Trust as a Process: A Three-Dimensional Approach

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ABSTRACT

What is trust? Should trust be used as a variable or as a process? Is trust in people similar in nature to trust in institutions? These are three main questions I address in this article. I argue that trust is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, which consists of a mix of trust in strong ties, weak ties, and institutions. I explain the need for a new approach to trust, using the Soviet Union as an example. I argue that rigid distinctions in social capital theory between high-trust and low-trust societies fail to account for the complexity of trust. In this article, I view trust as a process. I also suggest a new definition of trust based on the notion of agency, which underscores the idea of temporality and incorporates the roles of the past, present, and future.

KEY WORDS

agency / definition of trust / Soviet Union / temporality / theory of trust

Over the last two decades, social scientists have come to realize the centrality of trust in social organization. To create a good or 'functional' family, parents try to establish mutual understanding and build trust with their children. Newly married couples develop trustworthy relationships and learn how to rely on each other in their marriage. Managers are concerned with building trust among team members to maximize group potential. Market researchers learn about consumer loyalty and trust in brand names. Psychologists study the qualities and personal characteristics that make people trustworthy. Policy makers measure confidence in government and state policies to learn about public attitudes towards the state.

A close analysis of the ways the term 'trust' is used in the literature reveals a disagreement among scholars about the definition, characteristics, and even the nature of trust. The multiplicity of meanings of trust creates a measure of conceptual confusion, because confidence, reliability, faith, and trust are often used as synonyms.[1] Moreover, there is no consensus among social scientists about the object of trust. Can we trust only people, or can we also trust institutions, such as schools, businesses, and states? If we can trust both people and institutions, is there any conceptual or empirical difference between interpersonal and institutional trust?

In this article, I analyze trust using the example of the Soviet Union. I question the validity of a popular approach to trust that links it with the development of social capital and civil society (Fukuyama, 1995, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Putnam et al., 1993; Rose et al., 1997). That approach fails to differentiate between different types of trust. Following Parry's (1976) analysis of institutional trust, I develop an alternative explanation of why Soviet citizens did not trust the government. My approach focuses on the state's inability to provide people with consumer goods and services rather than on the absence of networks, norms, and interpersonal trust.

Based on my analysis of the Soviet case, I suggest treating trust as a complex phenomenon and present a three-dimensional view of trust, which distinguishes between trust in strong ties (thick interpersonal trust), weak ties (thin interpersonal trust), and institutions (institutional trust).[2] The overall composition and levels of trust in each dimension change over time and may not depend on each other (Newton, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Secor and O'Loughlin, 2004). This 'fluidity' of trust allows for its study not only as a variable, or as a continuum of low–high trust or trust–distrust (Fukuyama, 1995; Gambetta, 1988; Mishler and Rose, 1997; Rose et al., 1997), but also as a process (Möllering, 2001; Nooteboom and Six, 2003).

By acknowledging the variability of trust, I further suggest focusing on its temporal dimension using the notion of agency. This helps account for 'temporal-relational context of action', which underscores the importance of time and allows for the study of trust as a process (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Focusing on agency directs our attention to how the past, present, and future work in the development of trust as respectively manifested in routine behavior, evaluation of currently available information, and anticipation of future results under conditions of uncertainty and risk.

First, I briefly discuss the Soviet case and outline problems with how social capital theorists explain the lack of trust in the Soviet Union. In the second section, I use the Soviet socio-economic transition to illustrate a three-dimensional approach to trust that differentiates between thick interpersonal trust, thin interpersonal trust, and trust in institutions. Finally, I present a conceptual definition of trust that focuses on its temporal dimension and views it as a process.

The Weakness of the Strong State

Seventy-four years of a state-controlled and centrally planned economy strongly shaped the lives of the Soviet people. One the one hand, 'industrialization of the

economy, collectivization of agriculture, the resulting migration to the cities, as well as increased literacy and access to higher education all changed Soviet societies making them more "modern"' (Reisinger et al., 1994: 200–1). On the other hand, strict state censorship, the extraordinary power of Communist Party leaders, and inadequate distribution of public goods and services had tremendous negative effects on the lives of Soviet citizens. Although they were able to enjoy the benefits of free educational and health care systems, trust in the state was significantly undermined by a poorly managed socio-economic system and repression, as well as assassination of millions of people by the state and its leaders.

