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Building Trust in the Workplace

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A paper presented at the 5th Global Conference on Business and Economics, University of Cambridge, 06 - 08 Jul 2006.

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5th Global Conference on Business and Economics
July 6-8, 2006 Cambridge University

ABSTRACT

Most organisational writers would agree that we are living in an age of 'discontinuity', or paradox, Peters (1987), Handy (1996, 1998), Cloke and Goldsmith (2002). However, they would also argue that organizations are not prepared for the social, economic, political, technological and organizational change that they are currently experiencing and will continue to experience. Other writers suggest that to cope with this, 'trust' is a prerequisite. Further, whilst those of us who live and work in organisations would agree that trust is of vital importance for feelings of collaboration and well-being, our experience of trust in organisations is rare. The rate of absenteeism and stress in organisations is perhaps testament to this. However, whilst growing, the literature on trust in organisations, appears to conflict, and generally treats trust as some philosophical concept. We argue here that a more practical concept of trust needs to be developed, that treats trust as a process and not a static entity. To develop this we draw on psychological literature, conceptualising trust as a process, and argue that this can be developed through action research and action learning. Drawing on a practical example, we go on to argue that action learning and research are powerful ways for transforming institutional culture into safe environments where unconditional, trusting relationships can be continuously created and nurtured.

INTRODUCTION

Organisations in the 21st century are confronted with a fast paced and turbulent environment. External challenges from new technology have created a 'borderless' business environment, which in its turn poses significant challenges in terms of people management and organisational structures. Anyone trying to exist and prosper in the world of the 2006 workplace has a feeling that the key criteria for being able to handle the demands placed on them at work is the ability constantly to change or at least consider the possibility of changing in response to events in the internal and external environments. On the whole individuals are facing change at individual, team, project and organisational level without knowing with a great deal of certainty if they are heading in the right direction and doing the right thing.
In this environment, there is a call and desire for creating 'trusting organisations'. Within this rhetoric, there is a perceived need for managers and leaders to become teachers, coaches and facilitators of change (Senge 1993; Schein, 1997) rather than directors or controllers. To become gardeners rather than guards. Yet how can we do this? We first of all examine the literature on trust in organisations to see what this offers us in terms of developing a practical model.

Organisational context
To further our definition of 'trust' we will first draw on the organisational literature to help us conceptualise organisations not as static entities, which one can examine and

measure from outside, but rather as entities with on-going human and material dynamic interrelationships. The literature on chaos and complexity provides us with a backdrop for this understanding.

Many of these ideas are underpinned by the belief that people in organizations become self-organizing where it becomes possible that new organizations can emerge. It could be called `constructivist' (Morgan, 1997) or perhaps the 'New Science' or 'constructionist' paradigm (Wheatley, 1999; Tsoukas 1996) where it is believed that the observer cannot stand outside the arena of the observed, that there are no realities objectively `out there', (e.g., Maturana and Varela, 1980), where we no longer have a given reality but we are compelled to socially construct it. Thus, changes in organizations may be brought about by self-organizing individuals that may not be working according to some overall master plan (Stacey, 2003). If this is the case, then the need for finding ways in which organisations can create the conditions where trust can be developed moves us away from the abstract, and, as we have noted, confusing definitions of trust, to try and develop ideas of practice.

Need for trust in organisations
In these times of turbulence, and rapid change, as we have noted, the concept of and the desire for trust has become increasingly important, and has become an increasing focus in the organisational literature from a number of different angles. Mishra (1994) suggests that trust becomes even more central during periods of uncertainty due to organisational crisis and thus it can be a critical requirement in today's workplace. Even so, Davis and Landa (1999) report on a study that found that 68 percent of employees did not trust their supervisors.

Further, while we all think we have an understanding of what trust means, it is one of those fundamental notions that most individuals find difficult to explain or precisely define (Misztal, 1996).

Within the organisational literature, we can point to a body of knowledge that tends to treat trust as an abstract entity or 'something' that needs to be present.

For example, McKnight and Chervany (1996) suggest that trust is an important facilitator of materially and morally efficient relationships not only within but also between organisations. Trust within a process makes cooperative endeavours happen, as well as influencing the interaction between individuals (McKnight & Chervany, 1996).

Trust requires an unconditional relationship with another human being or towards an institution. It is recognised as a pre-requisite to knowledge sharing and creativity in organisations (Buchowicz and Illes, 2005).

