The university in the audit society: on accountability, trust and markets

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Introduction

Universities are organizations that perform basic functions resulting from the particular combination of educational and scientific, social and economic, cultural and ideological roles assigned to them. They are multi-purpose or multi-product organizations that contribute to the production and application of knowledge, the training of the highly skilled labour force, the social development and educational upgrading of societies, the selection and formation of elites and the generation and transmission of ideology. This range of functions constitutes the key tasks of higher education systems, albeit with different emphases depending on the national context, the historical period, the specific sector and indeed the organization concerned. What is clear though is that nowadays, universities are heavily involved in literally every kind of social and economic activity in our societies. This is but one of the factors that make the university such an interesting social institution to study. At the same time, this makes universities rather vulnerable organizations that tend to be laden with multiple expectations and growing demands about their role and functioning. There is good reason to argue that the university belongs to the kind of species of modern organizations that, from the point of view of system theory of functional differentiation, can be characterized by overcomplexity and underdifferentiation.

Moreover, the argument goes that there no longer seems to be a single society to which a university can be expected to respond. Instead, there are 'stakeholders' and 'markets', external and internal, suggesting changes in universities' relationships with society that are a mixed blessing for their status and role [1].

In this light, I see it as of great analytic interest to study the changing relationship between the university and society: the old and emerging new modes of co-ordination in higher education and their underlying rationales, how these are being translated into organizational frameworks and responses, and how they affect the basic functions of universities. Equally, from a normative point of view it might also be essential to support a policy search for systems and organizations that will be both solid and dynamic enough to withstand the current tensions and

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dilemmas, dilemmas that are already triggering demands for the simultaneous performance of increasingly competitive and sometimes contradictory functions in a changing environment [2].

In the following, I want to reflect on the linkages between governance reform in higher education and the issue of 'trust'. Large-scale institutional reforms in social service delivery in general and in higher education in particular have frequently been legitimized by statements around the loss of trust in public institutions and their performance. In solving these problems a reallocation of authority, centred on accountability and management, as well as the strengthening of market-type mechanisms, centred on price and competition, would have a central role to play. Both would help to get 'more for less', to raise the quality of services and to restore trust. This well-known argument raises simple, but intriguing questions that warrant further attention [3–5]: what empirical evidence do we have for a loss of trust in higher education? Who has lost trust? Are institutional reforms in higher education the cure for or cause of a lack of trust? And how likely is it that they will help to restore trust?

Trust and distrust in the service state

The issue of a loss of trust in higher education is a fascinating one. For one thing, trust is a complex phenomenon that is defined and interpreted in different ways. I want to use trust in its probably broadest sense as confidence in one's expectations [6]. In this meaning, trust involves a problematic relationship with time. Trust ties the past to present expectations and these to a reliable future. It means to behave as though the future is certain and thus remains in principle a risky undertaking. At the same time, trust provides an enormously efficient way of dealing with uncertainty and overcomplexity. In trusting another party, one treats as certain those aspects of life that would otherwise be clouded by overcomplexity. In this sense, trust reduces complex realities far better than authority and price, and has trust been understood as one of the three major coordinating mechanisms supporting social interaction within uncertain environments. Certainly, trust has to be learned and earned. It may rely on familiarity or social similarity, on past experience and recurrent interactions as well as shared values and norms [7]. And trust can be lost, which raises the issue of functional equivalents because otherwise the function of trust would remain unfulfilled. "Anyone who merely refuses to confer trust restores the original complexity of the potentialities of the situation […] Anyone who does not trust must, therefore, turn to functionally equivalent strategies for the reduction of complexity in order to be able to define a practically meaningful situation at all" ([6], p. 71).

For another thing, a loss of trust is often spoken of or written as an established fact that has fostered changes in and around higher education. But what is meant exactly, and where is the empirical evidence? Certainly, it suits politicians, faced with fierce fiscal pressures and a 'massifying' higher education system, to claim that there is a groundswell of public opinion demanding change owing to a lack of efficiency and effectiveness in the system. However, the basis for this claim seems somewhat unclear, to say the least. Obviously, we all know about private

conversations and public announcements of discontent when it comes to higher education. They sometimes might amount to an overall sense of crisis around and within the system. But does that mean that 'system trust', as Luhmann [6] phrased it, the overall public trust invested into the function and performance of a given societal sub-system, has decreased or even diminished?