Some social scientists claim that the Soviet system was not based on trust, but rather on fear, control, power, and corruption (Solomon and Flores, 2001). Sztompka (1999) views all of them as 'functional substitutes for trust'. These trust surrogates are incongruous with that which would seem to be the conceptual heart of trust – freedom:

> The freedom provided by trust is the freedom to think for oneself and speak up with one's ideas. It includes as its consequence (not its cost) the freedom to be questioned and criticized – and the right to be recognized and (if deserving) rewarded. (Solomon and Flores, 2001: 8)

The absence of major freedoms in the USSR, therefore, makes the development of trust in the state quite problematic. Similarly, many contemporary scholars argue that trustworthy states are associated with democracy and civil societies, where citizens can fully participate and, to some extent, control their institutions (Dahl, 1971; Misztal, 1996; Newton, 2001; Putnam et al., 1993; Secor and O'Loughlin, 2004).

Following Fukuyama's (1995) distinction between high-trust societies that have potential for successful long-term cooperative and communal partnerships through civil society[3] and low-trust societies that are characterized by the absence of civil society and the prevalence of in-group relationships, the Soviet Union should be classified as a low-trust society. This approach to classification, however, does not accurately characterize societal trust because it is one-dimensional: a single axis with low-trust societies on one end and high-trust societies on the other end (see Figure 1).

According to Fukuyama, if a society has a narrow radius of trust – the circle of people among whom cooperation and mutual understanding exist – and develops trust only in the private sphere, it is a 'low-trust' society. In such societies, people tend to trust only those to whom they are similar. In contrast, in societies with a large radius of trust, citizens actively participate in civic activities and meet different people, which helps them develop trust in the public sphere and societal institutions. Such societies are labeled 'high-trust' societies because they possess large amounts of social capital. To develop trust in the public sphere, citizens participate in civil associations that either teach them how to engage in political life or instill habits of cooperation and civic participation (Fukuyama, 1999; Newton, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Putnam et al., 1993).

This approach to trust, however, has a number of weaknesses. First, it views social capital as 'features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks,

Low trust   High trust
(Interpersonal trust)   (Institutional trust)

Figure 1   One-dimensional approach to trust

that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions' (Putnam et al., 1993: 167). This definition is very broad because it is used at the macro-level, which creates 'difficulties for theoretical development and empirical research' (Cook, 2005: 8). It seems more beneficial to return to the original use of social capital on the micro-level and employ Bourdieu's (1986) and Coleman's (1988) definitions of social capital that limit it to the resources people obtain through their personal networks (Cook, 2005; Portes, 1998; Secor and O'Loughlin, 2004). Such exchange networks provide people with access to valuable resources, social support, and/or financial assistance.

Second, to a large extent, institutional or public trust is seen as being superior to interpersonal or private trust and is used as a criterion to judge the extent of a society's modernization. Frequently, however, interpersonal trust is more valued by people than is institutional trust. For instance, Uzzi (1997) claims that some small firms in the women's fashion industry prefer to rely on close collaboration with each other, rather than on formal contracts, to develop social embeddedness. Embedded relationships are characterized by high levels of interpersonal trust, information transfer, and mutual problem solving that help firms remain competitive in the industry, which produces time-sensitive products. Uzzi further suggests that close ties with old partners, and therefore reliance on private trust, are often more valuable for these firms than the search for new partners and reliance on formal contracts.

Third, Fukuyama (1995, 1999), similarly to Almond and Verba (1965), treats trust in people as being a necessary factor for the development of trust in institutions: if there is no interpersonal trust, institutional trust is impossible. Yet, the relationship between trust in people and trust in institutions can go in both directions, because institutional trust can also promote, or hinder, the development of interpersonal trust. Because people have to trust strangers, they often rely on rules and institutionalized norms of social exchange that are meant to be independent from individuals' characteristics (Hardin, 1996). To avoid this vicious circle, I suggest using Parry's approach to institutional trust (Parry, 1976). Parry claims that institutional trust is more likely to be rooted in the effective performance of institutions than in the overall level of societal trust and citizens' participation in civil society.

