor's genuine but not conclusively justifiable conviction that what he believes is 'true' in the pragmatist sense of being useful, giving expectations and (thus) enabling action. This sentiment produces the 'will' to believe. Faith in these terms matches exactly that element in trust which – like a 'tranquilizer' (Beckert, 2005, p. 18) – allows the trustor to have favourable expectations towards the actions and intentions of others whose behaviour cannot be fully known or controlled.

At least two more points worth mentioning in the light of the discussion so far emerge from James' essays. First, an important aspect of the trust process presented in the previous chapter and again in this chapter has been that the development of trust depends on getting the process started somehow, after which there is a chance that it will be self-reinforcing. In this regard, faith would not only be instrumental in getting the process started but is itself a prime example of a self-fulfilling attitude, as James points out: 'There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming. *And where faith in a fact can help create the fact*' (pp. 104–05, emphasis in original). Or, more graphically and directly related to trust: 'A social organism of any sort whatever, large or small, is what it is because each member proceeds to his own duty with a trust that the other members will simultaneously do theirs. Wherever a desired result is achieved by the co-operation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned' (p. 104).

Second, interestingly enough, James also employs the image of a 'leap' with regard to faith. In *The Sentiment of Rationality* he uses the example of having to make a 'terrible leap' from a dangerous position while climbing on a mountain (p. 27). The mountaineer has no conclusive evidence of his ability to make the leap successfully, but his will produces the faith that will help him to achieve it. In Möllering (2001) I tried to illustrate my concept of trust in a similar way by reference to the analogy of jumping across a gorge, an image commonly associated with trust: 'trust can be imagined as the mental process of leaping – enabled by suspension – across the gorge of the unknowable from the land of interpretation to

the land of expectation' (p. 412). I stretched the analogy further by pointing out that such leaps are not unique events in life, but required recurrently, and I even suggested thinking about preferred crossing places and 'suspension bridges'. This may be taking the analogy too far, but if we want to imagine what a conscious leap of faith feels like, the moment of jumping to cross a gap without being certain that one will make it unharmed is one of the best illustrations, and it does not even involve a trustee or much of a social context either.

A similar 'experience' of suspension is expressed in the image of the 'leap in the dark' and it is noticeable that William James' essay *The Will to Believe* closes with a quote from Fitz-James Stephen, who asserts: 'In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark' (James, 1948, p. 109). Overall, James clearly does not assume that actors take such leaps lightly or foolishly. Faith as a part of trust has to resonate with the actor's experience. It has to feel right, true, plausible and so on in spite of inconclusive evidence. It follows that trust rests on a kind of 'will to trust', but trust cannot be willed against the trustor's very personal and private sentiments. It is in this sense that Simmel's (1950) widely accepted remark that trust 'cannot be requested' (p. 348) needs to be understood, pointing out the irreducible agency on the part of the trustor who, just like the trustee, ultimately cannot be forced to make that leap and play his part in the trust-honour game. He may pretend to be trusting – raise a façade of trust – but genuine trust requires that he makes a leap of faith, which may be bigger or smaller, more or less difficult, but never completely taken for granted. A strong emphasis needs to be placed on the key role of actors' idiosyncratic interpretation and suspension of doubt in trust, because trust implies an 'as-if' attitude which is ultimately realized at the actor level, notwithstanding the fact that this important element of agency in trust is socially embedded and, to some extent, also socially constructed and locally variable (see Meyer and Jepperson, 2000).

5.5 EVIDENCE OF SUSPENSION

It has been my aim not only in this book but also in earlier articles (Möllerling, 2001) to stimulate the re(dis)covery of the leap of faith as the essential element of trust in both theoretical and empirical research. In recent years, several empirical studies have taken this suggestion seriously and together they provide preliminary evidence of what suspension en-

tails in practice (see also the case material presented in Chapter 7 below). It is striking that the notion of the leap of faith appears to resonate particularly well when trust is considered in the context of medical care. On the one hand, trust between doctors and patients has been a classical and extensively explored theme at least since Parsons ([1969] 1978; more recently in Lee-Treweek, 2002; Gilson, 2003; and see also Chapter 3), but in contrast the findings on trust reported for instance in *Social Science & Medicine* tend not to be picked up in other fields. As the following sections show, it might be instructive to look at them when it comes to understanding the empirical meaning of suspension.

