WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A COMMUNICATION TO BE TRUSTED?

Francesca Granelli

Abstract

Despite following best practice, most governments fail in their strategic communications. There is a missing 'X' factor: trust. This offers a quick win to strategic communicators, provided they understand what the phenomenon involves. Moreover, it allows practitioners to avoid the risk of citizens feeling betrayed when their government fails to deliver.

Keywords: *trust, communications, impersonal trust, distrust, reliance, co-operation, strategic communications*

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Introduction

Governments, politicians, and commentators are worried. The 'crisis of trust' is now a common refrain, which draws upon a mountain of apparent evidence. [1] Edelman's *Trust Barometer*, for instance, points to declining levels of trust in governments, NGOs, businesses, and the media across most countries each year. Moreover, the situation in the United States is portrayed as extremely dire:

> No country saw steeper declines than the United States, with a 37-point aggregate drop in trust across all institutions. The loss of trust was most severe among the informed public—a 23-point fall on the Trust Index—nearly erasing the 'mass-class' divide that once stood between this segment of the US population and the country's far-less-trusting mass population.[2]

Yet, despite the apparent lack of trust we place in them, our governments continue to govern—and routinely ask for our trust.

Theresa May, for instance, has asked the British people to trust her to deliver Brexit,[3] although half the country no longer trusts what the other half says on the issue. Donald Trump relies on a simple phrase—'believe me'—and has successfully encouraged his supporters to distrust the mainstream media. South Korea's envoy has stated that Kim Jong Un's trust in Trump remains unchanged, yet North Korea's state media has accused the US of talking with 'a smile on its face' while plotting invasion.[4] Disinformation, misinformation, mal-information and non-information can be found widely and are perceived even more widely, and a growing number of people see this as an existential threat to liberal

1 The author is sceptical of research that purports to measure trust; the point here is that, whether or not the methodology is valid, many commentators find such reports compelling.
2 Edelman, *Trust Barometer Global Report* (London, 2018).
3 Rob Merrick, 'Theresa May urges the public to "trust me" to deliver Brexit amid increasingly bitter cabinet rows', *The Independent*, 12 May 2018.
4 Griffiths, James and Yoonjung Seo, 'North Korea's Kim has "unwavering trust" in Trump, South Korea says', *CNN* (International Edition), 6 September 2018.

democracy across Europe and beyond.[5]

Moreover, it is proving increasingly difficult to communicate in today's challenging media environment: the unrelenting volume, noise, and speed are too much to cope with. A few years ago, the problem was thought to be self-publication by bloggers and citizen journalists, which bypassed editorial review and traditional curation. Yet that issue was swiftly displaced by concern over so-called fake news; whereas self-publication was both villain and hero, fake news has no redeeming features.

Not only do commentators identify a decline of trust, they refer to it as a problem that needs to be tackled with solutions that range from fact checking to artificial intelligence. Yet the real challenge is that fake news is more trusted today than before and no one suggests we should encourage this—quite the opposite. This is a simple point, but one that policymakers and commentators obscure when they merely demand more trust: the fact is we're not lacking in trust but proffering it indiscriminately.

We need better trust, not more trust.

Airbnb, TaskRabbit, RelayRides, Getaround, Fon, and Lending Club all show that there is plenty of trust in today's world.[6] Rather than diminishing, it has shifted from a small number of traditional, vertical relationships to a variety of novel, horizontal relationships that run through society. This has led to a diffusion of trust. Trust in informal, personal relationships (or ostensibly personal relationships, such as peer-to-peer relationships enabled via the Internet) has increased at the expense of hierarchical, top-down relationships with authorities and

5 **Disinformation** is 'the manipulation of information that purposefully aims to mislead or deceive', while **mis-information** is 'inaccurate information that is the result of an honest mistake or of negligence'. Jente Althuis and Leonie Haiden (eds), *Fake News: A Roadmap* (Riga: NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence | King's Centre for Strategic Communications, 2018); **mal-information** is defined as 'information that is used to inflict harm on a person, organisation, community, or country' in Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan's 2017 Council of Europe report; and **non-information** is usually understood to be the absence or lack of information. This has the potential to be 'more difficult to deal with because we don't know what we don't know', writes John Williams, 'When People Don't Know What They Don't Know: Brexit and the British Communication Breakdown', *Defence Strategic Communications* Vol. 4 (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Spring 2018), p. 208.
6 Part of the so-called reputation or sharing economy. Rachel Botsman, *Who can you Trust? How Technology Brought Us Together—and Why It Could Drive Us Apart* (London: Portfolio Penguin, 2017).

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institutions. Both can be used for good or ill, and it is the responsibility of citizens to identify which is which.

But how should strategic communications practitioners think of trust? The relationship—and direction of causality—between trust and communication remains unexplored in the academic literature;[7] what is clear is that it is a complex, iterative, and symbiotic process.[8] In any event, that we trust communications is an unstated axiom of most communication theory. This is as true for more recent frameworks as it is for the classic models from Shannon & Weaver[9] or Osgood & Schramm.[10] We rely on trust. So, do we 'trust' the source, the sender, the medium, and the receiver equally? Meanwhile, the encoding and decoding of messages is governed by semiotic rules that take into account the relationships between all parties, as well as the wider social environment.

Yet Regina Jucks *et al.* remind us that 'words are more than merely a "device" to transport a message. They indicate deeply grounded attitudes, our emotional state, and relationship to the given communication partner'.[11] Words are more than their content. The very words we choose to express an idea, the sound they make, and the mood they evoke, offer to the listener an understanding richer than mere content. That said, we have no choice but to interpret them in order to draw conclusions about the communicator—whether to assess their ability, their benevolence, or their values. This is true not only of words, but also of images or actions, including the decision not to act in a situation. Trust is pivotal, since it means that we do not have to make that assessment *in toto*.

7 It is worth noting that the British government has been researching this extensively in recent years, especially post-2016, however, results are not yet readily available.
8 J. C. Anderson and J. A. Narus, 'A model of distributor firm and manufacturing firm working relationships', (1990), Vol. 54, № 1, pp. 42–58; R. Zeffane et al., 'Commitment, Communication & Trust—Exploring the the Triad', International Journal of Business and Management (2011) Vol. 6, № 6, pp.
9 Described as the 'mother of all models', the communication model described by Shannon and Weaver is one of the simplest communications models. Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1963).
10 W. Schramm, 'How Communication Works' in W. Schramm (ed.) *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1954) pp. 3–26.
11 Regina Jucks, Gesa A. Linnemann, Franziska M. Thon, and Maria Zimmermann, 'Trust the Words: Insights into the Role of Language in Trust Building in a Digital World', in Bernd Blobaum (ed.), *Trust and Communications in a Digitized World* (Springer, 2016).

Moreover, credible, coherent, and consistent communication nurtures trust. Effective dialogue reinforces trust by enabling the sender and the receiver to understand each other better, to share their values, and to offer a vision for the future. Such dialogue is further reinforced when communications are relevant, rather than simply treated as a 'download'. Effective dialogue not only reflects an understanding of the audience and what matters to them, but also can convey that listening and feedback are valued by ensuring that responses are timely. Communicating parties invest in each other as they develop their relationship over time. The opposite is also true: trust is eroded when communication is unfocused, inaccurate, dishonest, or incomplete.

Strategic communications, in particular, enjoys a symbiotic relationship with trust.[12] At its core, strategic communications is the coordination of words, images, and actions, to inform, influence, and persuade a target audience in pursuit of a clear, strategic goal.[13] Consider some recent examples.

Images and reports about the Grenfell Towers fire[14] in London on 14 June 2017 illustrate how quickly trust can be lost or reinforced through effective communications.[15] As Britain's worst residential fire since the Second World War, the incident was widely reported as it unfolded, and its aftermath was closely analysed. Prime Minister Theresa May initially waited for some time to visit the scene and, when she finally arrived, she seemed to focus her attention mainly on the emergency services. This was in stark contrast to Jeremy Corbyn, the Leader of the Opposition,

12 Strategic communications uses words, images, actions, and omissions—and at times silence—to influence discourses in order to shift attitudes and change behaviour and thereby shape the future in the national interest. It is a contested concept, which is often misunderstood and poorly defined; at a superficial level, it is often conflated with political marketing, which seeks to influence electoral contests, or public relations, which seeks to ameliorate relations between an organisation and its stakeholders. At a deeper level, strategic communications is often misunderstood as linear and transactional rather than complex, dynamic, adaptable, and never-ending.