Finally, Fukuyama's approach is not able to adequately characterize a society with high levels of interpersonal and low levels of institutional trust. It is impossible to find a place for such societies on the low-trust – high-trust axis. Consequently, such an approach violates the rules of mutual exclusiveness and exhaustiveness of social classification. The former means that categories should not overlap, while the latter states that researchers should be able to characterize all possible cases by using existing categories.

To illustrate these problems with the example of the Soviet Union, I suggest looking at what I call the paradox of 'the weakness of the strong state'. The Soviet state was strong and weak at the same time. It was strong because of its unlimited coercive power and ability to provide citizens with free education and health care. Yet it was weak because of its inability to produce and distribute adequate amounts of consumer goods and services.

Focusing on this paradox in discussing trust during Soviet times leads to two conclusions. First, Fukuyama is right to say that Soviet society was a low-trust society because citizens did not trust their government. Many contemporary social scientists would certainly agree that the lack of trust in the state was one of the reasons for the collapse of the USSR (see Misztal, 1996; Rose et al., 1997; Seligman, 1997; Sztompka, 1999). Second, Soviet society was *not* a low-trust society because there *were* extensive networks of interpersonal trust, but the state was not included in these networks (Gibson, 2001; Kapustkina, 2004; Veselov, 2004). Although citizens did not trust the government, they had high levels of interpersonal trust and developed extensive personal networks. Those networks, indeed, were the basis of survival under conditions of permanent shortages of consumer goods and services.

Fukuyama and his supporters see a direct relationship between amounts of interpersonal and institutional trust. They claim that people have to become active members of different voluntary organizations, such as churches, sports clubs, bowling leagues, community improvement organizations, and political parties to learn how to cooperate and trust other people by recognizing 'universal notions of individual dignity' (Misztal, 1996: 197). As a consequence, the existence of a strong civil society makes it possible to generalize already developed trust in people to different social institutions, and the state in particular (Putnam, 2000; Putnam et al., 1993). Because there was no civil society in the Soviet Union, goes the argument, there was no institutional trust.

Nonetheless, according to Parry (1976), creating institutional trust also depends on the state's ability to successfully perform its functions, which can be seen as an alternative explanation to the lack of institutional trust during the Soviet period. Therefore, it might not be the absence of civil society and low levels of social capital in the USSR, but the inability of the Soviet government to provide its citizens with necessary consumer goods and services that hindered the development of institutional trust. Soviet citizens quickly learned that waiting for support from the government was less efficient than relying on other people. To cope with the shortcomings of the Soviet state, citizens often engaged in informal relationships with each other (Gibson, 2001; Ledeneva, 1998). For instance, Soviet factory managers had to exchange state-owned raw materials with other factory managers, bribe public officials, and produce goods of unacceptable quality just to reach the goals of central plans. Yet they also had to develop trustworthy relationships with other managers because their actions were illegal, and managers risked punishment if caught by the state (Anderson, 1995; Kapustkina, 2004).

The social and economic hardship that people had experienced at that time taught them how to rely on interpersonal networks with their relatives, friends, and even friends of their friends rather than on the state in obtaining scarce consumer goods and services. This example illustrates the importance of

Granovetter's (1973) distinction between strong and weak ties. While the strong ties that come from a traditional collectivist orientation of the Soviet people were central to Soviet political culture because of their potential to create feelings of security and safety, weak ties, in the form of knowledge of the right people, were also important for their ability to provide otherwise unavailable access to scarce resources.

The Soviet case, therefore, illustrates the need for an approach to trust that differs from that of social capital theory. This new approach should move beyond a one-dimensional distinction between low-trust and high-trust societies and should emphasize the complex nature of trust. After acknowledging the difference in objects between interpersonal and institutional trust, it will then be possible to characterize a society that has low levels of institutional trust but high levels of interpersonal trust.

Theorizing Trust: A Three-Dimensional Approach

The analysis of 'the weakness of the strong state' paradox not only demonstrates a need for separation between institutional and interpersonal trust (Bachmann, 1998) but calls for differentiating between trust in strong and weak ties. Although Putnam (2000) distinguishes between thick interpersonal trust, which is embedded in strong interpersonal relationships, and thin interpersonal trust, which refers to trust in weak ties, he excludes trust in institutions – or what he calls 'political trust' – from his analysis because of the lack of correlation between trust in people and trust in the state. Yet this weak or non-existent relationship between interpersonal and institutional trust calls for a separate analysis of thick interpersonal, thin interpersonal, and institutional trust (Anheier and Kendall, 2002). Each of these types of trust has its own theoretical significance and should be viewed as an ideal type in the Weberian understanding of this term (Weber, 1978).