Pfeffer (1998) argues that if an organisation is expecting full productivity of their people through hard work and commitment, it will ultimately have to make sure that the message conveyed is one of protection and security. Other research has pointed at the different types of trusting relationships that exist within any organisation. A successful organisation is built on a foundation that includes lateral, vertical and external trust (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1995). Lateral trust as defined is developed between equals, vertical trust can be built between supervisors and

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subordinates and external trust happens between organisations and clients and or suppliers.

Taylor's research (1989) shows that the word 'trust' is used with a variety of meanings, yet the conceptual papers do not seem to be able to explain the elements and the true essence of trust, nor do they offer any examples as to how to move towards developing this idea of trust at a practical level.

We might argue here, with Dwyer (2005) that the topic of trust has been one of confusion and misconception on behalf of those who would hope to understand it. So how might we develop a notion of trust that can help create more balanced and less fearful organisations?

Towards a more meaningful understanding of Trust
In our view trust is more meaningful as a verb than as a noun. Trust is being built, expressed, experienced and ruined through action. It is a "must have" in our demand driven, materialistic mentality, yet by its real essence it is something that we cannot buy, we can only experience and express in the moment. Trust is continuously being created, or not, through action of the participants. It is thus a process, not an abstraction. If we really want an organisation in which there is 'trust', then we need to find some model to enable us to build the conditions where people can learn to trust one another.

To start our inquiry then, we move to the psychology literature, which theorises how it is that human beings learn to trust, or not to trust, from the earliest stages of their life. From this, we can extrapolate general principles of the types of conditions in which it is easier, or not, for people to be able to trust, since it is our theory that 'trusting' is an on-going process.

Erik H. Erikson (1963) divides human life between birth and death into eight significant phases. Each phase has its specific learning opportunity and, according to this, we need to develop certain positive emotions and their negative counterparts in order to grow in a healthy manner psychologically. If we fail to develop one aspect fully within its natural phase we will carry the task with us to the next phase. If we accumulate a 'backlog' of psychological development it is part of our make up even if it is not necessarily visible straight away. A person's 'backlog' tends to show itself primarily under stress or external pressure.

 The very first step of human development is the development of a balance between trust and distrust. A baby develops a sense of trust towards the mother who provides food and survival for the infant. Of course, as the child grows, the mother cannot meet all the needs of the baby all of the time. What matters is that the overall meeting of needs is greater than not meeting them, or inconsistency in the meeting of them. Attachment theory suggests that a balanced child will, by the age of 2 be confident that if a mother leaves the room, she will at some point return, and thus the infant is capable of being left without its mother. Therefore, trust is noticeable when the mother can leave the room without upsetting the baby. This experience is the foundation of human development and it has an impact on the development of all the other phases and all the other areas of life.

The eight phases continuously interact with and reinforce each other all through human life so they need to be considered as an evolutionary, psychological and emotional growing process rather than closed and self-contained units of development.

The eight phases are:

Basic Trust versus Basic Mistrust
Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt
Initiative versus Guilt
Industry versus Inferiority
Identity versus Role Confusion
Intimacy versus Isolation
Generativity versus Stagnation
Ego Integrity versus Despair

Each item of psychosocial strength discussed here is systematically related to all others, and they all depend on the proper development in the proper sequence of each item. However, each item exists in some form before its critical time normally arrives. For example a child might show signs of autonomy even before he starts acting independently from the adults. All phases are linked to each other and when one area changes that has an impact on all the other areas as well. Erikson says that we should not use these categories as check lists and that the 'positive' aspects should not be simply looked at as achievements secured once and for all at a given state. He also states that the negative senses are equally important and they remain the dynamic counterpart of the 'positive' ones throughout life. Winnicott (1965) suggests that most of the processes that start up in early infancy are never fully established and continue to be strengthened by the growth that continues in later childhood and indeed in adult life, even in old age.

It is important to note, however, that the mother/infant relationship is not experienced in a vacuum. The degree of 'good mothering' in a society will be both an individual as well as a collective phenomenon. Bowlby (1988) suggests that " In societies where death rates are low, the rate of employment high, and social welfare schemes adequate, it is emotional instability and the inability of parents to make effective family relations which are the outstanding cause of children becoming deprived of a normal family life." (Holmes, 1993). Western societies with their micro families and relative isolation have a higher level of risk of not providing enough opportunities for children to develop a range of unconditionally trusting relationships. A protective and safe environment is vital for infants and it has fairly significant importance to personal growth all through life.