13 James P. Farwell, *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communications* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012) pp. xviii-xix.

14 The fire in the 24-story Grenfell Tower block of flats in North Kensington, West London was first reported to the emergency services at 00.54am on 14 June 2017. Seventy-two people died, seventy were injured and 223 people escaped. The fire burned for about 60 hours until it was finally extinguished. More than 250 London Fire Brigade firefighters, 70 fire engines, 100 London Ambulance Service crews, and other special services were involved in the rescue effort.

15 Theresa May's approval rating sank to levels matching those of Jeremy Corbyn before the 2017 election campaign.

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who immediately sought to empathise with residents and locals. Their different approaches were vividly captured in starkly contrasting images: Theresa May was pictured through a long-lens camera being briefed by senior figures of the emergency services. She was advised, and perhaps believed, that she should avoid being seen as making political capital out of the suffering of the survivors of the fire. Her intentions may have been good, but her actions were interpreted as cold. In contrast, Jeremy Corbyn hugged Councillor Mushtaq Lasharie as he arrived at St Clement's Church to meet surviving Grenfell residents as they were given aid and relief. Where the Prime Minister misread the public mood, the Opposition Leader understood and embraced it. Was Theresa May out of kilter with public opinion? Or were local residents, journalists, and the wider public predisposed to see her as lacking empathy?[16] In demonstrating sympathy and solidarity with those affected, Jeremy Corbyn was seen as 'one of us', while Theresa May was seen as 'one of them'—unsympathetic and elitist.[17] We tend to trust those who we perceive, rightly or wrongly, to share the same values, respond in the same manner, and understand our way of life.

This was not the only relationship of trust to come under strain during the incident. Trust in both local and national government was challenged as it emerged that warnings had been neglected, and it was argued that there had been systematic under-investment on the part of responsible authorities that tracked social divisions within the local community. Indeed, Theresa May acknowledged, almost a week later, that the criticism was accurate; government, both local and national, had failed to protect and help its people in a crisis that involved their very survival and that of their families: 'As prime minister I apologise for that failure. And as prime minister I've taken responsibility for doing what we can to put

16 It subsequently emerged that Theresa May visited several families affected by the tragedy but felt that these ought to be private meetings rather than public interactions 'playing to the cameras'. Comparisons could be made with the Queen's initial public response to Princess Diana's death; recent private correspondence has emerged which paints a very different picture of the Queen to the one portrayed in the media at the time.
17 Nadir, a local resident, described Theresa May as a coward and 'one of them' during an Interview with Andrea Leadsom on Sky News on Friday 16th June 2017.

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things right.'[18] This failure to meet expectations weakened the credibility of and trust in local and national government, resulting in a sense of betrayal among those affected. Polls confirm this,[19] but the results should be treated with caution given the lack of baseline polling data and the well-documented limitations of trust polls specifically.[20] Insufficient resources, together with the slow pace and lack of transparency in their delivery, only added to the mistrust. At the same time, the residents' loss of their identity documents facilitated criminal fraud that further poisoned the atmosphere. The absence of dialogue, exacerbated by the reluctance of anyone in a position of authority to express regret, let alone take responsibility, caused the community to feel marginalised.

Similarly, media reporting—whether traditional or digital—came under increasing scrutiny as (i) unsubstantiated casualty reports circulated online, only to be debunked later; while (ii) the mainstream media reported the statements of onlookers claiming to have witnessed the miraculous survival of a baby thrown to rescuers—a significant, but also fictitious event that was later discredited by BBC Newsnight's David Grossmann and Dan Newling on 9 October 2017. These reports undermined confidence, influenced perceptions, and shaped the public response, creating a greater sense of uncertainty just when customarily trusted relationships were found wanting. These challenges to trust were not felt uniformly, but were embedded in specific contexts—they built on one another, reinforcing a sense of a 'them-and-us' dislocation that will not easily be undone.

The poisoning of former Russian military intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter Julia in Salisbury, England in March 2018 would

18 Caroline Davies, 'Grenfell Tower: May apologises for "failures of state, local and national"', *Guardian*, 21 June 2017.

19 A ComRes survey, found that, as a result of the Grenfell Tower fire, almost half (46%) of the 2,000 people surveyed were less confident in local authorities to oversee the safety of high-rise residential buildings. Grenfell Tower tragedy dents confidence in councils, poll suggests, *PBC Today*, 27 November 2018.

20 Survey questions are often vague, abstract, and hard to interpret; they also frequently conflate trust and trustworthiness. Even respected organisations such as Gallup and the Pew Research Center often have to infer attitudes, rather than directly measure them. See M. Naef & J. Schupp, 'Measuring Trust: Experiments and Surveys in Contrast and Combination' (IZA Discussion Paper, 2009) and S. Lundåsen, 'Methodological problems with surveying trust', JSM Proceedings at AAPOR (Alexandria, VA: American Statistical Association, 2010).

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become a war of words described variously by the media as tragedy, farce, or confusion. This case highlights the difficulties of whom to trust in today's new media ecology. The UK government had to overcome a barrage of disinformation and misinformation to get its message out. In the hours immediately following the incident, the number of alternative narratives multiplied. Within a couple of days, over thirty different versions of the events were circulating, rising to around forty-seven in the following weeks. The British government followed procedure, gathered evidence before commenting, ensured it did not compromise intelligence, and sought international support. By contrast, Russia and her alleged proxies—including the likes of 21st Century News, LiveLeak.com, The Truth Seeker, RightWeb, and an estimated 2,800 troll accounts[21]—chose ambiguity, obfuscation, and moral outrage. In what is now widely understood to be Russia's strategy of subversive confusion—the dissemination of many explanations, from the absurd to the mildly tenable—the multitude of stories combined to cloud the public's judgement about evidence-based accounts. The British state was also sensitive to the memory of the government's earlier handling of intelligence surrounding claims that Saddam Hussein's Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Government announcements included the phrase 'highly likely'—more suited to diplomatic communiqués than to press releases—when referring to the origins of the military grade poison, Novichok, used to poison the Skripals.[22] Nonetheless, Theresa May was able quickly to unite Britain's allies in NATO and the European Union, who not only issued statements expressing support for May's position, but coordinated their actions in expelling over 120 Russians diplomats. This was a significant diplomatic victory for May and the British government.

21 As noted by Deborah Haynes in her article 'Skripal Attack: 2,800 Russian bots sowed confusion after poison attacks', *The Times,* 24 March 2018.

22 Widely used in diplomacy, the phrase 'highly likely' has become more commonplace in government communication since accusations that Iraq surreptitiously retained weapons of mass destruction, supported by several Western governments, particularly in the 'September Dossier' published by the British government in 2002, were shown to be false.

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Trust in the institutions of either government, British or Russian, such as the police, forensic teams, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory,[23] and official media sources, were repeatedly called into question. Starkly different approaches were taken by the various actors: the British government sought to use logic, procedure, process, and past experience, whereas the Russians appeared to be leveraging denial, diversion, and distraction. Trust between states was lacking, and both sought to win over target audiences by nourishing their pre-existing perceptions of the world. The difference in the nature of the two governments' messages reflects cultural differences in their relationships of trust and in their approaches to strategic communications. The intricacies of this topic go far beyond the scope of this article: both nations played on their Cold War and post-Cold War histories to provide context, setting out conflicting narratives with the aim of simultaneously reinforcing trust in their version of events and undermining trust in the other. This was clearly a battle of trust. While some in the media argued, rightly or wrongly, that Russia 'won' the information war in this case,[24] Theresa May's ability to quickly unite the countries of the EU, the USA, and Canada in condemnation of Russia is a testament to the trusting relationships she and the British government have built.

