Trust in People, Organizations, and Government: A Generic Model

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ABSTRACT

There have been many efforts to model trust at different levels of society and in a variety of contexts, however much confusion remains regarding the various concepts, types and levels of trust. In order to give trust researchers a common ground for communicating their findings, a generic model of trust that relates conceptually to various levels of social interaction is needed. To this end, and based on a literature review, trust faces and types were extracted from the literature and they were put together to form a general model of trust. This paper presents a three-tiered model of trust. The first tier of the model designates three major levels of trust: Individual (micro), Institutional (meso), and Governmental (macro). The second tier differentiates seven kinds of trust relationships in society: Person-to-Person(s), Person-to-Organization(s), Person-to-System(s), Person-to-Government, Organization-to-Organization(s), Organization(s)-to-Government, and Government-to-Government(s). The third tier describes the related concepts and aspects of trust at each level of society.

KEYWORDS
Credibility, GEMOT, Government, Model, Organizations, Review, System, Trust

INTRODUCTION

Trust is among the main empowerment accelerators for states (Castells, 2009, p. 16), organizations, and individuals and it is an essential factor for interactions and collaborations in community (Flavián et al., 2006). Trust is also among the main influencing factors on people’s intention to use the e-government services (Carter & Bélanger, 2005). However, the concept of trust is “elusive” and “fleeting” (Haukkala et al., 2015, p. 3), “confusing” (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Shapiro, 1987) and “vague” (McKnight & Chervany, 2000). Thus, the concept of trust remains “abstract” and “complex,” which makes defining it and its building blocks challenging (Wang & Emurian, 2005, p. 107). Even within specific fields of research, there is not a unique definition of trust. Therefore, the definition of trust is very context-related or “situation-specific” (Frank, 1988; Seckler et al., 2015).

Trust is defined differently in various disciplines. For example, in psychology, trust is defined as the “reliance upon the characteristics of an object, or the occurrence of an event, or the behavior of a person in order to achieve a desired but uncertain objective in a risky situation” (Giffin, 1967, p. 105). While in philosophy, trust is “accepted vulnerability to another’s possible but not expected ill will (or lack of good will) toward one” (Baier, 1986, p. 235). Alternatively, in sociology, trust is termed as “a property of collective units” (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 968). For the purposes of this study, we use the noted sociological definition of trust. In this regard, based on the level of social interactions of actors, their trust behavior gradually evolves from “mistrust” to “trusting.” (Magrath & Hardy, 1989, p. 385). This conception of trust is relational, and it is “applicable” to all levels of interactions of actors (people, institutions and systems) in society (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 968).
Within the field of trust research, it is generally agreed that trust is a “multi-dimensional” construct (Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Flavián et al., 2006; Casaló et al., 2007; Casaló & Cisneros, 2008). However, there is not a consensus on the dimensions of trust (Wang & Emurian, 2005). Some researchers believe that trust is composed of three elements: “benevolence,” “honesty,” and “competence” (e.g., Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Casaló et al., 2007; Casaló & Cisneros, 2008; Flavián et al., 2006). Some others point out that specific beliefs of “integrity,” “ability,” and “benevolence” are precedents for general trust (Gefen, 2002). In addition, many researchers have considered the conceptualization of trust. For example, Blomqvist’s research shows that common synonyms of trust are “competence,” “credibility,” “confidence,” “faith,” “hope,” “loyalty,” and “reliance” (Blomqvist, 1997, p. 279) and finally, Hardin defines trust as a “three-part relationships: person A trusts person B to do X” (Hardin, 2004, p.6).

Furthermore, different trust models have been developed in various studies. A review of these models shows that the researchers have developed them based on different points of view. The systemic and technical approach to modelling trust in computer and information science studies resulted in numerous models (e.g. Wang & Vassileva, 2004; Xiong & Liu, 2003; Meng et al., 2012; Hamouid & Adi, 2015; Tahta et al., 2015; Twyman et al., 2015; Hoogendoorn et al., 2014; Lian-ju et al., 2014; Park et al., 2015; Jelenc et al., 2013; Lee & Turban, 2001). In addition to systemic and technical models of trust, there are many generic models of trust (e.g. Tan, 2000; Tan & Thoen, 2002; Kinateder et al., 2005; Mayer et al., 1995). However, they also focus on functional trust and factors influencing an individual’s trust formation in daily activities.

Furthermore, typologies and frameworks of trust concepts have also been developed (e.g. Rousseau et al., 1998; Li, 2007, 2008). However, none of the previous models have taken a more generalized approach to modeling trust in society. The previous models presented detailed reviews of trust constructs (e.g. McKnight & Chervany, 2000), but they lacked a relational approach (between different actors and at different levels) of trust formation in society and consequently there is ambiguity in identifying what type of trust relates to what level of relationships in society. Bachmann (2011, p. 2011) draws our attention to this gap and suggests that future researchers of trust to study the trust at the “macro level”.

While acknowledging the contribution of previous studies in defining trust and its constructs, this paper does not attempt to present an explicit definition of trust or its building blocks rather it identifies emergent trust types and concepts in society. This study will provide a common ground for communicating research findings and facilitate a better understanding of different types of trust in society. This common ground would enable researchers to effectively communicate findings across trust studies. Thus, the study answers following questions:

**Question 1:** What are the different types and aspects of trust in previous studies?
**Question 2:** Is it possible to shape a more generic model for trust?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Following the Methodology, the Literature Review presents different types of trust in society. In Discussions, the author answers the research questions and propose a general model of trust. Finally, the concluding remarks and the limitation of proposed model are summarized in Conclusion.

**METHODOLOGY**

To produce an acceptable model of trust requires analysis of existing trust types in literature. Due to the plethora of publications on trust, a systematic review of trust models and typologies is very difficult. For example, submitting the following query in Scopus (Figure 1) retrieved 41516 records that requires a long-term research and enormous financial resources to target the issue.
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