Trust:

An Exploration of Its Nature and Significance

Clayton J. Arceneaux, Sr.

University of Southwestern Louisiana

The word *trust* has been active in the language of lay persons and helping professionals throughout written history. Although it is a vital and essential ingredient in living, trust has not been a lucid and tangible concept. As people become more interdependent and as North American society continues to experience the pressures of population growth, economic problems, high divorce and crime rates, corruption in business and politics, and other deepening concerns, helping professionals will be compelled to develop a better understanding of trust and its importance to modern living.

Although the concept of trust has received relatively little attention from researchers and writers involved in invitational theory, its essence has pervaded the literature (Purkey & Novak, 1984; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987; Novak, 1992). While trust, along with respect, optimism, and intentionality, has been identified as one of the four assumptions that provide the framework for invitational theory, it has not received the study it deserves.

Schmidt (1988) referred to "mutual respect" and "faith" in his reference to relationships among friends (p. 9-11). Purkey and Schmidt (1987) asserted that trust is the "interdependence of human beings...the quality that is manifested in an inviting pattern of action...which creates and maintains inviting relationships" (p. 9). Such references to "interdependence" and phrases like "patterns of human interaction" become clearer when one is knowledgeable of the part that reliance, genuineness, truthfulness, intent, and competence play in the meaning of trust.

Although common definitions are adequate, it is necessary to explore the nature and significance of trust so that its contribution to invitational theory is evident. The purpose of this article is to: (1) define trust, (2) present various trust situations, (3) present the circumstances of trust, and (4) explore practical implications of the trust construct for invitational theory. In defining trust, it helps to consider its sources.

Sources of Trust

The essence of trust is anchored in certain sources of *ethos* and *source credibility*. The literature related to each of these, reveals an extensive array of sources that have contributed to a full, yet parsimonious, expression of the concept of trust. In his classic, *Rhetoric*, Aristotle introduced the concept of ethos, which holds that one's credibility depends on intelligence, correctness of opinion, character, honesty, good will, favorable intent, and reliability (McCroskey, 1968). More current literature lists ethos-related sources of trust as competence, truthfulness, reliability, ethics, integrity, genuineness, and positive intent (Heath & Bryant, 1992; Dahnke & Clatterbuck,

1990; Lui & Standing, 1989; Posner & Kouzes, 1988; and Rotter & Stein, 1971). *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1986) defined ethos as that which "distinguishes character, tone, and guiding beliefs."

From the realm of source credibility, trust is identified as expertness, valid assertions, and trustworthiness (Dahnke & Clatterbuck, 1990; Lui & Standing, 1989; Posner & Kouzes, 1988; and Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953). Therefore, the following sources seem appropriate for building the concept of trust: (1) reliability (consistency, dependability, and predictability), (2) genuineness (authenticity and congruence), (3) truthfulness (honesty, correctness of opinion, and validity of assertions), (4) intent (good character, ethical stance, and integrity), and (5) competence (intelligence, expertness, and knowledge). Trust is regarded as all that is conveyed by these five sources. In addition, there are some ancillary sources of trust such as attractiveness, composure (calmness, coolness and in control of self), dynamism (animated and excited), extroversion (outgoing), and sociability (likableness). While these sources can elicit trust, they have the potential for deceptive use as well as for good intent. Such sources of trust are only mentioned here as they appear to account for only a small portion of trust (Dahnke & Clatterbuck, 1990; Posner & Kouzes, 1988; and McCroskey, 1968; Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1966).

To test the validity of the distinction of trust factors between central sources (reliability, genuineness, truthfulness, intent, and competence) and ancillary sources (attractiveness, composure, dynamism, and sociability) this author constructed an instrument and in a pilot study administered it to a group of graduate students. A total of 41 graduate students representing a variety of helping professions at a southern university responded to the instrument, which included the nine sources of trust and instructions to rank these factors from 1 (most central) to 9 (least central) based on their importance in the concept of trust. A contingency table analysis was performed on the data. The ranking of the nine factors classified them as either in the top five or the bottom four of the rankings. The resultant x_2 value was statistically significant beyond the .001 level ($x_2 = 289.976$, df = 8, p < .001).