Even these two short case studies demonstrate that, although we usually refer to 'trust' in the singular, it tends to be a complex bundle of relationships; different types of trust overlap, bisect, dissect, reinforce, and compete with each other. They create multiple interconnecting relationships and continuously adapting networks that underpin society.[25] Consider money—as it evolved, so too has the nature of our trust in it. Our monetary system now represents such a complex amalgam of factors—including trust in the Bank of England, the banking sector, the financial system, and fiat currency—that it is beyond the understanding

23 The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory is an executive agency of the UK's Ministry of Defence that aims to maximise the impact of science and technology for the defence and security of the UK.
24 Tom Parfitt, 'Russia is Winning the Information War on Home Turf', *The Times*, 6 April 2018.
25 This emphasises the shortcomings of much of the polling data on trust, which reduce complex relationships into simple short questions 'do you trust X' or 'do you trust X more than you trust Y'. They do not explore what sits underneath.

of most people.[26] Best described as 'a collective act of imagination',[27] money is 'a thing which we have invested our credence in and it works because we do'.[28]

Personal networks of trust have multiplied exponentially in this digital information age.[29] The fluidity of these relationships has enabled them to challenge the stasis of traditional forms of trust between state and citizen. At the same time, reliance has displaced trust in this structure as governments address the increasingly risk averse electorate. The replacement of hierarchical, static, impersonal networks with flatter, dynamic, personal relationships has underpinned an increasingly turbulent politics[30] —and there is every indication that trust will become ever more dispersed. This is set to continue. The good news is that strategic communications practitioners have an opportunity to adapt to this new environment, if there is investment in research that goes beyond our familiar use of polling to map the landscape of trust.

Although practitioners may recognise the vital role trust plays, it nonetheless remains a difficult concept to assimilate across cultural lines and to deploy in practice. Academics do not help, often presenting the concept as multifaceted, complex, and abstract. Consequently, trust remains difficult to identify, let alone quantify. This suggests the need for careful use of the term, especially as strategic communications is a rapidly emerging discipline, not merely an empirical practice.

One way to approach the study of trust is to distinguish it from several interlopers. This clears the ground for a more focused exploration later in this article.

26 A trading relationship between two parties using hard, commodity money requires only trust relationships that are simple and direct. By contrast, an impersonal relationship between two parties using fiat currency in an open environment requires far more: trust relationships that underpin one's faith in money itself.
27 Drawing from diverse sources, including Shakespeare and Goethe, Marx (1844) was the first to highlight that money was more than a token and method of exchange, it had a life of its own and had become a symbol of wealth.
28 John Murphy, 'What is Money, Why Do We Trust It, and Has It Become Too Confusing?', *BBC Radio 4 current affairs programme*, 26 March 2012.
29 This new information ecosystem is reshaping the power of communications. It is now possible for multiple competing voices to capitalise on the free flow of information and challenge the *status quo*. Digital empowerment has overturned traditional 'trusted' lines of communication.
30 Helen Z. Margetts, Peter John, Scott Hale, and Taha Yasseri, *Political Turbulence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

Trust and trustworthiness

One notion that is often conflated with trust is trustworthiness, perhaps because we have a natural disposition not only to trust, but also to judge the trustworthiness of others.[31] However, there is a clear difference: trustworthiness is demonstrated (by the sender) while trust must be given (by the recipient). Trustworthiness is a positive character trait or virtue that reflects a willingness to take responsibility, to perform a duty, or to discharge an obligation.[32] By contrast, trust is dependent on our psychological profile, our attitudes, and personal experience—and, although we all trust to some degree, the act of trusting is specific and episodic (for instance, we might trust a communicator on one topic but not on another). An individual's trustworthiness is seen as constant, whereas trust is more ambiguous; we can trust blindly, foolishly, and immorally, but by being trustworthy we are honest and dependable.[33]

Trust and distrust

Distrust has limited attraction for researchers but has nonetheless already produced an extensive array of multiple definitions and meanings. An individual can both trust and distrust simultaneously; the two phenomena interact to reduce the complexities of daily life, shaping and colouring our perceptions, aiding us in making decisions, enabling us to assess risks and uncertainty against a backdrop of incomplete information and

31 For example, they are conflated, amongst others, by Luhmann, in *Trust and Power*, and Bernard Williams in 'Formal Structures and Social Reality', in D. Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1988), pp. 3–8.

32 Aristotle defines a virtue as a character trait, not a passion or faculty (Nicomachean Ethics 2.5). Machiavelli, however, writes that leaders should trust wisely and cautiously, as 'one can make this generalisation about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers, they shun danger and are greedy for profit, while you treat them well, they are yours […] but when you are in danger they turn away', and yet, to ensure their leadership continues unchallenged, they should be perceived as being trustworthy by the wider populace. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 17. While Richard Christie and Florence. L. Geis, *Studies in Machiavellianism (Social Psychology Monographs)* (Academic Press Inc, 1970) first drew attention to Machiavellianism as a recognised personality trait in leadership, creating an instrument to measure, it is a more useful measure of reciprocity than trusting behaviour. Anna Gunnthorsdottir *et al.*, 'Using the Machiavellianism instrument to predict trustworthiness in a bargaining game', *Journal of Economic Psychology*, Vol. 23, № 1 (2002): 49–66.

33 See Diego Gambetta's work *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection* (Harvard University Press, 1996) investigating the effects of trust within southern Italian villages and the Mafia.

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knowledge.[34] While we often seek to align messages and actions in order to minimise cognitive dissonance, it is worth remembering that cognitive dissonance can itself be used to change attitudes and sway behaviours. Where trust is optimistic, distrust is pessimistic—and, consequently, the two are sometimes portrayed as polar opposites. Julian Rotter, however, argues that they work together, simultaneously being weighed and considered as part of the trust process: distrust must be overcome in order to trust. Distrust is not a lack of trust or a precursor to trust.[35] Equally, Karen Jones has written that trust and distrust are contraries, not contradictories.[36] Roy Lewicki and his associates are exemplary in challenging the dominant discourse in both the media and the political science literature that positions the trust of citizens as good and distrust as bad; for, in fact, the phenomena (i) are empirically separate, (ii) co-exist, and (iii) have different antecedents and consequences.[37] They are certainly not different points on the same continuum. All the while, they position their definitions as 'movements towards certainty'.[38]

Whereas theorists attempt to distinguish between trust and distrust, individuals must balance the two. The manner in which this is achieved reflects an individual's psychology as well as the situation she faces. As Piotr Sztompka remarks, 'the culture of trust developed within a democracy is due precisely to the institutionalisation of distrust within

34 Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory maintains that inconsistency between internal beliefs and external information gives rise to psychological discomfort. It comprises two hypotheses. First, individuals attempt to achieve consonance, or inner harmony, in order to reduce the discomfort. They have three methods to achieve this: (i) minimise the importance of the dissonant thought; (ii) outweigh the dissonant thought with consonant thoughts; or (iii) incorporate the dissonant thought into one's current belief system. Second, individuals try to avoid future dissonance by avoiding challenging situations and disregarding information that does not affirm their current beliefs. This is why conservatives tune to Fox and liberals to MSNBC—and why the Internet 'filter bubbles' are so significant. Psychologists refer to this second phenomenon as 'selective exposure' or 'confirmation bias'; see Joachim I. Krueger, *Social Judgment and Decision Making* (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2012). Cognitive dissonance has the potential to alter people's behaviour, but we cannot predict which of the three methods a person may choose to reduce psychological discomfort. Accordingly, attempts to sway opinion can sometimes backfire and reinforce an undesirable attitude.

35 Julian B. Rotter, 'Interpersonal Trust, Trustworthiness, & Gullibility', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 35, № 1 (1980): 1–7.

36 Karen Jones, 'Trust as an Affective Attitude', *Ethics*, Vol. 107, № 1(1996): 4–25, p. 7.

37 As Geraint Parry notes in 'Trust, distrust and consensus', *British Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 6, № 2 (1976): 129–43; Hardin, *Trust and Trustworthiness*.