Thick Interpersonal Trust

Thick interpersonal trust is the first type of trust people develop in their lives. It is the trust that people have in their family members, relatives, and close friends. Thick interpersonal trust is necessary for developing an optimistic attitude towards others, which makes social interaction possible. According to Erikson (1993), the first stage of cognitive development that people go through is the development of 'basic trust' – an analogy to thick interpersonal trust – that sets up a general orientation to the social world. As children grow up, their sense of basic trust is either supported or undermined by their experience with parents and other people.

Thick interpersonal trust is similar to what Zucker (1986) calls 'characteristic-based trust' and Uslaner (2002) labels 'particularized trust' because it is tied to such personal characteristics as gender, ethnicity and cultural background. Trust in this case depends on similarity and strong emotional relationships between

people. Thick interpersonal trust is generally restricted to those who are of the same background, which makes the development of such trust less risky, but produces tight-knit networks that do not link people to the members of the out-groups who have access to different resources (Cook, 2005; Uslaner, 2002).

The basis for thick interpersonal trust therefore is *familiarity and similarity with a trustee*. Those people who know each other well and who have a lot in common are more likely to trust each other. Thick interpersonal trust often becomes automatic, and people do not even perceive it as trust. The opposite, however, can also be true. The more negative information people have about a person (the more they are familiar with him or her), the less likely they are to trust this person. For instance, people are less likely to loan money to a relative who has previously borrowed cash from other family members and never paid it back.

Trust in the Soviet Union was highly localized and concentrated around kinship relations, local community, and tradition. It was thick interpersonal trust that helped establish a sense of stability, security, and reliability (Cook et al., 2004; Kapustkina, 2004). Thick interpersonal trust was necessary not only for creating a positive orientation to other people, but also for helping people cope with the shortcomings of the system of central planning that had created permanent shortages of consumer goods and services. Asking close family members and close relatives for help was often a starting point in the search for connections.

In summary, thick interpersonal trust originates in relationships with strong ties and depends on the personalities of both the trustee and the trustor, because it involves personal familiarity with the other person and strong emotional commitment to the relationship (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). Trust in this case is necessary for establishing ontological security grounded in 'confidence in the reliability of persons', which is the basis for creating a sense of social reality (Giddens, 1991: 38).

Thin Interpersonal Trust

In a contemporary society that is characterized by social diversity, people interact with others whom they may not know well (Barber, 1983; Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Luhmann, 1988). Dealing with such people is about developing weak social ties that are invaluable for obtaining access to otherwise unavailable resources (Granovetter, 1973). Trusting members of out-groups is about developing thin interpersonal trust, which is also known in the literature as 'process-based trust' (Zucker, 1986) or 'generalized trust' (Uslaner, 2002).

By placing trust in people whom we do not know well, we usually expect or believe that they will comply with our expectations, 'be fair, honest, and reasonable in their dealings with us' (Solomon and Flores, 2001: 42). Our expectations can depend on the notion of morality (Uslaner, 2002), commonly shared 'ordinary ethical rules' (Messick and Kramer, 2001), or they can also be of a more pragmatic nature. For instance, according to Gambetta (1988), before trusting somebody, people expect that others' actions will be beneficial or at least not detrimental to them. Hardin (1998) claims that trust is an 'encapsulated interest', which is based on the knowledge of others' goals and interests. Trust is necessary

for successful cooperation, because both parties have similar needs and interests, and they recognize the importance of collaboration in achieving common goals.

Thin interpersonal trust, however, is riskier than thick interpersonal trust, because the former is about relationships with people whose real intentions may not be clear (Heimer, 2001; Luhmann, 1988). These risks significantly increase our vulnerability and dependency on someone else's actions. Nonetheless, the more people know about other actors, the longer they interact with the same partners, the more likely they are to establish trustworthy relationships. These assumptions about trust require that people have detailed information about the other party, and that both parties act rationally.