Public discontent in higher education

One way of trying to examine this issue is to look at survey data concerning public confidence in modern institutions. Major data sources of this kind, such as the European Values Survey [8] or OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) data sources, usually do not break down to the level of higher education. They only allow us to compare public confidence in education with other major institutions, such as the health service, governments, major companies or the legal system. It is interesting, however, to see that no simple picture can be given when it comes to a link between public sector reform in education and citizens' perceptions. In 1981, confidence in the educational system in six Western European countries ranged, for example, from 43% in Germany to 73% in The Netherlands, with Sweden (62%), U.K. (60%) and France (57%) somewhere between these countries. Then, 10 years later public confidence in the educational system had considerably increased in Germany (+11 percentage points), France (+9 points) and Sweden (+8 points) and declined in countries that were certainly more busy with some kind of new public management reform of their educational system, i.e. The Netherlands (−8 points) and namely the U.K. (−13 points). Furthermore, the respective data sources indicate that public confidence in the educational system was in all countries and at both points in time higher than the respective scores for civil service, governments and major companies. In most OECD countries, public opinion was actually defensive of the major public services – pensions, healthcare and education – during the last two decades of the 20th Century. In the U.K. during the height of Margaret Thatcher's reforms, in New Zealand during the radical changes of the 1980s and early 1990s, and even in the U.S.A. under Ronald Reagan, strong popular majorities in favour of traditional public service systems could be found in many opinion polls. Of course, none of this is to deny that individual citizens wanted improvements in particular services, but data indicate that citizens actually have highly sophisticated and differentiated views of public services, and that some of them (e.g. fire services, the police, local hospitals and schools) are often rated more highly than many private sector services [9]. Surveys among students, postgraduates and academics [10,11] tend to show a rather similar picture of quite differentiated views on the strengths and weaknesses of a given higher education system. Obviously, there is criticism and a demand for possible improvements. An overall picture of discontent cannot be found, however.

Interpretation of broad survey data such as these is indeed extremely difficult. Macro-level perceptions are not easily reflected at micro-levels. A lot may depend on how questions are phrased, and the broader the questions the more difficult the interpretation is. Moreover, the empirical relevance of such studies for our argument can be relatively easily contested. Confidence or satisfaction is not trust, and subjective measures of that kind are based on expectations

that are usually not measured in such surveys. They may be quantitatively and qualitatively different and may well change over time. It is relatively easy, for example, to score high when expectations are already low, whereas a reasonable performance might score low when expectations become inflationary. We should also not neglect that major reforms in public services influence citizens' and stakeholders' expectations and satisfaction, sometimes in a paradoxical manner. Usually, such reforms produce high transaction costs in terms of resources and legitimacy and seek support via two strategies: an unfair attack on the performance of the 'old' system that systematically overemphasizes its points of weakness; and the promise of an illuminated future that systematically overemphasizes what realistically may be achieved by the reforms. They create a missionary phase that may undermine trust in the 'old' system. There is thus no easy answer to the question of whether loss of trust is the cause for the ongoing re-engineering of public services or, at least partly, the effect of a public attack by those who are proposing the need for reform.

Finally, there may well be changes in what can be called the meta-trust in higher education's benefits for society at large that we do not observe via such surveys at all. This argument involves changing expectations within society about the contribution of higher education and research to societal welfare and economic well-being. It is not so much about 'more of the same', but about qualitatively different expectations, about changing qualification needs and demands for research production and knowledge dissemination. At the end of the day, it involves the construction of a different innovation strategy that is no longer based on the traditions of the industrial age. To date, we lack large-scale international studies that would allow for a differentiated empirical analysis of what has changed when it comes to public expectations on the role of higher education in society. However, we cannot neglect that a certain discourse around changing expectations with regard to the role of higher education in society and economy has gained in importance. Such changing expectations would undermine trust even if the societal sub-systems score well according to the traditional expectations.