38 Roy Lewicki, Daniel J. McAllister and Robert J. Bies, 'Trust and Distrust: New Relationships and Realities', *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 23, № 3 (1998): 438–58.

its construction'.[39] Democracy is built on an equilibrium of trust and distrust—and nowhere is this more clearly exemplified than in the US system of checks and balances.[40] If there is too much trust or too little distrust, the system becomes open to misuse. Consider the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy in the early 20th century.[41] Too little trust and too much distrust have the opposite effect—institutions become inert and/or social cohesion fractures, as in Palestine and Iraq.[42] The importance of balancing trust and distrust also sits behind the maxim to 'trust but verify' used by President Ronald Reagan, with respect to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 1987. Ten years later, President Clinton exhorted the public to 'trust in God but keep your powder dry', emboldened by the prospect of bipartisan co-operation to reach a balanced budget agreement.[43]

Trust versus reliance

The difference between trust and reliance is well documented. Trust is more than mere reliance. In both cases individuals accept a degree of vulnerability;[44] what distinguishes the two is the depth of that vulnerability and its actual or potential long-term effect. One relies on the postman to deliver our mail but we trust him not to read it.[45] If a letter is undelivered one is disappointed, even angry, but if it is

39 Democracy is 'a paradoxical mechanism'. Piotr Sztompka, *Trust, Distrust and the Paradox of Democracy* (WZB, 1997), p. 16.
40 Marek Kohn, *Trust: Self-Interest and the Common Good.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 7 and 123.
41 See Roger Griffin, *Fascism (Oxford Readers)* (Oxford Paperbacks, 1995) and Bruce, F. Pauley, *Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini: Totalitarianism in the Twentieth Century (European History),* (Harlan Davidson Inc, 1997) for insight into fascism and its policies of indoctrination.
42 'the Palestinian Authority are undermining democracy. [...] It also failed to prevent the murder of civilians in Gaza and instead [...] create a youth-led shadow government' as noted in Alaa Tartir's Foreign Policy article 'Palestinians Have Been Abandoned by Their Leaders', 24 May 2018. The current lack of trust in the system of governance and its leaders has produced a government that can no longer govern. Similarly, Sunni militants were able to seize control of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, in 2014 due largely to sectarian distrust, and lingers today following the expulsion of Daesh. See Heather M. Robinson, Ben Connable, David E. Thaler, Ali G. Scotten, *Sectarianism in the Middle East Implications for the United States*, RAND Corporation 2018.
43 Clinton's use of the quote (generally attributed to Oliver Cromwell) captures the ironic balance of trust and verification explained by Freedman: '…the need to police the implementation of a disarmament agreement arises from the fact that states do not trust each other to implement spontaneously, yet even establishing such a system requires a considerable degree of trust'. Lawrence Freedman, *Nuclear Disarmament: The Need for a New Theory,* (Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2009), p. 4.
44 On reliance see Baier, *Moral Prejudices*, p. 98. On vulnerability see Lahno, *On the Emotional*, p. 171.
45 A recognisable postal system was in place already in the twelfth century, but the Royal Mail was only set up in 1516. In 1635 Charles I opened it to the public. Use of the postal service became commonplace, yet it only became an offence to intentionally open or delay the post with the Postal Services Act of 2000. Duncan Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post: The Authorised History of the Royal Mail* (Penguin, 2012).

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read one feels betrayed. When our reliance has been transgressed we feel disappointed, but when our trust has been transgressed we feel betrayed.[46] The feeling of having been betrayed is a powerful human emotion and can be experienced only within the bounds of human interaction.[47] Betrayal is a deliberate and sometimes calculated action, the emotional response to which far and away exceeds the feeling of disappointment; not only does the emotion run deeper, but an act of betrayal presents an existential challenge.[48]

Disappointment is something that we all experience and is a 'fact of life', one that facilitates learning, development, and maturity. By contrast, betrayal can shake the 'very foundations of our relationship to the world or parts thereof' and thus presents 'a much deeper and [more] serious challenge in our everyday lives'.[49] Betrayal has the potential to change our very perceptions of the world around us and our place within it. Therefore, while we can, to some degree, account for disappointment in our deliberations and actions, and adapt our subsequent behaviour accordingly, betrayal challenges our very interpretation and perception of the world, together with our expectations of it. To re-establish trust, we may have to reinterpret and recreate our world.

Trust versus co-operation

Is trust a precondition for co-operation or does co-operation build trust? As Robert Axelrod demonstrated in his seminal work *The Evolution of Cooperation*, co-operation requires neither rationality nor trust.[50] More recently Karen Cook, Russell Hardin, and Margaret Levi have similarly argued that mutually beneficial co-operation is possible without trust, while highlighting a variety of mechanisms to enable, aid, and expedite co-operation in the absence of trust, such as facilitating mutually

46 Baier, *Moral Prejudices*, p. 99.
47 Betrayal is defined as exposing an individual to threat/danger, disclosing a deep confidence/secret, or breaking a promise/being disloyal.
48 Stephen Wright, 'Trust and Trustworthiness', *Philosophia*, Vol. 38, (2010) p. 617.
49 Lahno, 'On the Emotional', p. 177, and Lewis and Weigert, 'Trust as a Social Reality', p. 971, respectively.
50 Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

beneficial conditions, monitoring, sanctions, and legislation.[51]

For co-operation to work, the parties need simply to be able to identify each other and recognise that potential benefits outweigh any potential costs—something that might be easier between peers rather than between citizen and state. It is a commonality of interest that provides the motivation needed to cooperate. Parties co-operate to improve their position. That could mean maintaining a communal resource, constructing or sharing a jointly usable asset, collaborating in political activity, or simply being civil to one another. However, although both parties benefit from such arrangements, they may not do so equally, though the benefit in both cases must be sufficient to ensure co-operation. In doing so, co-operating parties operate within defined boundaries, which are in turn situated within a wider social system that can incentivise, coerce, or enforce co-operation. It is the very absence of trust that drives people to attempt to mitigate their risks.

Trust, belief, and ideology

Trust and belief are thought of, and used, interchangeably by many of us—the general public and strategic communications practitioners alike—but the concepts are actually quite different. The confusion arises when a rational, typically reductionist, approach is taken. A belief is an idea, a principle, an opinion, or even a faith that we accept as true. It provides us with a framework within which to approach and understand the world around us, shaping our perceptions and our reality. Beliefs are often neither irrefutable nor incontrovertible, but can be inflexible, persistent, and delusional.[52] While trust and belief both affect our actions, trust varies with each situation; it is episodic. Undoubtedly dynamic, trust is 'constructed out of a relationship [… and is] the product of communication in that relationship'.[53] Belief is more permanent ('I

51 Karen S. Cook *et al.*, *Cooperation without Trust?* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2005).
52 The conviction that the earth was flat was promoted in the Victorian Age by authors J.W. Draper, A.D. White, and W. Irving against an ideological backdrop that struggled with evolution, despite evidence to the contrary. Jeffrey B. Russell, 'The Myth of the Flat Earth', in *American Scientific Affiliation Conference* (Westmont College, 1997), p. 1.
53 Solomon & Flores, *Building Trust,* p. 51

believe in God', 'seeing is believing')—a constant, irrespective of the situation, and so not reliant on personal interaction.

In the same vein, the concepts of trust and ideology are linked, yet distinct. Ideology is a logically coherent system of ideas or systematic body of thought.[54] Increasingly, research suggests that ideologies—in thought, behaviour, and language—function 'as pre-packaged units of interpretation that spread because of basic human motives to understand the world, avoid existential threat, and maintain valued interpersonal relationships'.[55] Trust is easier when individuals can identify commonalities, such as ideological beliefs, for this reflects a sense of social solidarity.[56]

What is Trust?