However, people cannot be fully rational in their actions, because they have significantly limited and often biased information about their partners. Instead of being rational, people have what is called 'bounded rationality' (Simon, 1957), which means that social actors have a 'limited cognitive competence to receive, store, and process information' (Williamson, 1994: 101–2). People act in an environment of limited, approximate, and simplified models of reality, and their decisions depend more on already established patterns of behaviour, traditions, routines, and schemata (DiMaggio, 1997).

In the absence of previous relationships, the trustworthiness of a potential trustee primarily depends on two factors: the image of intermediaries[4] that the trustor relies on for obtaining information about trustees (Coleman, 1990; Levi, 1998) and/or the trustworthiness of institutions that back up trustees (Hardin, 1996). Creation of trust can be significantly facilitated if the trustor turns to a well-known and trustworthy intermediary for information about the trustee, and if the intermediary affirms trustworthiness of that potential trustee. Having a positive image of the intermediary directly influences the trustee's trustworthiness. For example, if your good friend recommends a doctor to you, you are more likely to trust that doctor. Moreover, trust in people can also be reinforced by institutional trust. When people decide to get onto a plane, they have to have some level of trust in the pilot. Although passengers do not know the pilot personally, their trust is often based on the airline's reputation. These two examples show that thin interpersonal trust depends significantly on the *reputation* (Zucker, 1986) of the trustee and/or the intermediary of trust.

Returning to the Soviet case, people had to rely on their weak ties to get access to scarce consumer goods and services during that time. Family members and close friends often acted as intermediaries of trust in such relationships. Their reputation was at stake if they recommended an unreliable person. Knowledge of the right people and a variety of weak ties were major sources of survival under the conditions of constant deficit of consumer goods in the Soviet Union. Contacts with people who are members of various networks can provide different access to consumer goods and services, which highly increases the chances of personal success.

Summarizing, thin interpersonal trust is created through interacting with people whom we do not know well and depends on the reputation of either a potential trustee or a trust intermediary. It represents reliance on weak ties and is based on the assumption that another person would reciprocate and comply with our expectations

of his or her behavior, as well as with existing formal and ethical rules. Although thin interpersonal trust is always directly associated with high risks – the ever-present possibility of lack of reciprocity, unmet expectations, and uncertainty – it is also able to provide us with more benefits if our trust is reciprocated.

Trust in Institutions

Political scientists often use the term 'political trust' (Newton, 2001; Secor and O'Loughlin, 2004; Uslaner, 2002), while some sociologists prefer to use the term 'system trust' (Barber, 1983; Giddens, 1990; Luhmann, 1988) to talk about impersonal trust. Despite the term used, trust in institutions is very different from trust in people, because the former may presuppose no 'encounters at all with the individuals or groups who are in some way "responsible" for them' (Giddens, 1990: 83). It is the impersonal nature of institutions that makes creation of institutional trust so difficult, because it is more problematic to trust some abstract principles or anonymous others who do not express any feelings and emotions. Yet institutional trust has the potential to encourage voluntary deference to the decisions made by institutions and increase public compliance with existing rules and regulations.

Some researchers, however, question the very possibility of trust in institutions. For instance, trust for Levi (1998) exists only between people, while trustworthiness can be attached to both people and institutions. She claims that in the case of trust in the state, which is one of the most important modern social institutions, citizens actually trust not the state per se, but 'they are declaring a belief that, on average, its agents will prove to be trustworthy' (Levi, 1998: 80). In her approach to trust, Levi follows Hardin (1998) who argues that researchers should not focus on trust in the state; instead they should concentrate on its trustworthiness. The state's trustworthiness requires a micro-level account of the government's functioning, meaning that citizens should perceive state officials who represent the state as trustworthy individuals.

Regardless of the theoretical approach, trust in institutions is often more important than interpersonal trust in a modern society, because institutions can have more resources to provide people with the means of achieving some of their goals. Effective functioning of institutions, and especially of the state, increases the level of institutional trust (Parry, 1976). As a result, citizens are more likely to rely on the government and its institutions in their everyday activities. Therefore, trust in institutions depends on their *perceived legitimacy, technical competence, and ability to perform assigned duties efficiently*.

