

Trust as a Cornerstone of a Civic Society

Social science has always been interested in finding out what factors or institutional arrangements have considerably facilitated societies to grow and develop economically, culturally, socially and politically. At the moment, this question is particularly topical at least for the following interrelated reasons. Firstly, continuous and accelerating change accompanied by increasing uncertainty makes it increasingly difficult for government, business, and labor to adjust to emerging conditions which are largely hard to predict and know in advance.

Secondly, complexities are inclined to increase, often exponentially, in organizations and societies as shown convincingly by Robert W. Rycroft and Don E. Kash in their *The Complexity Challenge: Technological Innovation for the 21st Century* (1999). This creates an unparalleled challenge for governments to discover fundamentally new political practices for political leadership in order to make the relationship with society more reciprocal, creative, and productive.

Thirdly, it seems that we have lost our compass and map that we have used for navigation in our society. Our social achievements, for which we have sacrificed, in which we have believed, and which we now understandably hold so dear and irreplaceable, appear to be bringing about more problems than they are able to solve. Things that were once solutions are now transforming into problems. There are many who worry that the foundations of a tolerable society are slowly crumbling down. This makes some indifferent and some angry, as professor Susan Tolchin forebodes in her book *Angry Americans – How Voter Rage is Changing the Nation* (1998), which should be compulsory reading for Finnish scholars.

However, the search for new cornerstones for developing our organizations and society has already begun. In his pioneering book *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (1995) Francis Fukuyama from George Mason University persuasively shows that trust elucidates why some nations, roughly similar in terms of material and social resources, do economically and politically better than others. Risto Harisalo and Ensio Miettinen have reached parallel conclusions in their *Trust Capital: The Third Force of Entrepreneurship* (1995).

Two studies to be published later in 2001 by Risto Harisalo and Jari Stenvall demonstrate the potential of trust for making organizations achieving and societies energetic. Their *Trust as a Cornerstone of a Civic Society* suggests that citizens' confidence tends to condition and structure ministries' ability to make difficult political decisions and lead the country in times of affluence or austerity. Mistrust creates an evil circle of opportunism where people always want more and more but are never satisfied with what they get from the government. *Trust Management in Ministries* confirms how deleterious is mistrust and how empowering is trust for management in its pursuit of social

objectives of ministries. In private and public organizations governance is based on trust.

It has been the policy of the Journal to devote space for intellectual contributions to promote dialogue on new theoretical insights on how major changes could affect government and organizational development in public and private spheres. This time we are particularly happy to publish Ning Li's article on social capital and international R & D collaboration which increases our understanding of the role of trust in highly intricate environments in which new technological innovations are created, tested and introduced. He shows that the more knowledge intensive an R&D area is, the stronger is the role of trust in a scientific culture. His findings are relevant for those who have development of social innovations at their responsibility. And his results also have implications for those actively engaged in the heated debate on the blessings and curses of globalization.

Despite intensive interest in the roles trust plays in politics, governance, and business, more vigorous research is still needed to make the picture more complete. Will it help us to patch up fundamental problems in political processes? Could it assist us to discover and introduce innovations more effectively? Can trust empower our organizations to become more inspiring and humane?

According to Francis Fukuyama's *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstruction of Social Order* (1999) trust may be of great help in attempts to put right structural social troubles that seem to be beyond our best capability to understand and handle. If trust is the key, what could be our government's policy to promote trust and fight mistrust? How we deal with this question will determine whether are we moving towards high-trust or low-trust society.

We wish our readers fruitful and stimulating reading experiences.

Risto Harisalo and Jari Stenvall