Despite this ground clearing exercise, multiple types of trust remain—and rightly so; it would do violence to our understanding to smooth out its crooked timber. However, all kinds of trust involve an acceptance of vulnerability in the expectation of certain outcomes/behaviours in a specific situation (and time). To trust a communication is thus to accept what is said, and how and by whom it is communicated, regardless of the risk of doing so, and, where appropriate, to act upon it. Clearly, we need to operationalise this working definition for strategic communicators. To this end, it is helpful to consider three approaches to trust in the literature: rationalist, trust building, and social practice. What they share

54 While there are many different definitions of ideology, the consensus is that an ideology is a system of ideas. See Philip, E. Converse, 'The nature of belief systems in mass publics', Critical Review, Vol. 18, № 1–3, (2006) 1–74; Herbert McClosky, 'Consensus and Ideology in American Politics', The American Political Science Review, Vol. 58, No. 2, (1964): 361–82; and W. A. Mullins, 'Sartori's concept of ideology: a dissent and an alternative in', in A.R. Wilcox (ed.), Public Opinion and Political Attitudes: A Reader (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974)77–87.
55 John T. Jost, Alison Ledgerwood, and Curtis T. Hardin, 'Shared Reality, System Justification, and the Relational Basis of Ideological Beliefs', *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2(1)(2008): 171–86, Abstract; 'It is mainly in discourse that ideologies are transmitted and meanings and values are learned and taught [...] which in turn also influences how we acquire, learn or change ideologies.' S.S. Nahrkhalaji, *Language , Ideology and Power: a Critical Approach to Political Discourse*, 2007, p. 1.
56 Researchers have found that trust prospers in more homogenous settings where an identification-based trust can flourish—see R. M. Kramer and J. Wei, 'Social uncertainty and the problem of trust in social groups: The Social Self in Doubt.', in T.R. Tyler et al. (eds), *The psychology of the social self* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlboum Associates, 1999): 145–68; and R. Lewicki and B. Bunker, 'Developing and Maintaining Trust in Working Relationships', in R.M Kramer & T.R Tyler (eds), *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of theory and research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996): 114–39—as shared memberships (when relevant) can reduce individual distinctions and simplify the trusting process. John C. Turner, *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Vol. 94. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

is a belief that trust involves a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioural components.[57]

- Cognitive—risks and rewards are calculated; a rational assessment must be made as knowledge-driven trust presumes incomplete information and a degree of uncertainty (full knowledge does not require trust)
- Affective—an individual's past experiences and their own propensity to trust play a role
- Behavioural—an individual's past experiences of other people and/or institutions and that individual's own propensity to be reliable are used to predict trustworthiness

Although all three feature in any plausible account of trusted communication, the precise mix changes to reflect the message, the messenger, and the medium, as well as local cultural and social norms. However, in the course of our discussion, we shall see that existing accounts omit two key components: the emotional and the temporal.

- The Emotional—emotions are tied to our perception of the world around us. By incorporating emotion into the concept of trust, a world of possibilities opens up to us.
- The Temporal—the past experiences of the parties involved, together with present conditions and available information/ knowledge, are used to envisage the future when deciding whether or not to trust.

Students of trust initially followed a rationalist account, but lacunae led some commentators towards a trust building approach. This introduced two fundamental elements—the emotional and the temporal—which, I

57 Bernd Lahno, 'Three Aspects of Interpersonal Trust', Analyse & Kritik, Vol. 26, № 2 (2004): 30–47; Niklas Luhmann, *Trust and power* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1979); D. Harrison McKnight and Norman L. Chervany, 'The Meanings of Trust', Working Paper series, WP 96-04 (University of Minnesota MIS Research Center,1996).

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argue, merit an even greater explanatory role. Moreover, once this has been granted, it is inevitable that we also admit the importance of social practice.

Rationalist

Rational choices and theories of exchange have dominated the slim but growing literature on trust, not least because several influential philosophical treatments have assumed that the actions of both trustee and trustor, sender and recipient, can be understood through the lens of instrumental rationality.[58]

James Samuel Coleman provides the most austere version of this approach, reducing the concept to a rational deliberation.[59] He asserts that 'the elements confronting the potential trustor are nothing more or less than the considerations a rational actor applies in deciding whether to place a bet'.[60] In trusting a communication, therefore, the individual is exposed to risk, and within the framework of the theory of rational choice, the action of trusting becomes a simple risk and reward scenario for sender and recipient.

Several authors offer a richer account. Annette Baier, for instance, claims that 'when I trust another, I depend on her goodwill towards me'.[61] She is by no means alone in taking this stance.[62] Yet this interpretation still cannot deal with the many instances where goodwill (a favourable disposition or attitude towards another person) is neither necessary nor sufficient for a communication to be trusted. Onora O'Neill demonstrated this shortcoming with the doctor-patient scenario: while one may trust a doctor personally as a friend or colleague, one trusts his/her medical judgement and professionalism based on their years of training, their professional qualifications, and the rules and regulations

58 It places a rational self-interest at the heart of its construction of trust.
59 James Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990)
60 Ibid., p. 99.
61 Annette C. Baier, *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics.* (Harvard University Press, 1995) p. 99.
62 Lawrence C. Becker, 'Trust as Noncognitive Security about Motives', *Ethics*, Vol. 107, № 1 (1996): 43–61.

under which they operate, together with the checks and balances that maintain the integrity of their profession,[63] while recognising they bear their patients no particular good or ill will.[64]

Equally, Richard Holton highlighted that a reliance on goodwill does not necessitate trust; a con man may actually rely on the goodwill of his victims but never trusts them.[65] He regards trust as laden with normative expectations. 'When you trust someone to do something, you rely on them to do it; and they regard that reliance in a certain way: you have a readiness to feel betrayal should it be disappointed, and gratitude should it be upheld'. As with Baier's approach, however, this definition is unable to account for the wide variety of instances of trusted communication and the different roles of those involved.[66] For it implies an obligation that is often absent and reduces trust to a matter of reliance (which is sharply distinguished below).

Russell Hardin presents the most comprehensive rationalist account of trust.[67] His work is predicated on the exclusive application of rational choice theory: 'A trusts B because A thinks it is in B's interest to take his or her own interest in the relevant matter seriously', which in turn means that B values an ongoing relationship with A.[68] Trust is therefore based on the calculated interests and preferences of others, but places them in context; that is, the parties involved have a specific role to play, which in turn dictates their preferences and behaviour in any given scenario. Yet Hardin's theory thereby negates the very need to speak of a 'trusted' communication (or communicator) since, with sufficient information about the interests of others, one can make an informed rational decision. Trust is crowded out.

63 Although in this scenario trusting a doctor on the personal and professional levels are two separate things, they may overlap and/or conflict
64 Onora O'Neill, *A Question of Trust: The BBC Reith Lectures 2002*. (Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 14.
65 Richard Holton, 'Deciding to Trust, Coming to Believe', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 72, № 1 (1994): 63–76.
66 Ibid., p. 67.
67 Russell Hardin, *Trust and Trustworthiness* (Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 1996).
68 Laszlo Zsolnai, 'The Rationality of Trust', *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 32, № 3 (2005): 268–69.

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As with other rationalist theories of trust, therefore, it remains the case that the 'concomitant conception of agency portrays rational mono-dimensional actors whose behaviour is calculable if sufficient knowledge about incentives, objectives and preferences are [sic] known'.[69] All things being equal, senders and recipients are interchangeable.[70] In the search for a universal definition of trust, such a simplistic and reductionist approach does little to further our understanding of trust, and only highlights the paucity of a purely rationalist account that ignores the complexity of real life communication and dialogue.[71]

Similarly, the use of rationalist theory to explain the emergence of trusted communication by a leap of faith relegates the act of communication to effect rather than to cause: it is the result of pre-existing trust rather than a precondition to creating new trust.[72] For, in reality, trust does not emerge because of a leap of faith but reflects an existing attitude; in short, trust in communications increases over time through repeated, positive interactions.

While the rational approach still dominates—not least because it can be modelled, measured, and 'validated'—it conflates co-operation and reciprocity with trust.[73] Accordingly, there is a growing sentiment among some academics that 'trust will remain elusive if we fail to grasp its emotional basis'. Consequently, they support a more multi-disciplinary

69 Torsten Michel, '[Time to Get Emotional: Trust, Rationality and the Spectre of Manipulative Mentality]' (Bristol, 2011), p. 7.
70 Martin Hollis, *Trust within Reason.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 10–14.
71 Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Jonathan Mercer, 'Rationality and Psychology in International Politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 59, № 1 (2005): 95.
72 Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's often referenced phrase 'leap of faith' is more accurately rendered as a 'leap into faith', and for him is a prerequisite for accepting Christianity. It is usually taken to mean believing or trusting in something without robust and supportable empirical evidence. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript: Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) pp. 263–66.
73 Coleman, *Foundations*; Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation.* (New York: Basic Books,1984); Partha Dasgupta, '[Trust as a Commodity]', in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988): 49–72. Although these three authors have made use of Game Theory, the Prisoner's Dilemma, and the Assurance Game for some time, this approach is criticised not only for assuming individuals are rational decision-makers seeking to maximise their utility/value but also because the approach conflated co-operation and reciprocity with trust. Beset with problems of context and over-simplification, they continue to be used as they provide trust research with empirical data. However, their wider value is limited by the difficulties surrounding the measurement of trust. See Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

approach to trust.[74] They are right to do so: it is this human factor that not only distinguishes trust, but holds the key to unlocking it.