Although institutional trust was very low in the Soviet Union, trustworthy institutions are particularly important for the transition to democracy and a free-market economy. The new socio-economic system makes the state and its agencies accountable for creating and enforcing the 'rules of the game', sustaining social order through mechanisms of legal control, and protecting individual rights and freedoms. In the beginning of the socio-economic transition, the idea of a democratic state was foreign to citizens, because the Soviet state did not have a trustworthy reputation. People got used to relying on their strong and weak ties
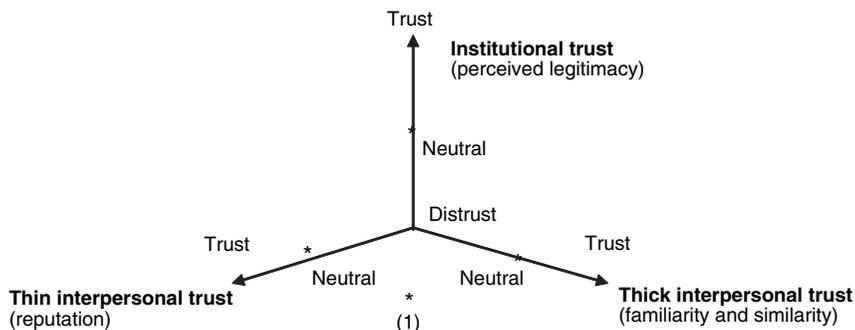
Figure 2   Three-dimensional approach to trust

for getting access to necessary resources and therefore were unwilling to depend on the new state institutions when they became available. It can be argued that citizens have extrapolated the low level of trust in the Soviet state onto a new Russian state. After the collapse of the Soviet system, the Russian government had to invest a lot of time and effort into creating a trustworthy image, and people had to learn how to trust the new state and its institutions.

To visually represent the complexity of trust, I suggest a synthetic, three-dimensional approach. A three-dimensional figure, which has thick interpersonal trust, thin interpersonal trust, and institutional trust as its axes, helps better depict the overall composition of three types of trust (See Figure 2). The point where the three axes intersect indicates total distrust in strong ties, weak ties, and institutions. The middle point of each axis is the point of neutrality, which is theoretically different from distrust: having no trust in institutions does not mean distrusting them. Applying this approach to Soviet society, the mix of trust at that time can be represented by point 1, which signifies rather high levels of thick and thin interpersonal trust, but indicates distrust in institutions.

Rethinking Trust: Trust as a Process

One of the major weaknesses of social capital theory is that it treats trust as a variable. Because the composition of the three types of trust in society is constantly changing, it seems more logical to treat trust not as a variable with different levels of strength, but rather as a *process* of its creation, development, and maintenance. Using trust as a process, however, is complicated by the absence of a good definition of trust that would emphasize its temporal characteristic. For instance, Gambetta's widely cited definition states that trust is:

> a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or a group of agents will perform a particular action, both *before* he can monitor such action (or independently of his capacity ever to be able to monitor it) *and* in a context in which it affects *his own* action. (1988: 217, author's italics)

This definition is useful for classifying people into high-trustors and low-trustors, but it does not tell us how trustworthy relationships are established and maintained.

With the notable exception of Nooteboom and Six's (2003) edited volume *The Trust Process in Organizations*, most contemporary social scientists do not view trust as a process. This can partly be explained by the fact that trust is traditionally measured through surveys[5] and experiments,[6] which are not particularly useful for depicting the dynamic nature of trust. Scholars often argue whether trust should be used as an independent or a dependent variable. Those who treat trust as an independent variable are primarily concerned with the benefits of trust. They focus on the potential of trust to reduce transaction costs (Nooteboom, 2000), facilitate cooperation (Gambetta, 1988), create social capital (Putnam, 2000; Putnam et al., 1993), and reduce the risks of uncertainty (Luhmann, 1988). In contrast, social scientists who view trust as a dependent variable focus on factors that have a direct impact on trust. For instance, Messick and Kramer (2001) and Yamagishi (2001) look at the characteristics of trustees as a criterion for building trust; Coleman (1990) and Levi (1998) are concerned with the role of the trust intermediaries' reputation; and Ouchi (1981) is interested in the impact of closeness, egalitarianism, and organizational structure on the development of trustworthy intra-organizational relationships.