This ability to 'trust' then impacts on the types of relationships that an individual is able to make. We can divide these types of relationships into unconditional and conditional. The first experience of unconditional relationship, as we have seen, comes from the mother/infant dyad. Children are fed and looked after regardless of their behaviour. They are loved and cared for even when they cry all night or when they misbehave later on in life. Mothers 'install the fundamental concept of unconditional love' into their children. The unspoken message here is: "I love and accept you the way you are regardless of what you do or do not do." This acts as an

anchor and a foundation that the growing person can always return to either in the physical sense or by revisiting the memory of childhood experiences. The unconditional relationship is the right platform to start the child's education. Unconditional love and trust makes it acceptable for children to follow the leadership and guidance of the parent. In unconditional relationships there is room for mistakes, there is room for testing the spectrum of good and bad, of right and wrong. It is not untypical even among grown ups that they try to live up to their mothers' expectations associating safety, security and final approval by the mother and the family. Conditional relationships on the other hand are based on power. These are limited liability relationships.

Some of us experience conditional relationships within the family and we all experience different forms of power-based relationships when we interact with the external world.

Trust is broken down however, when the parameters of work relationships are not clear. An organisation consists of a group of individuals in which relationships may be built on more or less conditional terms. It is not in itself a bad thing if the relationships are more or less conditional, but problems arise when it is not clear what these conditions are. If individuals have unconscious, unmet needs, these will be projected onto the organisational members who are deemed to be able to meet them. (Projection is a psychological term where an infant has not had her needs met, she will imagine those with resources, with authority to still be able to meet those needs). Thus authority figures such as senior managers will be perceived to be able to meet some of these needs. If the conditions are such where these expectations and assumptions can be fully challenged, then an organisation can provide a container for individual and collective growth.

Thus trust is key to all human relationships, and human beings are constantly building on and developing this capacity to let go unconditionally. From this, we can see that an organisation will consist of a number of individuals with varying capacities for trust, and that the organisation can be seen as a container for which unconditional and conditional relationships can be negotiated and mediated. It is our belief that an organisation that can be characterised one of high trust, is one both where there are the conditions for truthful relationships, and where individuals may be committed to individual learning, since self-knowledge and reflection give us the opportunity to monitor our growth, evaluate our experiences and integrate them into our evolving personal development.

Confidently relying on another and making oneself vulnerable is the prerequisite of human growth. These are the conditions that enable someone to focus and use the resources on expansion, growth and going beyond limitations. This is the safe environment when one can tap into creativity, when it is possible to have optimal human experiences, when one can surpass the ego needs and limitations of the self and cultivate a sense of oneness with the universe. If the mindset is fear based then the world is a battle field where others are villains and "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" (Machiavelli quoted in Bailey, 2002). From a Machiavellian view of the world the focus is on survival, control and victory. The recommended strategy is not to trust anyone, attack first and outwit the opponents.

Whilst, as we have seen, the importance of building, sustaining and repairing trust is acknowledged in a wide variety of books and research articles, little or no attention is given to the importance of continuously building, reinforcing and nurturing trust in our relationships. Trust is a prerequisite, something that is often taken for granted, yet we would like to argue that trust in our view is much more a process, a continuous balancing act of human relationships. It is not an item that can be ticked off of a to do list, it is something that needs to be a continuous part of our daily agenda and action. It requires personal emotional investment and reflection that our 'pushed for time' 'quick fix' and 'win-loose' culture does not support.

With this in mind, then what might help organisations develop the conditions where individuals can tap into their creative potential by feeling free to trust?

If this is the basis of trust in individuals and organisations, then how can we develop processes that take into account these early conditionings, and provide conditions for growth as elaborated by Erikson? To do this, we believe that processes of action research and action learning can help establish these conditions in an on-going way. We will firstly look at some of the basic principles of action research and learning from the theoretical standpoint in relationship to trust, and then examine a case where such cycles took place, to see to what degree trust became both an issue, and in the end an outcome that merits further exploration.

Developing trust: the use of action research and action learning
Reason and Bradbury (2001) maintain that forms of action research can be used as a practice for the systematic development of firstly knowledge and knowing but also trust through collaborative forms of inquiry (Huxham and Vangen, 2003). Action learning and action research methodologies are a participatory and democratic process grounded in a participatory, reflexive worldview which can provide a practical way to learn to share and develop trusting relationships thus providing more naturally collaborative and naturally inquiring people, just the 'call' that we have noticed in the organisational literature.