Trust-building

Consider the nature and emergence of trust. Practitioners of strategic communications are familiar with models that focus on trust-building in conflict situations.[75] For instance, two countries overcome their hostilities by implementing mutually reassuring actions (exchanging prisoners, calling a ceasefire, demobilising forces) within an agreed system of transparent checks and balances (independent monitoring). Small and largely symbolic steps are discussed and agreed upon between parties; provided these are adhered to, confidence is built over time. Do you need trust if you have confidence?

Nicholas Wheeler notes that the strategic dialogue between Brazil and Argentina over their nuclear facilities was an instance of successful trust-building in the 1980s.[76] A cooperative agreement and public expressions of trust regarding each other's peaceful nuclear intentions laid the foundations. Meanwhile the personal commitment of both Presidents Raúl Alfonsín and José Sarnay led to transparent confidence- and security-building measures. This included military-to-military contact, scientific and technical exchanges, a joint nuclear policy committee, and reciprocal nuclear site visits.[77] Wheeler also discusses the relationship between India and Pakistan, regarding their dialogue to overcome mutual distrust in February 1999 as a 'leap of trust', stressing how politically risky it was for Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to travel on the inaugural

74 Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Trust building between enemies in the nuclear age', Paper delivered to the All-Wales Peace Conference, 22 September 2007, p. 6.
75 See Charles E. Osgood's conception of graduated reciprocation in tension reduction in *An Alternative To War Or Surrender* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1962) and Andrew, Kydd's, model of costly signalling in *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) model of costly signalling.
76 Rodrigo Mallea, Matias Spektor, and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'The Origins of Nuclear Cooperation: A Critical Oral History between Argentina and, A joint conference between FGV, ICCS and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Rio de Janeiro, 21–23 March 2012.
77 Adam Daniel Rotfeld, 'Confidence- and Security-building Measures (CSBMs) in the Modern Context: The European Experience 1', *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 20, № 1 (2008): 3–12.

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Delhi-Lahore bus to meet his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif.[78] Vajpayee signalled his intent and Sharif responded favourably, which made it possible for the two men to build a rapport that enabled them temporarily to bypass the traditional routes of state communication. Unfortunately, due to the Kargil Crisis, a border conflict in Kashmir in May–July 1999 that wrecked the bilateral talks, we can only speculate on the long-term impact of their efforts.[79]

Yet increased transparency, incentives, and a formalised system of interactions do not constitute trust, since trust is neither present nor required in such circumstances. As Mercer pithily put it, 'if trust depends on external evidence, transparency, iteration, or incentives, then trust adds nothing to the explanation'; indeed, such arrangements 'eliminate the need for, and the opportunity for, trust'. Furthermore, Wheeler and Ken Booth point out that the leap of faith required to kick-start this process may be an expression of already-present trust.[80] Rationalist theories are therefore incomplete, at best: they do not, and cannot, explain how and why trust emerges. Consequently, the role of human agency becomes either a simple reflection of the risk profile of the participants, or a readily available explanation when trust-building exercises fail. The very need for checks and balances, norms, procedures, regulations, routines, and institutionalisation required in a more functional approach to trust building highlights a lack of trust. Trusted communication 'cannot be derived from a decision-making process in which we simply judge the risks and opportunities involved', even when a token human element is added.[81]

78 N. J. Wheeler, '"I Had Gone to Lahore With a Message of Goodwill but in Return We Got Kargil": The Promise and Perils of 'Leaps of Trust' in India-Pakistan Relations', *India Review*, Vol. 9, № 3 (2010): 319–44.
79 A dispute over Pakistani-occupied Indian army lookout posts in Kashmir, May–July 1999.
80 Michel, 'Time to Get Emotional', p. 11
81 Bernd Lahno, 'On the Emotional Character of Trust', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, Vol. 4, № 2 (2001): 172–73.

We therefore need an account fit for humans as they exist, not as they are modelled. Psychological profiles have been used to add emotion to trust;[82] this acknowledges that individuals are unique, different in both their appetite for risk and their propensity to trust. Yet, since both are relative to the individual and the situation in question, they are difficult to measure and offer little to further one's understanding of trusted communication.[83]

Interlude: emotional and temporal elements

When asked to describe when, and why, we trust communication, we usually fall back on trite remarks, such as 'because the messenger/medium/message has never let me down in the past'. At best these are approximations; at worst, we are post-rationalising our behaviour. So how can one incorporate emotions into an approach to trust? Torsten Michel has suggested an approach based on *phronesis*,[84] or practical wisdom.[85] Equally, Alasdair MacIntyre points out that the unpredictability of human beings and human life requires a focus on practical experience. 'Trust then appears as a form of emotive coping that involves practical forms of wisdom on the part of the trusting agent rather than an abstractly reasoned and technically implementable decision'.[86] For practitioners, there is hence a clear distinction between the types of trusted communication being outlined and the quality of the trust involved; the first is functional in nature, the second is emotive and far more than the sum and outcome of rational decision-making.[87] As Bernd Lahno remarks, 'genuine trust is an emotion and emotions are, in general, not subject to direct rational control'.[88]

82 An emotion is the genuine or feigned display of a feeling (a personal and autobiographical sensation), an internal state broadcast to the world, or a contrivance displayed in order to fulfil social expectations. Although infants display emotions, they do not have the biographical or language skills to experience feelings—their emotions are direct expressions of affect. Laura E. Berk, 'Emotional Development', in L. E. Berk (ed.) *Child Development* (Pearson, 2012), pp. 398–443.
83 Holton, 'Deciding to Trust', p. 63
84 *Phronesis* is understood by Aristotle to be a type of wisdom, referred to as practical wisdom (and the process of good decision-making) or prudence, combining rational thought with experience, practical knowledge, and decorum. It is concerned with the context and specifics of a situation. Flyvbjerg refers to it as 'practical knowledge and practical ethics'. Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp. 56–57.
85 Practical wisdom is interpreted as the ability to make good decisions and deliver on them. For further discussion see Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 6–16.
86 Michel, 'Time to Get Emotional', p. 17.
87 Olli Lagerspetz, *Trust: The Tacit Demand* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), pp. 38–39.
88 Lahno, 'On the Emotional', p. 172.

The wider debate between pursuing a rational versus an emotional approach to trusted communication, rather than a combination of the two, will endure as long as we focus on the abstract nature of trust rather than the experience of practitioners.[89] Given that the decision to trust is more often taken in an instant and unconsciously, it seems unlikely that rational abstraction will provide us with deeper insight.

Nonetheless, there remains a reluctance to focus on emotion. Some argue that trust is a performative quality of action rather than a conscious decision. Since Plato propounded his doctrine of a tripartite soul, Western thought has portrayed emotions as dysfunctional, irrational, and something we ought to control.[90] However, there is an emerging viewpoint suggesting that emotions are not only significant but a form of wisdom, albeit not the classical one.[91] Indeed, some advocate a highly integrative view where emotions are a type of perception and play a crucial role in rational beliefs, desires, and decisions that circumvent the impasse of pure reason.[92] In such scenarios the emotional component of trust comes to the fore and trust is 'necessarily tied to a particular perception of the world, or some part of the world', influencing the way we think and act and, therefore, 'cannot be understood as the immediate result of rational calculation'.[93]

It is in pursuing the role that trust plays in interacting with, refreshing, and altering our perceptions of the world, that we may gain more nuanced insight into whether and how communication is trusted. Such an approach situates human agency inescapably in context; there is no abstraction, no outside theoretical view.[94] Individuals appear no longer as already formed

89 Lahno, 'On the Emotional', p. 176.
90 Jonathan Haidt, 'The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment', *Psychological Review*, Vol. 108, № 4 (2001): 814–34.
91 David M. Buss, 'Cognitive Biases and Emotional Wisdom in the Evolution of the Conflict between the Sexes', *American Psychologist Society*, Vol. 10, № 6 (2001): 219–23; Scherer, Klaus R., 'On the Rationality of Emotions: Or, When are Emotions Rational?', *Social Science Information*, Vol. 50, № 3–4 (2011): 330–50.
Scherer suggests 'that emotions can be assessed as to whether, in particular situations, they are adaptive (functional), based on well-grounded inference from available information [… and] considered as reasonable by others'.
92 Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge University Press, 1982).
93 Lahno, 'On the Emotional', p. 177.
94 Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being in the World: Commentary on Heidegger's 'Being and Time'* (MIT Press, 1991).