Procedural distrust or the decline of the professional state

From another point of view, a good case can be made that the trust of political actors in the governance capacities of the 'professional state' has suffered and stimulated a search for a new mix of procedural arrangements to run public service sectors, such as higher education, in a better way. Two dichotomies come into play, which have informed analytical thinking about governance for quite a long time: the state compared with the market, and the profession compared with the organization. It is now commonplace to conclude that the traditional governance arrangements in Western Europe were premised around three assumptions about the university as a professional state institution: first, the regulatory environment is a national one dominated by the state or the various agencies of governmental or intermediate steering and control; secondly, the self-organization of science and the academic self-administration of universities assure a high degree of legitimate professional autonomy and performance; and thirdly, these relationships are more or less exclusive in terms of protecting the university from further direct interference from 'society' or interest groups. Yet,

as a consequence of various processes, these assumptions have all been challenged. During the last few decades we have been able to observe a remarkable shift in governmental beliefs and attitudes concerning the role of the state in modern societies and the modes of governmental problem-solving in public sectors such as higher education. By and large, the implementation of respective reforms profoundly modifies the relationship between government and universities as well as for the organization and the profession and rest, at the same time, on a significant reinforcement of the external ties of universities with their environment [12,13]. Although there are significant differences between countries, the common observation is that the traditional professional state model of higher education is under increasing pressure. New approaches stimulate increased organizational autonomy and accountability combined with managerial authority, a withdrawal of the government from detailed procedural regulation, and a market rhetoric that favours inter-organizational competition and responsiveness to the economic needs of the nation and its international competitiveness.

 Across Europe, countries have followed different paths in order to overcome the perceived problems of universities as professional organizations. We might distinguish three different, sometimes interrelated, types of thinking that stimulated higher education reforms [14–16]: a more efficiency-oriented model stressing productivity and managerial control under conditions of austerity where decisions have to be made between competitive goods; a more service- or client-oriented model stressing service orientation, consumerism and responsiveness to external environments; and a more market-oriented model stressing competition, privatization and an utilitarian belief system. All models share to a certain extent a withdrawal of trust in the procedural arrangements that traditionally governed the professional state and a withdrawal of trust from the university as a professional organization.

Contesting the third logic: distrust in professional self-control

The withdrawal of trust has most obvious consequences for the academic profession as one of the cornerstones of the professional state model in higher education. As for all professions, trust in the self-steering capacity of the academic profession provides an important legitimization for the right of expert autonomy and discretion. Unlike other occupations that are mainly controlled by bureaucratic rules, market competition or democratic procedures, the professions control themselves to a considerable extent as collectives, and each professional is supposed to control himself or herself within this collective. Their status vis-à-vis their clients as well as in public rests on the latter's trust; if it erodes, the profession faces trouble. But who were the clients of higher education in Western European countries? Higher education has certainly served many masters, but traditionally the state was not only the patron but also the most important addressee for the professionalization of the academic estate. And what has been given, can be taken away. Again, the approaches may differ but the overall picture is one of a profession under strain. In some countries, the public debate tends to draw a caricature of the homo academicus as the 'lazy professor' who has to be

kept at work by a management of short-term incentives and visible sanctions. In another variant the academic tends to be seen as a homo oeconomicus who can easily be steered by a cost-centred management that locally shapes rules, regulations and instruments for efficient work and output. A more sophisticated version emphasizes the internal differentiation of academic staff and the role of institutional leadership as soft supervisors aiming to design status and tasks of academics according to their strength and weaknesses. In any case, overall trust in the self-steering capacities of academics as long-standing and deeply socialized professionals that are best left alone and only symbolically represented by institutional leadership is diminishing.

Furthermore, the appearance of accountability in higher education is intertwined with the loss of trust in the self-steering capacities of the academic profession. As traditional authority is weakened and trust in traditional elites is undermined, more formal and open accounts and justifications have to be made to the variety of bodies that claim the right to judge the performance of institutions and professionals. Professionalism as the third logic [17] of modern society is thus contested by hierarchy and the market.