Although the latter group of scholars looks at factors that influence the development and maintenance of trust, they still view trust as a variable. On the contrary, a small number of philosophers and sociologists argue against utilitarian usage of trust as a 'medium' or 'glue' that holds relationships and societies together. They emphasize the dynamic foundation of trust, which involves the idea of trust building. These researchers think of trust as a social practice and process because it involves the responsibility of both parties, commitment to the relationship, and the possibility of social change: to trust is to anticipate that the other party will exhibit benevolence supported by moral competence in the form of loyalty, generosity, and honesty (Jones, 1996).

Their approach, however, stresses the role of the past and the future: 'Trust is historical, but it is not so much tied to the past as it is pregnant with the future' (Solomon and Flores, 2001: 15). Möllering (2001: 412), who builds on the Simmelian approach to trust, argues that 'trust can be imagined as the mental process of leaping – enabled by suspension – across the gorge of the unknowable from the land of interpretation into the land of expectation'. His theoretical assumptions are supported by recent sociological research that shows that the decision to trust depends significantly on the previous experiences and reputation of both partners (Ensminger, 2001; Good, 1988), who enter such trustworthy relationships having an expectation of some future material and non-material rewards (Coleman, 1990; Gambetta, 1988; Tyler, 2001; Uzzi, 1997).

Nonetheless, a good definition of trust as a process should explain how all three temporal properties (the past, present, and future) influence the creation, development, and maintenance of trust. One such strategy is to view trust as a form of agency. Agency is 'the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different

structural environments . . . which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 970).

Agency, as defined by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), consists of three main elements: iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation. *Iteration* refers to the influences of past patterns of behavior on social practices through routines, traditions, and schemata. It represents a major element of path-dependency theory and illustrates the reflexive nature of trust. The second element of agency – *projectivity* – is understood as anticipation of the future based on an actor's hopes, fears, anxieties, aspirations, desires, and calculations. Actors do not necessarily base their behaviour entirely on previous experiences, because they also imaginatively construct future possibilities and options. Trust is future-oriented because of the dimensions of anticipation and risk (Gambetta, 1988; Luhmann, 1988; Solomon and Flores, 2001). Although people try to foresee their future, they do not possess adequate information about the motivations of other people, which leads to risk, uncertainty, and vulnerability caused by the behaviour of their partners.

Finally, the third element of agency – *the practical-evaluative dimension* – is the capacity of actors to judge the applicability of alternative options for action according to existing information as well as behavioral norms and moral standards. This temporal dimension is crucial for the analysis of trust because it describes the actual time when the decision to trust or not to trust is made. It addresses an actor's evaluation of existing options, which is, to some extent, a calculation of possible material and non-material costs and benefits of placing or not placing trust based on currently available information. The decision to enter trust relationships means that the actor anticipates only positive rewards from such relationships and is ready to act 'as if' the other person could be trusted (Uslaner, 2002).

By accepting the agentic nature of trust, I claim that the decision to trust another person is made in the present and is affected by the partner's reputation, which represents the past, and by the expectation of possible tangible and/or non-material rewards, which represents the future. I propose the following definition of trust as a process, which takes all three temporal dimensions into account:

> Trust is 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 current circumstances of action, (3) assumptions about the partner's actions, and (4) the belief in the honesty and morality of the other side.

This definition of trust reflects the idea of temporality and accounts for rational (Gambetta, 1988; Nooteboom, 2000; Williamson, 1994), as well as non-calculative or affective dimensions of human behaviour (Jones, 1996; Lewis and Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995). The idea that trust is a process of an 'imaginative anticipation' goes beyond the rational choice perspective in that it stresses the notion of imagination, which implies that people cannot accurately predict the future, but are able to hypothesize about it. Human beings not only try to theoretically foresee their future, but they also try to step into the shoes

of their partners and understand how they might act in a particular situation. Such an imaginative exercise, of course, is often far away from the real behavior of the other party, but it gives people a sense of predictability, or at least a sense of readiness for action.