Key features, which are broadly common to all action inquiry approaches, are to co-inquire through iterative cycles about the way the social reality is constructed and thereby to enable change (Eden & Huxham, 1996). Questioning how we make sense of our world in terms of our values, attitudes, actions and interpretations is an essential first step to break away from the dominant logic and preconceived ideas and solutions. It can help to clarify the organisational values and beliefs on which actions are based. Additional insights into envisaging a preferred future and organising effectively to achieve such an outcome must be present. Through a cyclical process of action and reflection with regard to a meaningful problematic situation, theory and practice are inter-linked and build on each other. Fresh insights and understandings are developed through continuing spirals of action and reflection on action (Carr & Kemmis; 1986). The cyclical process helps individual personal development and enhancement of professional managerial practice (McNiff, 2000).

Our understanding of action research and action learning is based in 'Action Inquiry' (Torbert, 1991) as well as drawing on Heron's 'Co-operative Inquiry' (1996) and lessons from Huxham and Vangen's work in collaborative work groups (2003). Of the Action Research forms, Action Inquiry (Torbert, 1991) is an iterative, cyclical process

of improved knowledge or knowing through action and revised or new action and knowing through reflection, i.e. it is a form of emergent solutioning through reflection on doing. The action-reflection cycle resembles a spiral in which knowledge and practical knowing can provide an evolving body of wisdom.

We believe that the collective inquiry into developing such insights reflects the early processes through which trust is developed: namely that we can liken the organisation to the early 'holding field' in which the mother provides a safe container in which the infant can develop a sense of his or her own place in the world. It is possible that action learning cycles can recreate these conditions, and thus build upon the confidence and creativity that characterises the 'trusting' child. The questioning that characterises action learning cycles reflects the questioning and learning that a child meets in growing into a knowledgeable and competent human being.

Participative forms of action research have looked for ways of developing trust through self-reflection, firstly in the individual, i.e. that my thoughts are equally valid, through to large groups, through participative collective inquiry. In action research theory, this has been articulated as a process of first-, second, and third person distinction. This was first explicitly introduced into the action research context by Torbert (1999). First person research/practice skills and methods address the ability of the person to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting. Second-person research/practice starts when we engage with others in a face-to-face group to enhance our respective first-person inquiries. One of the most clearly articulated approaches to second-person research/practice is co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996). The kind of inquiry skills that co-operative inquiry helps develop are, for example, being present, being open, creatively reframing constructs, emotional competence, meta-intentionality and non-attachment solely to one's own ideas (Heron and Reason, 2001). Implicitly in everyday life and explicitly in an action inquiry, persons need to reach beyond merely acknowledging the existence of multiple perspectives and voices to working with them. This means responding intelligently in the moment, coming to timely decisions, exploring presuppositions, inferences, or attributions, and reforming oneself or the conversation from time to time (Torbert, 1999). Third-person research/practice aims to create a wider community of inquiry involving persons who, because they cannot or are not well known to each other have a more impersonal quality. Third-person research/practice attempts to create conditions, which awaken and support the inquiring qualities of first- and second-person research/practice in a wider community, thus empowering participants to create their own knowing-in-action in collaboration with others.

Again, we can liken this to the early development of the human being. First-person and second-person inquiry reflects the mother-child dyad, whilst third-person inquiry can be said to resemble the first faltering steps that the child makes when engaging with the broader world outside these immediate early relationships. These footsteps can only be taken creatively, when the child has a good enough foundation with itself and the mother, that enables it to trust that it can return once again to a safe holding field - i.e. that it has enough ego-identity to reflect upon and learn from the consequences of its actions. A confidence in this process gives the child the competence to re-engage, and learn to discover and consistently move through the different stages adumbrated by Erikson. In other words, confidence in this process

enables the child to move beyond its inherent limitations, while an individual in an organisation, or groups can move beyond their own preconceived ideas and logics, and thus create an organisation that is self-emergent in creative and not stagnant ways. As Hitchens and Huxham have pointed out, in action research, there is potential for both collaborative advantage but also collaborative inertia (2005).

Vangen and Huxham suggested that certain actions contribute to successful collaboration - compromise, good communication, an ardent concern for equality and democracy and a conclusion that trust between participants is essential for any meaningful collaboration, engaging in a continuous process of nurturing trust (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). It is our contention that before all these parameters are met, however, open communication is of the utmost importance. We noted earlier how unconscious projection can create situations of distrust, as unmet childhood needs surface and are projected onto the other. In working relationships, clarity about where and how the relationship is conditioned is of the utmost importance - otherwise these unmet needs can become intertwined with existing authority relationships, causing distrust and confusion. We believe however, that action research with its individual and collective reflective cycles, when deeply entered into, can provide the conditions where individuals can learn to surface and articulate some of these deeply felt repressed emotions.