On the one hand, accountability serves as an instrument of co-ordination that supplements and undermines trust. Accountability informs authoritative interaction in the frame of social coordination in hierarchies. Governments have tried and still try to link measures of outputs more closely to funding. This linkage requires assessments of the amount and quality of what is achieved by their higher education organizations and their professionals. Growth of the higher education systems, both in size and complexity, points to the need for granting greater autonomy to their universities and other higher education providers. External accountability as well as organizational self-regulation point in the direction of greater management of work processes and outputs as well as developing capacities for organizational strategy making. External accountability calls for internal accountability, provides opportunity as well as legitimacy for managerial control. Accountability means that trust is vested in accountability. With regard to primary organizational processes and outputs, trust is no longer given but has to be earned again and again, which changes already a great deal. It makes a huge difference if someone who attacks you has to show up with evidence that you are untrustworthy or if you have to show up with evidence that there is no need to attack you because you are trustworthy. This means that there is as a certain correlation between accountability and power as well: those who define the processes and criteria for accountability measurements will have pre-defined performance and success to a certain extent. The struggle around the setting for evaluations and quality assessments, their external and internal use has thus developed into one of the main areas of ongoing power games within and around higher education. One of the consequences of evaluation exercises and rankings on the bases of achievement is that they foster intense competitiveness, striving for status and conflict among academic organizations, subunits and faculty members. In consequence, there is no unidirectional relationship between cause and effect when it comes to the loss of trust and the rise of accountability. As Trow ([3], p. 311) has put it, accountability does not only appear when trust is lost; indeed, "efforts to strengthen accountability usually involve parallel efforts to weaken trust".

On the other hand, trust in the markets has been on the rise in a rather peculiar form: the regulation of higher education via state-driven competition on quasi-markets. The power of the public purse is played out in research markets as well as educational markets. Competition for research funding is strengthened by limiting unconditional and direct funding for research and re-shovelling funding into competitive schemes and programs. Funding for education has been made conditional on performance criteria such as number of students and number of graduates per institution and field of study. As a consequence, universities are no longer funded for what they are but for what they do. Anglo-Saxon countries, namely Australia and the U.K., have gone or are going to go one step further in terms of the privatization of public higher education by raising tuition fees, replacing governmental funding. Competition for the purchasing power of the student customer is expected to enhance 'value for money' as well as the responsiveness of the sector and its institutions to student needs and the labour market. At the same time, competition for the student customer raises fear of the decline in quality, e.g. in terms of admission and completion standards. This in turn calls for accountability mechanisms for quality assurance in teaching and learning.

From input to output legitimacy: the state in advanced capitalist democracies

The foregoing argument has already made it clear that the withdrawal of trust in the procedural arrangements that traditionally governed the professional state affects not only the academic profession, but also the role of the state as the other cornerstone of this model. The loss of 'process trust' and the withdrawal of trust from the university as a matter of government policy deserve some further attention, among other reasons, because they once again raise the issue of 'output trust'. There are at least three different interpretations of the withdrawal of trust that may seem to stand in competition at first glance. I want to put forward that they form compatible elements and to follow an argument made by Kogan and Hanney [18]: "We can offer no clearly schematic picture of how policies emerged and ideologies were sponsored. Intentions were forged partly by belief systems, partly by the power of circumstances, and partly by opportunistic reactions to what might not have been planned or even rationally contemplated."

First, reform in higher education is the unavoidable outgrowth of systemic problems inherent to the 'massification' of higher education and the changing role of knowledge in society that are not adequately responded to, neither within the system itself or by traditional means of political intervention. This argument stresses a 'system crisis' as the outcome of impersonal forces and structural trends that call for new forms of purposeful political action. The changing attitudes of public authorities towards higher education are the outgrowth of a search for new procedural arrangements to stimulate systemic changes. It can convincingly be argued that the loss of trust is inherent to the growth of higher education since the 1950s and the proliferating forms that higher education takes, many of which cannot claim the authority of traditional elite forms of higher education. The lack of internal systemic differentiation and the persistence of traditional privileges in

terms of resources and authority has created growing tensions between expectations and outputs that raised questions regarding quality and standards on the side of public authorities. 'Massification' has also led to familiarity with the private life of higher education among a growing number of citizens. Growing familiarity with the 'realities' of higher education may have harmed public images that were based on times of elite higher education. This in turn has prompted growing interest in accountability, managerialism and market forces in maintaining both the funding and quality of higher education, even in countries that have long mistrusted the role of such forces in 'cultural affairs'. It has also weakened the position of higher education and the academic profession in defence against these forces, owing to both a lack of public support and a growing gap between the political interests of institutional leadership and management, on the one hand, and the academic profession, on the other. The problem with this argument, however, is that the search for new forms of public intervention and new modes of coordination has become a more or less ubiquitous phenomenon in public services. It can easily be generalized to the systems of social security, public health and education in general and cannot solely be ascribed to specific characteristics and problems of the higher education system.