These results support the distinction between the central sources and the ancillary sources of trust. Figure 1 highlights the nature of trust as viewed in part from the findings of this pilot study. It will be helpful to keep this diagram in mind as sources, situations, and circumstances of trust are explored.

Trust appears to consist of five sources, two situations, and four circumstances. Each will be considered in turn.

Reliability

Reliability is established through consistency and predictability. To be considered reliable or reliant, a person is consistently dependable over time. For example, when you become ill, you trust your parents to respond with concern and care because they have been consistently concerned and caring over time. Reliability is perhaps the first component of trust to be recognized by researchers and writers, and it appears to be the one referred to most frequently in published sources.

Figure 1 Trust Diagram

Genuineness

This quality refers to the level of authenticity and congruence exhibited by the sender or receiver of a message or product. Individuals cannot be thought of as trustworthy if they are perceived by themselves or others as operating behind a facade. An example of genuineness might be a grandparent who is free from pretense and who is content to simply be himself or herself. While genuineness resembles truthfulness, each is unique and one cannot stand in place of the other.

Truthfulness

This source is characterized by a devotion to accuracy and honesty. People who display honesty in actions and seek to be correct in their opinions and assertions are considered to be truthful. An example from literature would be when the emperor and his subjects had been persuaded that the king had new clothes, it was the honesty of a child who insisted that the emperor had no clothes on. Truthfulness refers to one's ability to express reality by being valid with assertions.

Intent

Intent is best explained as the display of good character, ethical behavior, and integrity. A person who exhibits these qualities may be thought of as trustworthy if he or she acts in the best interest or welfare of all individuals involved in the trust process. For example, when a person's life and safety are threatened, he or she calls the police. The assumption and expectation embedded in this action is that the representatives of society's helping agencies embody the attributes of positive intent and will respond accordingly.

Competence

This source includes all that might be referred to as intelligence, expertness, and knowledge. Intelligence is the capacity to reason and make sound judgments. Knowledge and expertise mean being learned and skilled in a particular discipline or field of endeavor. When a patient learns that a physical condition requires open-heart surgery, he or she would want a cardiovascular surgeon who is knowledgeable, skilled, and competent.

All the sources of trust are interrelated and interdependent. To the degree that any one is missing in a given situation, trust is weakened or absent. These sources of trust are funneled into interpersonal and intrapersonal situations.

Situations of Trust

The sources of trust are considered in terms of either interpersonal or intrapersonal situations.

Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal trust is defined as an expectancy held by an individual or group that another individual or group can be relied upon (Rotter, 1971). When and if the positions are reversed, the situation remains one of interpersonal trust. In other words, interpersonal trust refers to an individual sender who is perceived as sincere, benevolent, and truthful by a receiver. At the same time, a receiver who is perceived as sincere, benevolent, and truthful by the sender is considered trustworthy (Gurtman, 1992; Rotter, 1980).

Intrapersonal Trust

While intrapersonal trust is not as frequently discussed in the literature, it is nonetheless an acknowledged phenomenon. Giffin (1967) discussed intrapersonal trust as the trust in oneself as a speaker or a listener. Arceneaux (1976) discussed intrapersonal trust as related to self-perceived confidence or self-doubt. Classic self-concept theory and the idea of self-efficacy also imply intrapersonal trust. Therefore, intrapersonal trust is an expectancy held by an individual that he or she can be relied upon in the role of sender or receiver (Rotter & Stein, 1971; Giffin, 1967). Intrapersonal trust also refers to the perceived trustworthiness of a sender by the sender. Likewise, intrapersonal trust may refer to the perceived trustworthiness of a receiver by the receiver (Gurtman, 1992; Rotter, 1967).