The above definition of trust also implies the existence of a non-calculable dimension of human behavior. People do not always view each other as being totally driven by the desire to maximize their own profits, as rational choice theorists would argue. People are not able to be completely rational in their decisions because they act in an environment characterized by everlasting uncertainty, fast changes, and risk (Giddens, 1990; Luhmann, 1988). The unpredictability of the long-term future often encourages people to rely more on the honesty and morality of their partners than on their ability to act rationally (Messick and Kramer, 2001; Uslaner, 2002).

The notion of reliability of the other party includes the idea of risk (Cvetkovich and Lofstedt, 1999; Gambetta, 1988; Luhmann, 1988; Poortinga and Pidgeon, 2003). If I trust you, will you comply with formal and informal rules that guide our interaction? Reliability is partly based on previous experiences with a partner and his or her reputation (Ensminger, 2001; Good, 1988). If the actor has a record of bad relationships with other partners, he or she is less likely to be considered trustworthy, and therefore new partners may be unwilling to engage in further exchange with this actor. In contrast, if both partners had successful previous relationships with each other or have positive information about each other, they are more likely to establish trustworthy relationships.

The decision to trust is always made in the present. Although people try to imagine their future, their imagination is bounded by the information they possess now. Something that is desirable for them today may not be as desirable tomorrow. People, however, trust that others will comply with the same behavioural and moral principles tomorrow and follow the 'rules of the game' regardless of possible future changes in their relationships.

Conclusion

In this article, I have analyzed the complexity of trust by presenting a synthetic approach that combines three objects of trust relationships – strong ties, weak ties, and social institutions – and views trust not as a variable but as a process. Such an approach helps better explain the multifaceted nature of trust in a modern society. By using the paradox of 'the weakness of the strong state', I have presented an alternative to social capital theory's explanation of why Soviet citizens did not trust the state. Following Parry (1976), I viewed the inability of the government to provide its citizens with scarce consumer goods and services as an important factor that explains the lack of institutional trust in the Soviet Union.

Analytically, my discussion of the Soviet case and three types of trust shows that it is necessary to distinguish between interpersonal trust and institutional trust. It is hard to disagree with those scholars who think that Soviet citizens had low levels of trust in their government. Yet, at the same time, it would not be

correct to claim that the USSR was a low trust society solely because of the lack of trust in government. According to Cook et al. (2004), in the absence of trust in the state, strong networks of interpersonal trust facilitated social exchange among different groups, which helped people survive during the long years of a poorly managed economy.

Theoretically, my analysis shows that the major difference between interpersonal and institutional trust lies in the type of social exchange involved. Compared to institutional trust, interpersonal trust depends on social interactions that are more reciprocal and symmetrical in nature. Trust in people can be further subdivided into thick trust, which implies familiarity and strong emotional ties with trustees, and thin trust, which involves relationships with weak ties and primarily depends on actors' reputations.

In contrast to existing approaches to trust, which primarily treat it as a variable, I emphasize the temporal dimension of trust and its agentic nature. The idea of temporality makes the study of trust-building processes possible because it illustrates factors that influence the creation, development, and maintenance of trustworthy relationships. Looking at trust as a process may help explain why Russians were unwilling to depend on the newly created democratic state and its institutions when they became available. My conceptual definition of trust also combines rational decision-making with ideas of honesty and morality and explains how our decision to trust is influenced by the past, present, and future.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 For details on the differences between trust and confidence see Luhmann (1988), Offe (1999), and Cook (2005); between reliance and trust see Pettit (1995); and between faith and trust see Solomon and Flores (2001).

2 Although it is theoretically possible to add a fourth dimension of trust, namely trust in technology (Cvetkovich and Lofstedt, 1999; Poortinga and Pidgeon, 2003), such analysis would extend beyond the discussion of the Soviet case and would require an additional article.

3 Fukuyama (1995: 4–5) defines civil society as 'a complex welter of intermediary institutions, clubs, unions, media, charities, and churches'.

4 According to Coleman (1990), advisors, guarantors, and entrepreneurs are the three most common types of intermediaries. Advisors provide the trustor with information about potential trustees, while guarantors and entrepreneurs are

personally responsible for a successful placement of trust and often act as trustees to the trustor.

5 See Uslaner (2002) for a discussion of using surveys to measure trust.
6 See Cook and Cooper (2003) for a review of major experimental work on trust.

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