Secondly, the attack on higher education is the outgrowth of neoconservative politics and an ideology that favours the private over the public, management over professions and economic growth over cultural identity. This argument stresses the 'trust crisis' as the outcome of purposeful political action. In fact, a good argument can be made that certain governments have made it very clear that they have withdrawn whatever trust they previously placed in the traditional norms, standards and practices of their public service sectors, among them the university: "The United Kingdom under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher provides a classical example of the withdrawal of trust from the university as a matter of government policy rather than of changes of attitudes in the broader society" ([16], p. 291). The loss of trust is thus made by political actors who formed an ideologically motivated attack against the 'old' system. As I have tried to show earlier, such an attack is usually accompanied by strategies of 'blaming' and 'promising' in order to gain legitimacy for a major shift in policy-making. However, there is a problem when we try to generalize this argument, because such political changes in Anglo-Saxon countries took place or continued rather independently of the political party involved. Furthermore, continental European countries are undergoing a re-engineering of their higher education systems accompanied by certain strategies of 'naming, blaming and faming' and a search for new forms of coordination and structure as well, even though the changes are qualitatively different and less sharp compared with the developments mentioned above in Anglo-Saxon countries.

This leads us to a third argument about overall changes with regard to the role of the state in modern society. Globalization of economies and individualization of societies creates inherent tensions for governing political democracies in capitalist economies that foster government by output-oriented efficiency [19]. This argument stresses a 'political crisis' as the outcome of impersonal forces and structural trends that call for new forms of legitimacy in state–society interaction. The dual and interrelated processes of, first, economic globalization that transcends the given boundaries of any given political system and, secondly, societal individualization

that breaks up traditional collective identities, undermine the problem-solving capacities of governments as well as trust in the efficacy of the democratic process of government by the people. In turn, output-oriented legitimacy that emphasizes a government for the people with regard to the effectiveness and efficiency of public services and welfare spending gains in importance.

This argument seems to resemble debates in political economy in the late 1970s about the precarious symbiosis of the democratic state and the capitalist economy. Theories of 'late capitalism' discussed an eminent legitimacy crisis of the state [20,21], which had to instrumentalize its power in order to fulfil the growing requisites of capitalist economy and consumerism. By contrast, theories of the 'overloaded state' [22,23] predicted an inflation of political demands for taxation and economic regulation that would harm the problem-solving capacities of capitalist economies. Against these predictions of inevitable collapse, theories that we have become used to working with in the field of higher education, such as the off-load state, the rise of the evaluative state and the governmental shift from procedural regulation to output control, suggest another stage of development in the precarious development of capitalist democracies.

The political argument around output legitimacy also provides a link to the rise of the audit society and the designing of a world of risk management that Michael Power [24,25] has so convincingly elaborated on. In contrast with Power, however, there is no need to assume vague notions of the rise of the 'risk society' and misleading conceptions of a 'weak government'. Governments in search of new sources of output legitimacy are by no means 'lame ducks', but exercise new forms of accountability and control, including those that are carried out in the shadow of hierarchy.

Conclusion

As the 20th Century came to a close, the pace of change in our societies and their major institutions accelerated. When we analyse social change, it is good to specify which of its two major meanings the concept of social change is employed. First, social change appears as the outgrowth of impersonal forces or structural trends to which human agents are exposed as objects. In this meaning, social change is something that happens; it has not been initiated by someone and cannot be stopped by social agency. Secondly, social change appears as the outgrowth of deliberate and intentional action of human agents. In this meaning, social change is something that is made and has been purposefully enacted by actors, and can also be influenced by other actors. The foregoing argument is an example of a combination of these two seemingly incompatible understandings of social change: the structural trends that affect human agents are themselves set in motion by human agency, and its aggregate outcomes sometimes have unintended consequences.

I have discussed the issue of public discontent and lack of trust in higher education that seems to be intimately tied to the theme of 'trust in the service state' in both of its meanings: trust placed in the service state and trust placed by the service state. We have seen that we lack empirical evidence to clearly identify the relationship between cause and effect when it comes to the relationship

between a lack of public confidence in higher education and purposeful political interventions to transform the university. It seems quite likely that what was offered as a cure to the system was at the same time, at least partly, a cause of distrust. In other words, it has been argued that when this kind of trust crisis occurs, a self-vindicating effect occurs whether or not the institution in question has experienced an over-investment of trust or an under-output of performance in the past. What has most clearly suffered is the trust that public authorities place in higher education and the traditional modes of governance of higher education in the professional state model of the university. Accountability and state-induced markets as alternative modes of coordination are thus on the rise, and eventually re-enforce each other.