By way of example, Mark Bernstein and his colleagues interviewed patients facing brain tumour surgery (Bernstein et al., 2004). The narrative remarks from patients that they report clearly document the presence of suspension. The patients recognize that trust does not mean objective certainty: 'You can be very confident in your doctor and there still can be an error. It just makes you feel comfortable going through the process if you have confidence in the doctor' (p. 210). Beckert's (2005) analogy of trust as a tranquilizer applies almost literally here. Bracketing is evident in the following quote from one of Bernstein et al.'s patients: 'And a slip of the scalpel ... you think of these things, but I ... have confidence in him and I'll just have to be, you know, I will just assume everything will go right' (p. 210). And other patients that they interviewed said that they do not worry about the risk of an error during surgery because they feel that this is something they cannot control – and therefore have to blend out. By achieving suspension, patients can be less terrified and undergo life-threatening brain surgery in a trustful, optimistic way.

In another study, Martin McKneally et al. (2004) analyse interviews with patients recovering from the elective surgical removal of their gall-bladders. It should be noted that in contrast to the Bernstein et al. study, these patients were interviewed after the treatment, not before, and that the operation they underwent is far less frightening than brain surgery. When surgery is 'elective', it is done with the patient's prior consent, as opposed to emergency surgery on an unconscious patient after an accident for example. A key aspect emerging from McKneally et al.'s analysis is how 'doubts and fear were set aside, but not eliminated, using various mechanisms to manage them' (p. 53). A minority of patients (six out of 33) approached the decision to undergo operative treatment with an unquestioning attitude, a form of trust without reservation, requiring no objective proof and displaying a 'let's do it' approach.

Most patients, however, had to ‘put aside’ serious misgivings or doubts, although without completely eliminating them. The authors describe how patients accumulated information about their disease, treatments and medical institutions, but they could not manage their fear and doubts purely by reason. Patients ‘made a leap to trust rather than simply building a bridge of reasoned arguments across the chasm of doubt and fear’ (p. 55). In preparation for the decision ‘not to worry’, they started to focus on positive aspects rather than risks, but for some it was also a kind of resignation to the fact that they had ‘no choice’ (p. 54).

Overall, McKneally et al. found that ‘ways of leaping were as diverse as the patients themselves. Some patients gained confidence to make the leap by becoming more informed about the surgical procedure and competence of professionals who would take care of them. Many were prodded to make the leap by increasingly intolerable symptoms, or by fear of the consequences of not acting. Patients were ultimately encouraged, that is, they were rendered courageous enough to leap, by the empathy, understanding, and confidence of the doctors and nurses who cared for them’ (p. 55). The last point about the encouraging role of medical staff highlights the fact that although people have to make leaps of faith individually, they are not alone in this but embedded in social networks.

Julie Brownlie and Alexandra Howson (2005) have stressed this embeddedness argument recently in an empirical study that builds on my article on the Simmelian notion of trust (Möllering, 2001) and demonstrates the role of suspension in parental and professional talk about vaccination against measles, mumps and rubella. In what follows, I extract only a few of the most illuminating passages from Brownlie and Howson’s (2005) rich article. Parents who have to decide whether to have their children vaccinated look for good reasons and proof but realize that they have gaps in their knowledge. They can even list, and then partly set aside, what they do not know. Their suspension can be routinized (‘You just go and do it’, p. 227), but in important situations, such as the vaccination decision, it can also be highly reflective and dynamic in the sense that they are able to bracket some uncertainties but not all – and not instantaneously nor all the time. There is a temporal aspect to suspension, as one parent put it: ‘Probably I was hoping that your will, your resistance will wear down and you will just go ahead and say “oh lets just go and get it done, get it over and done with”’ (p. 228).

As already mentioned, Brownlie and Howson (2005) emphasize that parents do not suspend in isolation: when suspension occurs, it occurs

within relationships and networks' (p. 228). In particular, parents receive relevant information not only from health professionals but also from their families and friends as well as the media and authorities. They also draw on their own experiences as children (who were routinely immunized in the past, for example) and as parents (who have already had to make similar decisions before). Overall, leaps of faith are made possible by the 'relations of familiarity' that parents develop over time, not only with particular medical professionals but also within their larger social networks that extend as far as the political arenas of government and state. This view corresponds with the idea that individual leaps of trust refer to a fiction of reality that is produced individually, collectively and institutionally.

Embeddedness clearly plays a role in the empirical case that I presented in a recent article on the duality of trust and control (Möllering, 2005a). There, I refer to the deterioration of trust that a German publisher had in a very prominent author and politician. Their relationship was complex as it had dimensions of business, party politics and friendship and was embedded in overlapping economic, political and personal networks. However, what suspension means is ultimately recognizable at the level of the individual, for instance when the publisher stated: 'I know Oskar Lafontaine so well that I am sure he has his good reasons' or 'I have no doubt that Oskar Lafontaine has told me the truth' (p. 296). In both cases the publisher could not be perfectly certain but he was willing to bracket uncertainty and vulnerability. The example shows that suspension can have detrimental effects because in this case it turned out that the publisher lost a lucrative book deal because his trust was broken by Lafontaine.