Whilst it would seem then that trust is both part of the process and desired-for outcome of action research, to what degree is this possible? Our case study reanalyses the material from a case study to explore the relationship between action research and trust.

What is Future?
This is a case study of a medium size Finnish consulting firm that has been part of a research project to look at the practice and ongoing viability of 'Chaordic' work practices (van Eijnatten, 2001; Fitzgerald, 1996; 1998).

There is an emphasis in the organisation on self-organising, self-leadership and an entrepreneurial approach in which all members of the organisation are responsible for creating their own work-projects, client work, product development – and therefore their own income streams.   In their own form of chaordic work practice there are no compulsions, controls or forms of checking.

The research took place over 3 years and involved interviews, observation, participant observation, reflective diaries. The action inquiry part of the project involved individuals, small cells or pairs and then later an enlarged group inquiring into their own work practices, which reflected the first- second- and third-person inquiry form. Our practice form of Action Inquiry emphasises an individual, a dyadic and then a group voice, which helps to practically implement a form of democratic dialogue. We encouraged reflection and developmental conversations similar to first, second and third person inquiry, into 'me', then with a collaborative partner - 'me and we' - then into larger group collaboration - 'me, we and us'.

The research was exploratory inquiring into the experience of participants and to what degree they felt that they could be truly creative within the model, and if not, what forms of practice could sustain it.

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As the project unfolded, it became clear that the freedom implied in the chaordic model, was difficult to live and work with. As the individuals in the firm learnt to self-organise they had at the same time to learn to trust their co-agents in the organisation whilst at the same time learning to trust themselves and to a certain extent that the future will emerge in an appropriate way.

Whilst the first-, second-, third person approach had much to recommend it in terms of building up dialogue, issues of trust has manifested as a real problem in allowing this model to work fully. Issues of isolation, lack of trust, lack of clarity on authority had already emerged. The research provided an arena for this to be explored.

The women in the organisation in particular after reflecting as individuals and then in pairs felt that the language used internally and some of the mental models in the organisation were distinctly 'macho'. After explaining this to the larger group, participants felt that trust had moved forward and they resolved to try and change some of their uses of language. There was a realisation that business models used outside of their organisation encouraged competition, ranking, development of hierarchies and haves and have nots. There was an explicit insight after the reflective inquiry processes that adopting recommendations made by a TQM consultant into organising their organisation would change the 'culture' of their organisation. It would move from a free, self- organising approach to a more controlled, systematic, framework driven model which they were not happy with.

To accommodate this, by the end of the project and in a third iterative cycle, the initial inquiry had developed a more critical emancipatory approach (Kemmis and Grundy, 1988; McNiff, 2000) more specifically inquiring into why their chaordic practices were evolving from their radically (de-) structured organisation into a more traditional organisation and what could or should be done about this trend. What was emerging as a result of their self-organising was a form of consulting organisation that sought to limit the chaordic freedoms. **One conclusion was that their cellular way of working could be used to construct support groups to practice a 'mutual entrepreneurism' rather than the individualistic style of entrepreneurship to which they were becoming familiar. This would take the form of mutual 'god-parenting', which they termed 'the two entrepreneurs way':**

"We have some ideas... we go as couples, two coaches... we need to practice the' two entrepreneurs' way... we are just learning it "

A final initiative was to have a continuous reflective action inquiry in how to trust, share and co-operate since these were behaviours that were not learnt at school or business school. The organisation had to learn to inquire at an individual and group level into how they could develop their capacity for trust, collaboration and sharing.

"I think we don't have 'tools' for sharing"

"I have noticed myself that I have made a clear committed decision to break those expectations or beliefs... I think these things cannot work unless you bring these taboos up... **You cant have taboos otherwise you cant trust and without trust there are no structures…"**

There was an acceptance that elements of their 'chaordic' work system caused envy, internal competition and selfishness and that one way to combat this was to bring

these issues to the table, to question the fairness of their work system and how people could learn to collaborate and share. The conclusion was that everything they did, because they were not bound by structures, hierarchy and rules more prevalent in a traditional work organisation, had to be based on 'trust' of the other individuals in the chaordic work system. Trust was seen to be the key to enabling this self-organising and trust is developed through ongoing action inquiry, which helps to create and then maintain the viability of the de-structured organisation. This third person inquiry was initially called 'work counselling' and then jokingly 'Ethical Circles' from an analogy to quality circles.

