

Panel 4:

Panel proposal: Colloquium on Trust in Public Administration

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Colloquium theme: Trust in Public Administration

The balance between trust and distrust is shifting – yet again. The move towards public sector reforms inspired by the New Public Management (NPM) from the 1980s on introduced a series of innovations that might be argued to be based on mutual distrust between public sector actors (Van de Walle, 2010). NPM-style reforms created a situation where trust was regarded as naïve, highlighting its dysfunctional aspects. More recently, trust has been rediscovered as a functional phenomenon facilitating interactions, reducing transaction costs, and creating innovation. At the same time, public distrust towards government and public administration has remained solidly on the agenda.

Trust can be considered as a feature of relationships of individuals, of organisations and of institutions that affects their interactions in a supporting way. According to Coulson, ‘trust describes a relationship which can be between two or more individuals, between individuals and an organisation, or between several organisations’ (Coulson, 1998, p. 31). Since there are many relationships in many directions, it is necessary to reduce the complexity and cluster these relationships. Bouckaert (2012) distinguishes between three clusters:

- Trust of citizens and organisations in government and the public sector (T1);
- Trust of government and the public sector in citizens and organisations (T2);
- Inter-organisational and inter-personal trust within government and the public sector (T3).

T1: Trust of citizens and organisations in government and the public sector

In public administration we have seen a sharp increase in attention for the public's perception of government, and trust more in particular. Such research ranges from country studies (Christensen & Laegreid, 2005; Marlowe, 2004), over multivariate explanatory models relating trust to a number of government processes and outputs (Van Ryzin, 2011; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007), to more sophisticated multi-country analyses of trust, looking at country-level explanations for differences in trust (Kim, 2010; Van de Walle, 2007; Vigoda-Gadot, Shoham, & Vashdi, 2010). In this trust relation between citizens and government, it has often been assumed that outputs matter and that distrust results from low government performance. Research has however shown that the process by which services are being delivered or policies are being implemented is at least as important. Trust is thus at least as much influenced by procedural justice as it is by outputs (Van Ryzin, 2011).

T2: Trust of government and the public sector in citizens and organisations

While citizens' trust in government has received a lot of attention, the opposite relation has been researched only marginally (Wu & Yang, 2011). Yang, therefore, described it as a missing link in research (Yang, 2005). Expressions of civil servants' distrust appear dominant and are visible in officials' unwillingness to involve citizens in decision making, in their unwillingness to take their views seriously (Yang & Holzer, 2006), or in an overall relatively sceptical attitude toward citizens (Aberbach & Rockman, 1978). The reason for such distrust can be multifaceted, ranging from negative prior experience, over a belief that citizens aren't sufficiently knowledgeable to play a role, to a conviction that citizens have profound negative intentions when interacting with government. Officials' distrust in citizens may evoke a reciprocal reaction, leading to mutually reinforcing dynamics.

The topic of administrators' trust in citizens has become very relevant in an age when governments want to reduce red tape and control- and inspection-related burdens. Innovations such as labelling or self-regulation require a great deal of trust in citizens' and companies' willingness to follow the law. Replacing extensive control systems by trust-based arrangements requires a total change in officials' thinking, and may prove to be very hard without a better understanding of administrator's trust in society. Or is the assumption that trust and control are substitutes outdated (Six, 2013)?

T3: Trust within government and the public sector

Some scholars argue that recently, we have seen a move towards trust-based management and steering concepts in public administration (see e.g., Choudhury, 2008). This is visible throughout the public sector (Bouckaert, 2012), and comes at a moment when the public sector is moving yet further away from traditional bureaucracy to governance arrangements (Grey & Garsten, 2001). Misztal (1996) has argued that the additional complexity associated with these arrangements necessitates increased attention for trust as a governance mechanism. It can therefore be argued that the increasing attention for trust-based management in public administration is motivated in part by the search for pragmatic and efficient solutions to cope with the increasing complexity of contemporary society, and in part by the unsatisfactory results of incentive-based (NPM) instruments, which might be argued to enforce attitudes of distrust within government (Bouckaert and Oomsels, 2012).

Trust between actors in collaborative arrangements has been associated with a long list of virtues, such as better performance (Klijn, Edelenbos, & Steijn, 2010), lower transaction and control costs (Fukuyama, 1995), better compliance (Davies et al. 2011), better and easier conflict resolution (Das & Teng, 1998) and more exchange of information and knowledge (Beccerra, Lunnan, and Huemer 2008). In the particular case of Flanders, Buttiens and Verhoest (2011) have argued that inter-organisational trust was a central factor for the success or failure of different government-wide coordination initiatives.

Link to NIG sub-themes

As the following table shows, this theme cross-cuts the four sub-themes of the NIG conference. The following table illustrates the scope of this panel using a number of examples, without the intention of being limitative.

	T1: Societal trust in government	T2: Government trust in society	T3: Trust within government
Multi-level governance & Europe	Citizen (dis)trust in different levels of government	Different levels of government's (dis)trust in citizens	(Dis)trust between public organisations or civil servants at different levels of government
Multi-actor governance & complexity	Societal actor's (dis)trust in public actors in collaborative multi-actor arrangements such as public-private partnerships or participatory policy processes	Civil servants' (dis)trust in societal actors in collaborative multi-actor arrangements such as public-private partnerships or participatory policy processes	(Dis)trust between public actors in collaborative arrangements, cross-sector policies or horizontal governance
Political institutions & democracy	Institutional sources of citizen's (dis)trust in government	Institutional sources of government's (dis)trust in citizens	Institutional sources of interorganisational (dis)trust in government
Public management	Managerial strategies for societal actors' (dis)trust in government (e.g. the effect of openness of information policies on societal trust in government, policy branding / framing; etc).	Managerial strategies for civil servants' (dis)trust in societal actors (e.g. codes of conduct for 'boundary spanners')	Managerial strategies for interpersonal or interorganisational (dis)trust in public administration (e.g. leadership, interpersonal communication, etc.)

This panel welcomes conceptual, theoretical and empirical contributions employing quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method methods that study T1, T2 or T3 trust in relation to the four sub-themes of NIG. Papers in English are strongly preferred.

Publication opportunities

Presented papers may be considered for a special issue of an international journal. The colloquium will also propose a special issue of a Dutch language journal (Bestuurskunde or VTOM), and work towards a joint book in its 3-year operational activities.

Web and updates:

To subscribe to relevant updates regarding this panel, register your email-address in the right-hand column of the colloquium's website (www.trustandpa.eu)

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