'rational monads', but as agents who interact within a constantly evolving world, opening up infinite possibilities and avenues for action.[95]

By acknowledging the limitations of a rationalist approach, and the associated shortcomings of trust-building, it becomes clear that a different approach is required. As society and environment are constantly changing, communications—especially strategic communications—must be understood as dynamically interactive. A useful way forward is to see trust as a social practice.

Social practice

Helpful material can be found in the work of some contemporary sociologists, who regard trust as a social practice.[96] They stress that it is the responsibility and commitment of both parties that facilitate trusted communication.[97] Trust in such an approach 'is historical, but it is not so much tied to the past as it is pregnant with the future'.[98] If trusted communication is viewed as a process, its creation, development, and maintenance can be seen as a form of agency.[99]

95 Brian Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed its Spots: The Evolution of Complexity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 45–46.
96 Trust is seen as a dependent variable (Coleman, *Foundations*), an independent variable (Niklas Luhmann, 'Familiarity, Confidence, Trust: Problems and Alternatives', in Diego Gambetta, (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 1988), pp. 94–107), or a process (Dmitri M. Khodyakov, 'Trust as a Process: A Three-Dimensional Approach', *Sociology*, Vol. 41, № 1 (2007): 115–32).
97 See Khodyahov's description of trust as a two-way process in *Trust as a Process*, p. 125.
98 R.C. Solomon & F. Flores, *Building Trust in Business, Politics, Relationships, and Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 15.
99 Within sociology, functionalism, symbolic interactionism and conflict theory, whether implicitly or explicitly, draw on the concepts of trust and distrust to understand the social processes that underpin social actions, social structure and functions. Functionalists' macro-perspective—Talcott, Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action: 001*, 2nd Edition (Free Press, 1967); Robert, K. Merton, *On Social Structure and Science (Heritage of Sociology Series),* (University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Samuel, P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Soci*eties (Yale University Press, 1973)—emphasises the pre-eminence of an orderly social world over its constituent parts, often with biological analogies, while socialisation of the individual into society is achieved through the internalisation of norms and values. This requires trust. On the other hand, symbolic interactionists—Herbert Blumer, 'Collective Behavior', in A.M. Lee (ed.), *Principles of Sociology*, 3rd Edition (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1969), pp. 219–88; and George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (The University of Chicago Press, 1969)—with their focus on the micro, see '…humans as active, creative participants who construct their social world and are not passive conforming objects of socialisation' and therefore focus on cohesive systems and a 'more changeable continually re-adjusting social process'. C. Hunter & K. McClelland, 'Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology', in S. J. Ferguson (ed.), *Mapping the Social Landscape: Readings in Sociology*, 7th Edition (McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages, 2012), p. 36. Garfinkel's 1967 trust experiments specifically question how individuals who interact can create the illusion of a shared social order. In marked contrast, conflict theorists—C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite (Galaxy Books)*, (Oxford University Press Inc., 1956); Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Progress Publishers, 1969); and Randall Collins, *Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science* (Academic Press Inc, 1975)—emphasise domination, power and manipulation in maintaining social order, highlighting the interaction of the concepts of trust and distrust. Change is seen as rapid and disorganised.

It is part of our human nature to imagine, evaluate, and assess the various options available to us against a backdrop of past experiences, norms, and traditions, in combination with our hopes and aspirations for the future—all the while recognising the ever-present risks and uncertainty. Trust is necessary precisely because humans lack full knowledge. In this perspective, trusted communication is always future-oriented. Understood as a social practice, trust goes beyond the dominant rational-choice perspective by incorporating the emotional, often indefinable, human element in recognition of the risks and uncertainty we perpetually face in the ever-changing social-psychological environs in which we live. Moreover, drawing on the specific nexus of societal norms, habits, and traditions in question, the inclusive nature of trust makes it a social practice. Dmitry Khodyakov has defined trust as 'a process of constant imaginative anticipation of the reliability of the other party's actions based on (1) the reputation of the partner and the actor; (2) the evaluation of the current circumstances of action; (3) assumptions about the partner's actions; and (4) the belief in the honesty and morality of the other side'.[100]

Niklas Luhmann's work offers insight into the social practice approach to trust; while his writings are not easy to grasp at first reading, they are rich and rewarding for practitioners of strategic communications. He argues that society actually 'consists of meaningful communications'[101] rather than of people and objects. Of particular relevance to the current inquiry, all these communications are underpinned by the 'irreducible and multidimensional social reality' that is trust.[102]

Luhmann differentiates between personal, impersonal, institutional, and system trust. He rightly emphasises that what unites them all is emotion.[103] As Jocelyn Pixley notes: 'personal trust is based on familiarity and rests

100 Khodyakov, *Trust as a Process* p. 126.
101 'It cannot be conceived as a finite and bounded set of things and events (in the classical sense of *a universitas rerum* or *aggregatio corporum*)'. Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 232.
102 David J. Lewis and Andrew J. Weigert, 'Trust as a Social Reality', *Social Forces*, Vol. 63, № 4 (1985): 967–85, p. 968.
103 Luhmann, *Trust and Power*, pp. 22 and 81.

on emotional bonds (the embeddedness thesis), whereas system trust, for example, entails taking a conscious risk by "renouncing" further information and taking a "wary indifference"—hardly non-emotional'.[104]

Luhmann identifies three limiting factors that specifically apply to communicative efficacy. First, meaning is ambiguous: 'only in context can meaning be understood, and context is, initially, supplied by one's own perceptual field and memory'.[105] Second, 'it is improbable for a communication to reach more persons than are present in a concrete situation, and this improbability grows if one makes the additional demand that the communication be reproduced unchanged'.[106] Third, 'even if a communication is understood by the person it reaches, this does not guarantee that it is accepted and followed'.[107]

It helps to place Luhmann's writing in the agency-structure debate, where trust takes centre stage as an essential ingredient for the smooth-functioning of society and thereby facilitates individual and societal wellbeing. Without trust, only very simple forms of human co-operation—effectively, those which can be fully transacted on the spot—are possible.[108] In contrast to a rational-choice interpretation of trust, his 'theory of trust presupposes a theory of time', because trust has 'a problematic relationship with time. To show trust is to anticipate the future. It is to behave as though the future were certain'.[109] Trust is therefore the means whereby an uncertain future is given the semblance of certainty so that otherwise unachievable outcomes are attained.[110]

104 Jocelyn Pixley, 'Impersonal Trust in Global Mediating Organizations', *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 42, № 4 (Winter, 1999), pp. 647–71.
105 Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) p. 158.
106 Ibid., p.158.
107 Ibid.
108 In this context, rationality does not refer to the decisions concerning action, but the meaningfulness of the action taken. Luhmann, *Trust and Power*, p. 88.
109 Ibid., p. 10.
110 Ibid., pp. 10 and 25.

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Non-personal trust

All three approaches make clear that there are inevitably different kinds of trust. Strategic communicators are primarily concerned with institutional trust, which is situated in the nexus between individuals and the organisations that are intended to represent them; indeed, it is the means by which the latter are legitimised.[111] This differs from trust between individuals as it presupposes 'no encounters at all with the individuals or groups who are in some way "responsible" for them'.[112] However, it is a vital coping mechanism that simplifies the complexities of everyday life. When trusting in institutional communication, we expect certain behaviours, actions, and outcomes, which in turn provide us with a degree of certainty in a complex and uncertain world. Institutional trust enables us to look forward more optimistically, plan for and invest in the future, and make long-term commitments. If there is a high degree of uncertainty, we focus on the short term. This affects, among other things, our actions, the economy, and government strategy.