Three causes for this 'trust crisis' were discussed and suggested to form complementary rather than alternative explanations: the ideologically motivated attack on the university; the tensions and problems built into the development of mass higher education systems that are themselves partly the aggregate outcome of unintended social action; and the problems of the state in capitalist democracies searching for output legitimacy. Certainly, the audit society has reached out to higher education as a leading bearer of legitimacy, whereas traditional sources of legitimacy are declining in influence. Ironically, the culture of evidence is unlikely to restore trust whereas it is likely to nurture the rise of reputation and expectation management in universities.

Comments by Göran Hermerén[2]

Introduction

Professor Enders' discussion raises intriguing questions of whether trust in Higher Education Institutions is decreasing or not, and whether governmental interventions have helped to restore trust or perhaps decreased it. The most important part of his chapter is probably the discussion of the withdrawal of trust from the university as a matter of government policy and the three different interpretations of this withdrawal: the ideologically motivated attack on the university, the problems built into the development of mass higher education systems and the legitimacy problems of the state in capitalist democracies.

The tacit assumption of my comments, which, of course, can be questioned, is that higher education is essentially a good thing; universities play and have played an important role in the transformation of society, which has been taking place over the last 100 years; universities are essential for the development of individuals and societies; and they are engines of the economies of the industrialized countries. In that perspective, decreasing trust is a cause of concern and worry.

I will comment briefly on what I take to be some of the main points in Professor Enders' chapter. In doing so, I shall also try to slightly broaden the issues in order to facilitate the connection of topics mentioned in this section with topics

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discussed in other sections. I will focus on the concepts, the levels, the evidence, the causes and the strategies to restore trust.

Concepts of trust

Trust is used in many senses, and can be studied in different (cultural, sociological, philosophical etc.) contexts. The objectives of such studies can differ, and there is a vast amount of literature on these issues. With reference to the work by Luhmann [6], Enders uses the concept in what he calls the broadest sense, "as confidence in one's expectations". He stresses rightly that trust in this sense ties the past to present expectations and these to a reliable future; and at the same time provides an efficient way of dealing with uncertainty and overcomplexity.

In the philosophical discussions of trust it has been emphasized by several writers that accounts of trust that do not distinguish it from reliance are too broad, whereas goodwill-based accounts appear too narrow and take as their paradigm case interpersonal relations rather than trust in governments and institutions, which is in focus here.

Thus mere reliance is not enough. Governments, at least in some countries, may have had expectations that universities did not live up to. Trust may include, for example, a disposition of those who trust to react negatively or with resentment if their expectations are not met. This is relevant to Enders' discussion that focuses on governmental reactions to alleged or perceived distrust of Higher Education Institutions. Incidentally, 'alleged' or 'perceived' in the previous sentence raises epistemic issues on the grounds for trust or distrust.

In fact, the precise definition of trust is tricky, and it is more than likely that there is not just one concept, but rather several interrelated concepts, perhaps partly overlapping. If trust is defined in terms of 'reliance', 'goodwill', 'credibility' or 'confidence' then we need to know something about the meaning of these latter concepts, if the definition is to be informative.

Trust is usually analysed by philosophers as a three-place relation, forward-looking 'A trusts B to do X' or backward-looking 'A trusts B to have done X', where A and B can stand for persons, institutions, organizations etc. In fact, the values of the variables can be specified in many different ways. Also, time and situation variables can be introduced, which shows the complexity of the concept.

The point of introducing such variables explicitly is that we can be more specific about trust. If clarity is essential, we should avoid talking about trust in general. Questions in surveys need to be specific; trust seldom extends to all domains of interaction. Trust can be graded. Trust is not momentary; it takes time to build up. Trust is tested again and again.

