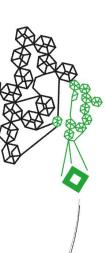# Trust and distrust at the crossroads – Managing the proliferation of technology for the good of employees, organizations, and society.

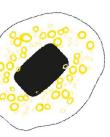*Simon Schafheitle, Rosalind Searle & Antoinette Weibel*

The self-accelerating speed of technological developments is both equally promising and spooky, not least in its impact on organizations and employees. In Homo Deus, for instance, Harari (2016) prophesies a bright future in which technological progress will make it possible for humans to exercise godlike abilities. In contrast, Zuboff's (2019) seminal work on surveillance capitalism conjures up an almost doomsday scenario, with technology ultimately subjugating man and humankind to technology-augmented and data-based value creation. Without a doubt, we are currently at a crossroads as to how a technology-permeated future can enable a good life for all, at work and in organizations. Why and how we design and deploy technology at work and in organizations will be decisive because what is allowed to occur at a small scale in a workplace will have a potentially huge footprint in broader society.

In the words of Bodrožić & Adler (2022), the crossroads of current technological advancements mirror what Schumpeter (1934, 1939, 1942) called "creative destruction", relating to the interplay between revolution and counter-revolution. Revolutions, such as the widespread permeation of societal spheres with sophisticated technology, are characterized as "fiery and frenzied" and it is the task of the counter-revolution to soothe this frenzy, mitigate its possible negative impact, and redirect the design and use of technology towards a more human rather than a dehumanized future. This was exactly what such counter-revolutions in the past have managed as, for instance, the Human Relations-Movement with regard to a "tailorized" workplace or how total quality management and kaizen enabled new human empowerment in a world of super-efficient and lean production (Adler & Borys, 1996). Following Bodrožić & Adler (2022), we contend that the time is now ripe to consider these crossroads, the occurring revolution(s), and to define what a counter-revolution to the digital transformation can look like.

With this sub-theme, we suggest that trust and distrust research can provide fruitful and fresh perspectives to examine if, how, and when technology affects humans positively or negatively. We invite manuscripts that contribute toward a more nuanced understanding of how trust and technology inside workplaces interrelate; that is how trust and distrust shape and are shaped by

technology. With this subtheme, it is our explicit intent to engage with thought-provoking scholarly contributions that advance our understanding of trust and distrust at the crossroads.

Hence, we invite original contributions to tackle the very nature of trust and distrust as well as its relationship to preconditions and outcomes amidst the technological permeation of workplaces. As a default, HRM/OB scholarship defines trust as a person's willingness to be vulnerable towards the actions of another party, based on positive expectations of the future intent or action of that party (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Other the other hand, distrust can be defined as an unwillingness to accept vulnerability based on pervasive negative perceptions and expectations (Bijlsma-Frankema, Sitkin, and Weibel, 2015). From this perspective, we infer the following four observations: (1) Trust and distrust are relational properties between two parties, a trustor and a trustee (which might be a person or broader entities thereof); (2) Trust and distrust are dynamic as they shape and are shaped by these two parties and can be maintained or disrupted to change course; (3) Trust and distrust involve an interplay of cognitive and affective processes many of which remain relatively unexplored by our literature; (4) Trust and distrust entail intentionality and some degree of volition whereby trustors choose to accept or limit their vulnerability. We surmise that technology proliferation is an important context in which to put these assumptions to the test, and so we outline possible questions for us to tackle within this subtheme:

Trust and technology

- Can we transfer the logics and dynamics of trust as explored between "living" entities to trust in technology? What are the differences? And (why) do they matter?
- What are the consequences of technology design and deployment strategies on trust in technology, and what are meaningful combinations thereof? What influence does the organization and social context have on employees' trust in new technology?
- What is the relationship between optimal trust, over-trust, suspicion, and distrust when it comes to technology as a trust referent? What do the dynamics of, and tipping points between these different concepts look like?
- What are the impacts of new actors, such as technology designers, implementers, and/or regulators on trust in technology and/or trust in the technology-permeated workplace? Do these new actors add different tensions, or disruptions to prior perspectives? Or are these new actors in new ways simply replicating/accelerating past tensions? Is there some novel distrust being introduced?
- What kind of regulations are needed to enable warranted trust in technology (and in its usage)? What is the role of industry standards to enable trustworthy technology? Who (which actors, which expertise) should be included in any kind of oversight board on trustworthy technology?

Trust relations inside the technology-permeated workplace

- What are the effects of technology permeation and automation on human character, attitudes, competencies, and behaviors, and how does this impact trust (e.g., are leaders less willing to be vulnerable, or are employees perceived to have fewer competencies, etc.)?
- How does the advent of decision-making automating technologies change the (trust) relationships between employees and leaders (between colleagues, or between employees and their employer)?
- In developing and deploying automation technology in the workplace, what attention has to be paid to building, preserving, or even repairing employees' trust (in technology, in their employer, in co-workers, etc.)?
- What are the dynamics of trust when technology permeates the workplace? What role do affect and emotions play amidst automation with regard to trust and distrust? Do these dynamics differ from prior, imposed change initiatives?
- How are active trust processes triggered, under which conditions is suspicion evoked, and what are the tipping points for distrust to emerge?
- How does technology change the nature of work and the distribution of good/decent work in organizations (but also in society) and how does this change trust in various referents (e.g., between core and peripheral employers, in the employer, in government, etc.)?

Trust as a navigation pin for the design of a counter-revolution

- What are the trust/distrust spillovers from the proliferation of technology inside organizations into society?
- What are the effects of shifts to suspicion and distrust within the workplace for wider society?
- What are the possible reactions of societal actors, such as governments or unions to the proliferation of technology inside organizations from a normative and a pragmatic stance?
- What do patterns of a trust-emphasizing counter-revolution look like (historical analyses, case study research, etc.)?
- How do universities and business schools contribute to trust and distrust with regard to the proliferation of technology inside organizations? Are their efforts to be trusted?

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