Trust in organisational communication is therefore a reflection of its 'perceived legitimacy, technical competence, and ability to perform assigned duties efficiently'.[113] Therefore, it is more of a calculated decision rather than pure trust.[114] This kind of trust can easily be shaken and lost when expectations of service, integrity, and perhaps even value for money, are not met.[115] This is not to say that citizens always fail to distinguish between the shortcomings of an official and the institution represented by that official.[116] Furthermore, the lack of such trust in a particular bureaucratic department does not necessarily

111 William Mishler, and Richard Rose, 'What are the Origins of Political Trust? Testing Institutional and Cultural Theories in Post-Communist Societies', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 34, № 1 (February, 2001): pp. 30–62.
112Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*. Vol. 20. (Oxford, England: Polity Press, 1984), p. 83.
113 Khodyakov, *Trust as a Process*, p. 123.
114 Margaret Levi defines trust as only existing between individuals, yet individuals and institutions can be trustworthy. See Margaret, Levi, 'A State of Trust', in Valerie Braithwaite and Margaret Levi (eds), *Trust and Governance* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998), pp. 77–101.
115 Examples include the MP expenses scandals, the NSA spying debacle, the 'sexing-up' of the dossier on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Brexit parliamentary debacle.
116 Jack Citrin, 'Comment: The Political Relevance of Trust in Government', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 68, № 3 (1974): 973–88, p. 974.

result in a boycott; for this to happen, there would need to be a widespread breakdown in a regime's power, authority, and perceived legitimacy.[117]

We are all born into some system of governance with which we interact from an early age[118]—even in so-called failed states or geographically isolated communities. On the one hand, we come to understand the institutional structures and systems within which we live; on the other, we reinforce them through use. We both learn the rules of the game and play the game. An upshot is that we cannot step outside our reality objectively to evaluate or to challenge what is in place, since our reaction is shaped and coloured by it.[119] This observation is key to strategic communications.

There are two competing schools of thought to consider. Cultural theorists argue that non-personal trust is determined by cultural norms, habits, and socialisation; personal trust, by contrast, is projected or superimposed onto political and other institutions.[120] Institutional theorists take a rather different approach, linking trust to satisfactory performance, and describing it as a rational consequence of met expectations.[121] While these explanations are very different, they are not mutually exclusive, but complement and reinforce each other; each shares 'the fundamental assumption that trust is learned and linked at some level to experience'.[122]

117 During the banking crisis of 2007–08, trust in bankers plummeted yet societies remained reliant on the banking system. Losing trust in the underlying system would have created chaos, similar to the panic of 1930. Elmus Wicker details the effects of the 1930s crash in *The Banking Panics of the Great Depression*. (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 42–45, 138–141.
118 The distinction lies not in the form, but in the degree of governance. Lippman observed that '…there is no greater necessity for men [to] be governed, self-governed if possible, well-governed if they are fortunate, but in any event, governed'. Walter Lippmann, 'Today and Tomorrow', *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 December 1963, p. 24.
119 Communitarians such as Michael, J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Harvard University Press, 1992).
120 See Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture Revisited*, Revised ed. (Sage Publications, 1989); Robert D Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000); and Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton University Press, 1997).
121 See Coleman, *Foundations*; Dasgupta, '*Trust as a Commodity*'; and M. J. Hetherington, *Why Trust Matters: Declining Political Trust and the Demise of American Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
122 Mishler & Rose, '*What are the origins*', pp. 8–9.

Citizens of Western nations rely on government in their everyday lives,[123] changing the relationship between state and citizen[124] and thereby shifting the boundary between the 'public' and 'private' spheres. Nineteenth-century individuals had few expectations of their governments beyond basic provisions (defence, law and order, currency management, trade support). Participation in politics was restricted and referred to as a prize, not a birthright. The relationship between government and society was limited: government provided a framework, but society ran itself. However, a combination of national and international pressures, including but not limited to a changing political and social landscape, the pressure of war, internationalisation and globalisation, demographic growth, and scientific advancement, significantly increased expectations of and demands upon the state in the following century.[125] In seeking to account for and improve on rapidly changing societal conditions, the state has expanded its role and encroached upon the private sphere. Having taken on a larger role in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, governments have been increasingly criticised, not only for their shortcomings, but for creating 'servile' citizens and 'nanny states', leading to a something for nothing culture that has changed the perception of citizens' rights.[126]

However, there is a paradox. While governments require trust to function effectively, let alone to expand their activity, recent polling data suggest that impersonal or political trust is diminishing. So how does the

123 'Institutions by definition are the more enduring features of social life.' Giddens lists—institutional orders, modes of discourse, political institutions, economic institutions, and legal institutions. Giddens, Constitution of Society, pages 24 and 31, respectively.
124 J. Harris 'Society and the state in twentieth-century Britain', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950 Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 63–118; Keith Middlemas, *Politics in an Industrial Society: The Experience of the British System Since 1911*. (HarperCollins, 1979); and Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture Revisited.*
125 In Britain the modern welfare system began with the Old Age Pension Act (1908), the National Insurance Act (1911), the Employment Act (1934), and the National Health Service (1948). Overall government spending increased from 9.4% of GDP around the year 1870 to 43% in 1996 (in France the increase was from 12.6% to 55% and in Germany from 10% to 49.1% 1870–1996 respectively). Vito Tanzi and Ludger Schuknecht, *Public Spending in the 20th Century: A Global Perspective.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 6.
126 Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State.* (1912; Cosimo Classics, 2007), pp. 95–113. Iain MacLeod MP coined the term, referring to '…what I like to call the nanny state' in his column in *The Spectator* (3 December 1965), to describe an interfering/overbearing state that sought to make decisions for its citizens that they might otherwise make for themselves.

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system continue to work?[127] A move to increase transparency is seen as the way to rebuild trust, yet this approach may well increase the distance between the individual and the institution: concomitant form-filling reduces human interaction and, moreover, overloads citizens with data they cannot hope to digest. Accordingly, it reduces the need for trust while increasing expectations. A more fruitful alternative is to expand the dialogue between individuals and institutions: to view non-personal trust similarly to the way we view personal trust—not only from rational and trust building perspectives, but as a social practice that requires creation, development, and maintenance.[128]

Conclusion

We have covered a lot of territory. What should be clear is that, although trust has become a ubiquitous term in twenty-first century discourse, it is rarely defined. Strategic communicators must develop a better understanding of what trust means if they are to create, maintain, and rebuild it. The British Government's Communication Plan 2018/19, a glossy twenty-eight-page document, refers to trust on four occasions: 'using active listening to build trust', 'maximis[ing] the role of government communications in challenging declining trust', 'working alongside trusted partners', and finally, 'ensuring communicators are visible, trusted advisors to their Ministers and senior executives'. Yet at no point is the term 'trust' defined. Given the lack of clarity, how can this trust be implemented, measured, or managed?

The short answer is that it can't. Trust is a deeply nuanced concept that underpins our daily interactions and communications. It influences how information is exchanged and absorbed, and in doing so, trust shapes our understanding of the world around us. Yet it remains under-researched.

127 Citrin, 'Comment: The Political Relevance', Seymour, M. Lipset and William Schneider, 'The Confidence Gap during the Reagan Years 1981–1987', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 102, No. 1, (1987) pp. 1–23; S. C. Craig, *Broken Contract? Changing Relationships Between Americans And Their Government (Transforming American Politics),* (Westview Press, 1996); and Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, have charted the extraordinary collapse of political trust, sometimes referred to as 'trust'.
128 Geoff Mulgan, *The Art of Public Strategy: Mobilizing Power and Knowledge for the Common Good.* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 227.

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By better understanding trust, practitioners of strategic communications would be better placed to succeed where they would otherwise fall short. This article has sought to take the first steps in defining trust and differentiating it from similar concepts.

But this is only the beginning of a much-needed conversation about the role of trust in strategic communications. The dominant view sets trust and distrust as binary opposites; this view, rather than build social cohesion, contributes to a widening of social fractures. It is counterproductive. This view also has a secondary effect: over time it changes the meaning and very nature of trust. Yet there is a more fundamental issue—in seeking to influence behaviour by changing attitudes, should governments even be harnessing trust? A breakdown of trust can lead to a sense of betrayal, which can shake the very foundations of one's world view. Should governments therefore adopt a lower risk approach, with a focus on building confidence in systems instead?

Sometimes. However, there are surely occasions on which governments need more than confidence; they require trust. For instance, many European governments had to deal with two world wars, the decline of Empire, closer ties with Europe and, now, a resurgent populism that has manifested itself in Brexit and growing protectionism. Yet in these cases, practitioners can only succeed if they understand what they are dealing with. They need a working knowledge of trust.

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