*"the good thing is that we speak about this in our 'work counselling' (Ethical Circle/Critical Emancipatory) meetings, .. **the trust is so important that if I give my case to him(or her) ….will they give (to) … me when I need it**..."*

*"**Then there is the basis of trust which is everything** because if you see yourself as a free agent ... **The point is we have to honour trust…** otherwise it don't work"*

*"The **competition question** inside (the organisation)........If somebody know s that I am earning ok and I could get more **but I could also share with the others……….
it's a choice….That is….. a higher way of behaving**.....most organizations doesn't get to this".*

There was an acceptance that the way that people live their lives in society generally puts pressure on their ideal of sharing and dividing earning opportunities (and not competing)… that there were no models for this kind of behaviour in commercial organisations. There were few models around which explained how to learn to trust. There were no books on organisation and management that recommended sharing of opportunities and income making possibilities. In fact society outside of their chaordic work organisation emphasised the opposite:

*"T*he getting the work done... is a difficult area.... its money, its mortgages.... How to divide (the work opportunities that we have)...This issue is also, in this free system...what is the criteria to divide, who has time, who is capable, what is it. **Its very important that we create some procedures which are fair**...*"*

In other words, issues of trust had arisen once again, even within the action inquiry model. In a final series of interviews with individuals as to their feelings about the action inquiry process, we returned full circle back to the first person centered inquiry. Reflections by some of the participants were that they needed to firstly look inwardly at themselves.

"*So this is some kind almost like training in philosophy, understanding my own beliefs"*

Further, for the researcher, the role had moved from that of consultant/researcher - almost to that of a therapist.

Interestingly, in therapy, the therapist is often called upon to hold the projections of the client as they move through unprocessed stages of experience, stages where they have been unable to develop the particular attributes noted by Erikson.

CONCLUSION

Thus, whilst in theory, action inquiry has the elements of trust, and builds in systems of inquiry that could reflect upon Erikson's model, it is clear that there remains much to be done if trust is truly to be the foundation of relationships at work.

Even within the participative models of action research, and in a company, which fostered ideals of democracy, fear and distrust emerged as part of the system. Whilst unconditional relationships might appear, even in psychological literature as a possibility for human growth and development, in practice they are rare and difficult to foster. We could speculate that this is a consequence of particular parenting patterns in the West - that the obsessive individualist tendency paramount in our organisations could be a result of the emotional instability of the parenting (Bowlby, 1988), which in its turn may have its source in the micro models of families mentioned above.

The notion of chaordic organisations, and the rhetoric that accompanies this, may, paradoxically even exacerbate the problem, since the ideal hides the realities of survival with which both individuals and organisations battle. The literature of chaos and complexity from which chaordic models evolve needs to take into account the psychosocial components of the human being in organisational life. Whilst limited to one company, this example illustrates quite clearly how issues of trust are deeply embedded in the psyche, and that it will take far more than an abstract definition to try and develop more harmonious ways of working.

However, we still believe that the ideals of action research, the thorough practices and models of collaboration that they encourage, and the self and other reflection which are part of the cycles, may mark a step forward in beginning to develop more trusting relationships. If we can believe Erikson, then possibilities for human growth and development are on going. However, to do so, we need more developed practices of reflection that take into account the whole developmental cycle of the individual both at rational and emotional levels, if our cycles of action research can be truly effective. This needs to be combined with some of the insights of critical management research that is located in an in-depth inquiry into the social conditions in which we operate. Thus, in truly trusting organisations, we believe the conditions need to be set up where agents have the space, not merely to move freely, as chaordic systems may suggest, but also to engage with one another in a mutual reflection, building up a basis for long-term relationships which are conditional, but where the conditions of that relationship are in constant articulation and exploration.

Finally, whilst the results of our research are perhaps problematic, we do suggest that issues of trust can only truly be fostered and understood, not as abstract 'nice-to-have' but as in-depth and on-going inquiry into how we understand and relate to one another as human beings in the workplace and to the collective tasks we undertake. Action research and learning cycles, underpinned by psychological, emotional and social reflections, may provide us with a difficult, but possible, way forward of developing that much-needed trust in the workplace.

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