Enders makes some interesting comments about the relationship between accountability and trust. He writes: "Accountability means that trust is vested into accountability"; accountability here reappears in the explanation. Taken literally, this looks similar to the beginning of an infinite regress or a circular definition; so obviously, it should not be taken literally. But how should it be understood? Anyway, he then goes on to make the important point that it makes a huge difference: "…if someone who attacks you has to show up with evidence that you are untrustworthy or if you have to show up with evidence that there is no need to attack you because you are trustworthy".

This raises, as Enders points out, intriguing issues about the relationship between accountability and power. Who decides on who has to prove that he or she is trustworthy and on what grounds? In this power game, the media can play an important role by defending or discrediting persons or institutions.

Levels

What is trusted or distrusted? Are we focusing on trust in systems or organizations or in persons working in these organizations? Several different levels can be distinguished:

1. Higher education generally
2. Higher educational institutions, such as universities
3. The profession or activity such as researcher or research
4. Individual researchers

The relationships between these levels is not quite clear, in particular, the extent to which information about trust or distrust in relation to one level can be generalized or applied to other levels. Enders stresses rightly the difficulties in drawing conclusions from surveys focusing on trust of levels 1 and 2. "Macro-level perceptions are not easily reflected at micro-levels", as he puts it. The same problems reappear when surveys ask questions focusing on other levels.

Of course, even in elementary logic books students learn to avoid inductive reasoning of the sort: Professor X has been shown to be untrustworthy, hence all professors (in his field, at his university etc.) are untrustworthy. However, perhaps it is more tempting to move from information about trust or distrust at level 4 to level 1 than from such information about level 1 to level 4?

Empirical evidence available

Is there empirical evidence available relevant to the concerns of the paper? Enders seems somewhat sceptical, asking where the empirical evidence is; however, the answer obviously depends on the concept, level and hypothesis that we have in mind. Evidence of what?

It is clearly important to separate the question of whether there is empirical evidence for decreasing trust in Higher Education Institutions or whether there is empirical evidence for or against particular hypotheses concerning causes and effects of declining trust, for instance, that decreasing trust in Higher Education Institutions is the result of governmental interventions.

As to the first issue, it is clear that in some countries there is evidence indicating that trust is decreasing. For instance, a study published in Sweden in 2011 points to a slightly falling trend in the last decade ([26], pp. 8–11, 17–18). It also shows that the decrease varies between age groups and faculties. Research in medicine is more trusted than research in the humanities, for instance. With regard to levels, this survey is somewhat ambiguous, since some questions in the survey refer to 'research/researchers', that is, a combination of levels 3 and 4, whereas Enders focuses mainly on levels 1 and 2.

However, in Enders' argument, there is not only a discussion of the possibly decreasing trust in institutions of higher education, but also a discussion

of the relationship between decreasing trust and governmental interventions. In fact, this is perhaps the most interesting and novel part of the section. Then another proposition or problem is considered in relation to empirical evidence: is there empirical evidence that governmental reforms/interventions have helped to increase trust in universities? Or have these interventions rather had the opposite effect? Enders may be right that there is little empirical evidence for and against such hypotheses.

To sum up about empirical evidence, what Enders is sceptical about is the existence of solid empirical evidence for particular causal hypotheses:

> *"…we lack empirical evidence to clearly identify the relationship between cause and effect when it comes to the relationship between a lack of public confidence in higher education and purposeful political interventions to transform the university."*

Causes of decreasing trust

There could be many causes and a few of them pull in different directions. Enders discusses three different paths or models that have been used to overcome perceived problems of universities: the efficiency-oriented model, the client-oriented model and the market-oriented model.

Enders is cautious and careful, but in his discussion the idea surfaces, although perhaps only as a hint, that distrust may be fabricated by politicians who for ideological reasons want to change the system. There are references to reforms of higher education in the U.K. and to Margaret Thatcher. However, the situation and the reasons for governmental reforms may not always be the same. At least in Sweden it seems clear that something had to be done to cope with the vast number of students coming to the universities in the 1960s, for the simple reason that higher education became very expensive for society.

However, there are many other possible causes of distrust. Let me just mention a few possible causes, many of which have to be discussed together, as they may reinforce each other.

Misconduct or fraud published in the media?

We have all heard about individual cases of fraud or scientific misconduct, as exposed by the media. I want to stress two aspects of these cases, both of which are relevant to the theme of this volume: cases of fraud and the way the cases have been handled. Parallels to Watergate and 'Clintongate' are instructive. The poor way some cases are handled, sweeping the problems under the carpet, trying to cover things up and protecting colleagues can be just as detrimental to trust as the fraud and misconduct itself.

