

The Problem of Trust: A Multidisciplinary Approach

The evocation, acceptance and maintenance of trust are important steps in establishing cooperation. Many problems of cooperation, including the large number whose roots lie in the well-known Prisoner's Dilemma, could be resolved if there were well-grounded mutual trust between the participants.

Practitioners of different disciplines take very different approaches to the problem of developing and using trust to establish and maintain cooperation. Game theorists and modelers often base their models on the concepts of reward, punishment and payoffs¹, while some psychologists adopt quite a different approach, suggesting counter-intuitively that trust can be evoked most effectively if it is first offered freely without thought of reward². Behavioral ecologists tend to interpret trust in terms of genetic, evolutionary advantage, along the lines of J.B.S. Haldane's rather simplistic assertion that "[I would give my life to save] two brothers or eight cousins." Sociologists seek to understand how altruism has arisen, and how it can be further encouraged. Political scientists such as William Mishler and Richard Rose³ argue that trust in institutions, rather than individuals, is a key factor in maintaining political stability, while the anonymous author of *The Book of Life* presents a persuasive case (<http://www.thebookoflife.org/innovation-creativity/>) that businesses prosper most highly when they can demonstrate convincingly that their customers can trust them because the business puts customers' interests first.

All of these approaches have something to recommend them, from simplicity and effectiveness of modeling to practicality of implementation in real-life situations. Here I argue that the different disciplines could often benefit from taking on board the concepts of trust developed by other disciplines, and show where the overlaps and differences lie, and how synergy might be achieved.

REFERENCES

1. Len Fisher *Rock, Paper, Scissors – Game Theory in Real Life: Strategies for Cooperation* (London: Hay House (2008)).
2. Len Fisher "How Can I Trust You? Encounters With Carl Rogers and Game Theory" in *Interdisciplinary Handbook of the Person-Centered Approach* (J.H.D. Cornelius-White et al, eds) (New York: Springer (2013)) 299 – 317.
3. William Mishler & Richard Rose "What are the Origins of Political Trust?" *Comparative Political Studies* Vol.34 (2001) 30 – 62.