In counseling relationships, Rogers (1961) described a pattern of increased personal trust and value that he observed in each of his clients as the therapeutic process progressed. It is from these experiences that he inspired an appreciation for intrapersonal trust of the receiver (client) in oneself. However, the reverse—trust of the sender (therapist)—is also applicable. The famed trumpeter, Louis Armstrong, for example, must have understood as he listened to some of his early instrumental and vocal renditions that great musicians and singers did not play and sing as he did. Somehow he trusted in his own experiencing of life, the process of himself, enough that he could go on expressing his own uniqueness.

With these two situations in mind our focus moves to the four circumstances of trust presented in the trust diagram (Figure 1). For the purpose of this paper the term *sender* can refer to presenter, performer, provider, or source while the term *receiver* refers to listener, audience, or consumer.

Trust Circumstances

Out of interpersonal and intrapersonal trust situations come two sets of circumstances, each with two possibilities. The interpersonal trust situation presents two possible circumstances: the receiver's trust in the sender and the sender's trust in the receiver. Likewise, the intrapersonal trust situation presents these two possibilities: the receiver's trust in self and the sender's trust in self.

Receiver's Trust in Sender

This circumstance has to do with the receiver's concern for the trustworthiness (reliability, intent, and competence) of the sender. Literature related to this particular circumstance begins with the Aristotelian influence on trust. Aristotle based his views on empirical observations of the practice of speakers and responses of audiences, particularly the speakers' means of persuasion to arouse audiences, yielding his term *ethos*. Aristotle believed that one's potential to be trusted depended on the sender's intelligence, correctness of opinion, character, honesty, reliability, goodwill and favorable intent as per-ceived by the receiver (Heath & Bryant, 1992; Dahnke & Clatterbuck, 1990).

Further, Dahnke and Clatterbuck (1990), discussed the concept of source credibility that emerged as a result of research conducted by C. I. Hovland, J. L. Janis, and H. H. Kelly in the 1940's and 1950's. Dahnke, Fernandez-Collado, and Clatterbuck (1990) cited subsequent researchers like J. C. McCroskey, T. Jensen, C. Todd, J. Toomb, and W. Holridge who collaborated in various combinations in the early 1970's to analyze what constitutes credibility. This research implies that receivers (people) make about five independent decisions about a sender, which contributes to the credibility of the sender. Those decisions are related to competence, character, composure, sociability, and extroversion. From Aristotle's viewpoint, persuasion of credibility was the essential focus and the responsibility of the sender. However, contemporary researchers view credibility as being conferred by the receiver rather than by the sender.

Studies of interpersonal trust are abundant. Watkins and Terrell (1988), Watkins, Terrell, Faynesse and Terrell (1989), and Poston, Craine, and Atkinson (1991) conducted separate studies in which they observed that black clients (receivers) were distrustful of white counselors. Brownlow and Zebrowitz (1990) studied facial appearances of television spokespersons and found that baby-faced persons and females were perceived by audiences to have less expertise but to be more trustworthy than more mature-faced persons and males. In another study, Gunther (1992) argued that the receiver's group membership plays a role in his or her perception of the press's competence and trustworthiness. Finally, Posner and Kouzes (1988) examined leadership and credibility, and found that subordinates (receivers) were trusting of leaders who challenged the process, shared vision, enabled others to act, and served as models. Each of the preceding

studies is an instance of the receiver's trust in the sender or source, and is an instance wherein people trust for various reasons.