The general public is somewhat unhappy when the police investigate offences committed by members of the police force; similarly, professional autonomy can be discredited if there is no independent investigation of allegations of misconduct and this is left to the university where the misconduct has taken place. It is wrong to sweep things under the carpet, but it is also dangerous if the general public suspects that things are swept under the carpet.

It has been pointed out that trust in universities in Sweden has decreased during the period 2002–2005, and that this coincides in time with media reports of cases of fraud and misconduct in research. Correlation is one thing, causal relations another, of course. However, the media play an important role in shaping opinions. They sell newspapers by writing about scandals, not about slow structural changes. Reported failures of the peer-review process in scientific journals, misuse by reviewers of the information contained in papers they are examining, intentional delay of the process to favour others, stealing ideas and so forth, may have contributed to the decrease in trust.

Promising too much too early?

Hype can create distrust. In gene therapy, for decades researchers promised treatments, but not many patients have been treated successfully by gene theraphy to date.

Behind this there is a problem in the funding system: there is currently much focus on applied research both in the EU (European Union) and in many member states. Researchers have to promise not just new knowledge but potential innovations and commercially viable applications in order to get funding, and hence they are tempted to promise too much too early.

Scientific disagreements, especially if political, commercial or religious interests are involved?

In the Swedish debate, some commentators have indeed suggested that the decreasing trust in Higher Education Institutions does not primarily concern research but rather research policy. By prioritizing certain research areas and making strategic investment plans, politicians interfere with the development of science in ways that, according to some commentators, can cause distrust, especially if scientific disagreements are involved.

For example, a lot of money has been invested in research on climate problems, but as to the causes of global warming the scientists seem to be divided into two camps. They have drawn quite different conclusions from more or less the same data. Other examples include controversies over intelligent design and the relationships between levels of cholesterol and cardiovascular diseases. The risk of distrust is likely to increase, if political, commercial or religious interests are involved in such controversies. Scientific disagreement is nothing new, but it raises the challenge to explain these disagreements in ways that increase trust, not decrease it.

Turning every academic researcher into an innovator

Corporations are more and more becoming role models for universities, which is also evident in branding (cf. Chapter 11). This is not unproblematic, since the underlying values of these cultures differ. For example, consider the sharing of ideas and openness compared with protection of intellectual property, and increasing market shares compared with increasing knowledge.

Distrust may also have been increased by dissatisfaction with the current vogue of turning universities into R&D (research and development) laboratories of multinational companies, by focusing on innovations such as the key mission of universities and defining 'innovations' very narrowly, as in a message expressed in an interview with the rector of a Scandinavian university: Innovation means new

successful products, services and processes. What we work with at my university is primarily research-based innovation, that is, innovations building on use of new knowledge based on research.

However, such innovations are rare in the humanities, theology and the social sciences. Of course, focus on innovations in this narrow sense will leave little room for the traditional critical tasks of a university: seeking and systematizing knowledge in order to better understand the world, as well as providing a critical voice in societal debates, in addition to education and preparing students for future careers. To put this differently, the demand for universities to produce what is deemed to be immediately useful knowledge will speed up the transformation of universities to R&D laboratories of companies, if this is generalized and taken to be the main task of universities.

Strategies to improve trust

In order to cure a disease, knowledge about its causes is crucial. This is commonplace in medicine. Combinations of causes are most likely to be at work here, so no easy or simple remedies seem readily available. Different possible causes have to be treated separately; there is not one general avenue for those who want to improve trust; combinations of approaches are called for.

In general terms, however, how an institution, action or an agent is perceived or interpreted is important for trust. Openness and accountability can help to create trust in both institutions and individuals. Incentives and penalties for untrustworthy and exploitative behaviour can be used strategically. In a situation where trust is decreasing, it is important to be specific about the distrust, to identify possible causes and then try to deal with them.

Conclusions

Trust and its related concepts need to be clarified. There is empirical evidence for slowly decreasing trust in Higher Education Institutions. However, there may not be solid empirical evidence for the claim that governmental interventions have enhanced trust. Governmental interference may have helped to create distrust, but there are many other likely causes of distrust. It is, or should be, possible to do something about them.

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