In her work on the development of trust in small business cooperation in Tanzania, Malin Tillmar also frames trust as a combination of the trustor's subjective knowledge and a leap of faith (Tillmar, 2002; Tillmar and Lindkvist, 2005). The colourful case of the initiatives within a community in the remote Tanzanian town of Singida is, first of all, remarkable due to the unusual and, more importantly, highly difficult and unreliable institutional context. In the absence of effective jurisdiction and police, people refer to tribal rules and witchcraft as the basis of their exchanges. Modern business initiatives seem almost impossible in this context. Nevertheless, Tillmar observes cases of successful cooperative business ventures where the partners have been able to build up enough trust. In explaining how they were able to do so, Tillmar and Lindkvist (2005) note that there was 'a need to be creative and in a sense try to "invent" good

enough reasons for trust' (p. 18), in other words to create a trust-enabling fiction of reality. In practice this meant overcoming distrust initially by finding reasons for why the others would not be untrustworthy. Accordingly, the researchers found that the Tanzanian business people they observed would try to avoid big leaps of faith and, instead, they would take much smaller 'steps of faith' in less risky kinds of cooperation.

The Tanzanian business people's reluctance to take larger leaps of faith is understandable given the general precariousness of their situation. It could be argued that what they achieved, nevertheless, was an 'as-if trust' of the kind Hardin (1993) talks about or a weak form of trust still in the early stages of a gradual trust-building process. At any rate, even the small 'steps of faith' seem to have had a very positive effect and they even spread within the community by imitation. Moreover, we simply have to accept that there are many situations in which people are unable to make a leap of faith and, therefore, they are unable to trust. Sometimes this is unproblematic and sometimes it seriously paralyses them in their social activity. I never meant to suggest that the leap of faith is easy and perhaps the motto 'just do it' suggests a misleading ease when the ensuing question 'do what?' is omitted (Möllering, 2005b). It is one thing to define the suspension of uncertainty and vulnerability as the essential element of trust; it is a completely different matter to suggest normatively that people should take leaps of faith or to try and specify when suspension is in order (Möllering, 2005a).

The ideas presented in this chapter support the essential role played by suspension in reaching trust as illustrated in the Trust Wheel (Figure 5.1 above), even if we only have a rough and preliminary notion of suspension so far. When clarifying the meaning of suspension further, probably the most important question to be answered will be what it is – *beyond* reason, routine and reflexivity as bases for trust – that enables the trustor to make a leap of faith? The quick answer is 'agency': the idea that, although there are deterministic forces, social actors always have room for idiosyncratic, contingent initiatives which, in this case, they may or may not use to make a leap of faith for the sake of reaching trust. However, precisely what agency means in the literature and how exactly it is constituted in reality varies greatly.

On the one hand we have Anthony Giddens' (1984) concept of the actor, which is certainly not an undersocialized concept but Giddens nevertheless sees the actor as individually knowledgeable and powerful. Accordingly, actors can also face the unknowable and engage in the 'active

trust' Giddens (1994b) describes later (see also Chapter 4). On the other hand, Giddens' actor model was criticized early on especially by Hugh Willmott (1986), who points out that Giddens underestimates the role of unconscious sources of motivation, resulting in an untenable assumption of sovereignty.

Writing from a somewhat different theoretical angle, John Meyer also challenges the notion of agency as a 'natural' property of sovereign human beings (see for example Meyer and Jepperson, 2000). He argues that ideas such as 'free will' and 'independent choice' are not only socially constructed and attributed; they are also conditional upon continued legitimacy in the social arenas in which they are applied. In other words, agency can be withdrawn, thus making leaps of faith impossible. Alternatively, agency may be forced onto social beings, whereby they become obliged to take on unwanted responsibility for their actions. The latter suggests a kind of self-management à la Foucault, in this case the idea that actors seek to conform by making or avoiding leaps of faith, depending on what is legitimate in a particular situation. Seen somewhat more positively, when the uncertainty and vulnerability implied in all trust is partly borne by society at large, this may facilitate suspension. However, ultimately individuals suffer the consequences of their more or less embedded and legitimated acts, which means that trust is genuinely a question of agency and an idiosyncratic achievement that may be supported or hindered, but not replaced, by social structure or, for that matter, unconscious motivations (see also Chapter 8).

In conclusion, this is still only the beginning of a new direction in trust research that builds on existing perspectives while placing the concept of suspension at the heart of an overall concept of trust. In order to develop this direction further, we need more theorizing but, quite definitely, we also need more empirical work exploring these ideas. In the next two chapters I will therefore present and discuss, first, some important methodological considerations for studying trust (Chapter 6) and, second, an analysis of rich empirical case material that brings out the experience of trust using all the elements of the Trust Wheel (Chapter 7).