Sender's Trust in the Receiver

This second interpersonal circumstance has to do with the sender's concern whether the receiver is worthy of trust. Specifically, reference is made to a sender who perceives a receiver to be sincere, benevolent, truthful, and trustworthy (Gurtman, 1992; Rotter, 1967). Manifestations of this phenomenon are related to concepts such as teacher expectations and the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Teacher expectation is what a teacher believes about a child's ability as reflected in the teacher's behavior (Fennimore, 1989). The faith or lack of faith demonstrated by the teacher will affect the child's school performance. Teacher expectations are influenced by personal characteristics of children and families, such as race, sex, parent occupation, socio-economic status, family structure, and intelligence (Kachur, Godbold, Glidden, & Marquis, 1985). The above hypothesis was supported by the classic Rosenthal and Jacobson study, reported in *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, which found that students who were labeled potential achievers showed significant gains in IQ and that the reasons for such gains were that their teachers expected more of them (Biehler & Snowman, 1990). This phenomenon is referred to as the Pygmalion effect, and subsequent studies have given credence to the notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Bandura (1977) and Johnson (1986) asserted that when false beliefs are established by a sender, the beliefs become self-perpetuating. As a result, it becomes possible for the original false impression to be accepted as reality. The assumptions, true or false, that the sender makes about the receiver and the way in which the sender behaves can often influence how the receiver responds to the sender, thus establishing a self-fulfilling prophecy in the relationship.

The following examples illustrate a negative and a positive self-fulfilling relationship. An agricultural consultant (sender) expects his audience to dislike him, distrust him, and reject him. Therefore, the sender in this instance behaves in a very guarded and suspicious way toward the group (receivers). His actions can influence the audience to dislike, distrust, and reject him. A second consultant who speaks to the same farmers later that day expects them to be congenial, friendly, and trustworthy. She reacts to them pleasantly and friendly, freely disclosing her thoughts and feelings, while accepting and supporting them. Her experience is one in which the group receives her as she expected.

Receiver's Trust in the Receiver

The first intrapersonal circumstance is a receiver's concern for his or her own trustworthiness as a receiver. This particular concern is related to one's self-concept; in this case, all of a receiver's perceptions of self, varying in clarity, precision, and importance (Combs & Gonzalez, 1994). The individual in this circumstance may experience trust or lack of trust in self. An example would be Mary, a student who listens to a lecturer whose content is generally clear to her, perhaps because of her special interest and prior exposure to the subject. Throughout the lecture she attends with complete confidence that she can master the information shared. On the other hand,

another student, John, finds the content difficult to comprehend. From the beginning he has difficulty understanding the message; at times he is lost in the barrage of words and the new concepts presented. Consequently, throughout the ordeal he feels inadequate and doubtful. On this occasion, John lacks trust in his ability as a receiver to benefit from what he suspects is a valuable presentation, especially after he notices Mary's positive response. Naturally, Mary builds trust in the way she perceives herself as a receiver. However, John challenges and threatens his self-trust as a receiver.

Consequently, this intrapersonal trust circumstance has important identity implications. Combs and Gonzalez (1994) would say that John's experience was negative and held the potential for negative feelings, beliefs, and behavior, while Mary's positive experience could yield positive feelings, beliefs, and behavior. John is likely to attribute his problem to internal personal factors and the impression (feedback) he had when he observed Mary's reaction. Mary would attribute her success to internal personal factors, and in her positive state, is likely to attribute her good fortune to external factors as well.

Sender's Trust in Sender

This trust circumstance refers to the trustworthiness of a sender as perceived by the sender. This circumstance of trust is explained in terms of self-efficacy, which, in many respects, is similar to self-concept. Shubert and Ayers (1992) explained that confidence from knowledge, expertise, and experience is what a sender needs for self-trust. It is confidence, faith, and trust in self that promotes spontaneity of thought and action. One who has a positive self-concept tends to be confident and efficacious, and one whose self-concept is inadequate tends to be insecure. However, there are times when individuals who have a positive self-concept experience moments of anxiety, doubt, and lack of trust. This usually occurs in the presence of observers. An example is when a performer (a sender), considered to be an expert, experiences a temporary condition commonly known in the acting profession as "butterflies" or "stage fright."

A sender relies in part on information from his or her physiological state in judging personal performance level. A person reads visceral arousal in stressful and taxing situations as a sign of vulnerability. While high arousal debilitates performance, average arousal is not likely to impede success. As the sender begins a rendition or speech, he or she senses subtle and obvious feedback that reinforces and increases trust in self as a sender.

A capability is only as good as its execution. One's efficacy in dealing with the environment is not a fixed act or knowledge. Instead, it involves generative cognitive, social, and behavioral skills organized into integrated courses of action to serve a number of purposes. A sender's perceived self-efficacy is concerned with the sender's judgment of how well he or she will deal with a situation. Such judgment, be it accurate or faulty, influences whether the sender will trust or doubt his or her capability and how the sender's view will ultimately affect a particular undertaking in some way. Judgments about one's confidence determine how much effort a sender will expend and how long he or she will persist. Because senders are influenced more by their perceived self-efficacy, perceived self-efficacy is a better predictor of future behavior than actual performance level of the sender.

One may conclude that a sender's behavior is closely related to his or her level of self-efficacy. The higher one's perceived self-efficacy is then the greater one's performance. A skeptical sender's ability to control his or her actions tends to undermine effort in challenging situations. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that human influence, individual or collective, operates in a reciprocal way rather than in a unidirectional way (Bandura, 1982).

Implications

The civilized world has proclaimed the value of trust casually and formally. It is a moral source that is essential to positive and constructive relationships within and among societies. Trust makes collaboration, cooperation, harmony, and production possible. At a time when hatred, violence, selfishness, cheating, and abuse are on the rise, it becomes a most important concept. Trust is best understood as an element consisting of unique human qualities and sources, and influenced by situations and circumstances. Then its value and application to the lives of people will be appreciated beyond casual understanding.

This article identifies two situations of trust: interpersonal and intrapersonal. Generally, research and writing about trust were related to interpersonal trust. Moreover, interpersonal situations are related to the receiver's trust of sender.

A second circumstance of intrapersonal trust, a sender's trust in receiver, was described using the self-fulfilling prophecy and teacher expectation. Personal expectations were found to be true when the two circumstances of the intrapersonal situation were explored: receiver's trust in the receiver and the sender's trust in the sender. In the case of the former, reliance was thrust on self-concept and self-esteem theory. The latter circumstance forced reliance on self-efficacy.

The implication is that ethos-related research and source-credibility research, as well as other research, need to focus on matters related to sender's trust in the receiver, receiver's trust in the receiver, and the sender's trust in the sender. It appears that the domain of intrapersonal trust is not as developed as interpersonal trust. While interpersonal trust, as related to receiver's trust of sender, has received a great deal of attention, the sender's trust of receiver has obviously not been a matter of investigative urgency.

In this article, I have attempted to identify and explain a systematic and comprehensive way of viewing trust as a concept. With a comprehensive and systematic view, more meaningful and more rational strategies for facilitating the development, enhancement, and management of trust are possible. The general implication is that more and broader research efforts can yield a greater basis for developing trust—building trust and wisdom within and among groups, and within the individual.

Additionally, an implication is that the enhancement or broadening of trust as a construct, in turn, makes it possible for theories whose substance relies significantly on the concept of trust to advance their ideas. An example is invitational theory, which uses trust as a primary assumption of the professional stance (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987).

As currently perceived, trust implies good character and requires commitment to self and others, personally as well as professionally, by giving proper attention to places, programs, policies, and processes for the welfare of people. This article calls attention to the fact that neither a sender nor receiver can accomplish good in the absence of trust.

Finally, trust and all that it embodies must become a source of inspiration for people to be concerned beyond an aesthetic response to paradigms such as the one proposed by invitational theory. It is not enough to be caught up in the beauty and excitement of content, conferences, speeches, and quotations. Instead, people must make an ethical response to trust and invitational approaches. Such a response must grow out of an appreciation for both and a personal commitment to follow implied and inferred precepts that are to be accepted, practiced, and shared.

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Clayton J. Arceneaux, Sr. is professor of education at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, LA. Send correspondence to Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, The University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, LA 70504-3091