Looking 'beyond the factory gates':

Towards more pluralist and radical approaches to intra-organizational trust research

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to suggest new avenues for trust research by critiquing the extant literature on this topic. We analyze the most influential research on intra-organizational trust from the perspective of a classic industrial sociology framework from the 1970s – Alan Fox's work on frames of reference and trust dynamics. Our analysis of intra-organizational trust studies leads us to three conclusions. Firstly, the large majority of intra-organizational trust research has strong unitarist underpinnings, which support a managerial agenda that is potentially detrimental to employees' and (indeed managers') long-term interests. Secondly, *most of this research fails to explain how trust in organizations is embedded in societal and field level institutions, hence it would benefit from looking 'beyond the factory gates' for a more complete understanding of trust dynamics in organizations. In this connection, we argue that Fox's pluralist and radical perspectives, which are under-represented in intra-organizational trust research, could provide new lines of inquiry by locating internal trust relations in a wider institutional context. Thirdly, Fox's explanation of how low and high trust dynamics in organizations are embedded in wider society may help address the concerns about under-socialized, endogenous explanations and open the way for structure-agency analyses of building, maintaining and repairing intra-organizational trust.*

Keywords: Alan Fox, frames of reference, industrial sociology, organizational trust, trust dynamics

Introduction

In their seminal essay, Kerr and Fisher (1957) criticised what they labeled as 'plant sociology', arguing that most research in work relations ignored the external environment of organizations. This comment referred to the functionalist-dominated, neo-human relations research of the day that typically failed to acknowledge the influence of structures and institutions in wider society on what went on inside organizations. In a similar vein, we argue that current intra-organizational trust research is in danger of falling into the same trap. Much of it could be described as plant sociology because of its focus on the micro-foundations of trust building, maintenance and repair and neglect of understanding how this micro-level of analysis is embedded in the wider structural and institutional context of employment relationships. So in the spirit of the recent call for retrospection in organizational theory made by Hassard, Cox and Rowlinson (2013), we revisit past scholarship to engage in a conversation with other trust scholars about the role of research assumptions in setting boundaries and limitations that affect much current research into intra-organizational trust. We argue that these boundaries constrain both the range of topics explored and the methods and rationale for intra-organizational trust research, so limiting new scholarship to theory extension rather than significant theory building (Corley & Gioia, 2011). Our return to past scholarship draws on the classic insights of the British industrial sociologist, Alan Fox (1969, 1974a, 1974b; 1985), whose works on frames of reference and organizational trust dynamics were frequently regarded as seminal among industrial relations scholars from the 1960s onwards (Ackers, 2011; Edwards, 2014) but have been surprisingly less influential among the majority of trust researchers in organizational studies. Fox's frames of reference provide a basis for a critique of extant trust research but also allow us to offer new ways of thinking about this increasingly important topic. We have concentrated specifically on trust in the employment relationship because in recent years such trust appears to have suffered most – partly due to deteriorating economic conditions following the global financial crisis, and partly because of the changing forms of work organization and

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reduced job security associated with post-Fordist employment relationships (Cappelli, 1999). As Tyler and Kramer (1996) noted, in hard economic times faith in the binding power of obligation appears to decline, and workers seem unprepared to trust their organizations because they have proved unable to guarantee the old-style relational contract.

Based on our analysis of intra-organizational trust studies we make three contributions. The first contribution lies in showing how much of intra-organizational trust research has strong unitarist underpinnings. While unitarism is a way of seeing organizational relations from the perspective of managers, it is also a way of not seeing because it is biased towards a managerial agenda that is potentially detrimental to employees' (and indeed long-term managers') interests. The second contribution is in showing how most existing intra-organizational trust research fails to acknowledge sufficiently macro-level explanations of how trust in organizations is shaped by societal and field level institutions. We argue that research in the field would benefit from looking 'beyond the factory gates' (Ingham 1970: 149; Fox, 1985: 42) for a more in-depth understanding of employees' trust relations in their organizations. In this connection, Fox's pluralist and radical perspectives, which are under-represented in intra-organizational trust research, offer significant potential for providing more complete explanations of trust inside organizations and for new lines of inquiry. The third contribution lies in bringing Fox's (1974a) notion of high- and low-trust dynamics to the attention of trust scholars. Fox's key contribution lay in showing how intra-organizational trust was embedded in institutional systems and how internal and external trust dynamics were mutually constitutive of each other, so anticipating much of structure-agency debates in organizational studies. We argue that many intra-organizational trust scholars might benefit from adopting his approach to provide more insightful analyses and relevant prescriptions for trust building, maintenance and repair.

Although the motivating impulse of our research can be seen as a critique of a narrowly focused approach to trust within organizations, claiming that all literature on trust is normative and uncritical would be a vast misrepresentation. Several authors in recent years have expressed concerns about the taken-for-granted nature of the benefits of trust and have acknowledged the problematic nature of trust and/or its institutional embeddedness (Bachmann, 2001; Child & Rodrigues, 2004; Gargiulo & Ertug, 2006; Hardy, Phillips & Lawrence, 1998; Schoorman, Mayer & Davis 2007; Lewicki, Tomlinson & Gillespie 2006; Möllering, 2001; 2005; Timming, 2009; Mishra & Mishra, 2013; Skinner, Dietz & Weibel, 2014; Six, 2014), or argued that to distrust rather than trust might be a wiser alternative strategy for employees in some organizations (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). While acknowledging the importance of these contributions, we problematize the notion of intra-organizational trust further by questioning the assumptions underpinning much trust research and conclude with some proposals for further research. Our paper is structured as follows. First, we tackle the definitional problems concerning intra-organizational trust; these are important because definitions reflect and shape what is researched and how it is researched. Second, we discuss Fox's frames of reference and analysis of trust dynamics to create a methodology for our critical review of the most influential literature on intra-organizational trust. Third, we present our findings from this critical review and discuss these findings in relation to Fox's (1966; 1974a; 1974b; 1985) evolving analyses, concluding with implications for intra-organizational trust research and possible new avenues for inquiry.

Defining organizational trust: common themes and common problems

A number of influential reviews have been published over the past decade, e.g. Dirks and Ferrin (2001), Dirks, Lewicki and Zaheer (2009); Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), Kramer and Lewicki (2010), Kramer (1999), Lewicki, Tomlinson and Gillespie (2006); Schoorman, et al. (2007), and Dietz and Den Hartog (2006). The majority of these have been written from a psychological or social psychological perspective, although there are a number of sociological contributions (e.g. by Bachmann, 2001;

Möllering, 2001, 2006b; Luhmann, 1979; Sztompka, 1999; Misztal, 1996). Empirical research in the field also tends to cite definitions from other foundational works: Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer (1998), Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, (1995), and Robinson (1996) among others.

Today, by far the most cited definitions of trust are those by Mayer et al. (1995) and by Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer (1998). Mayer et al. (1995) defined trust as 'willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party' (1995: 712). Rousseau et al. (1998: 395) proposed a cross-disciplinary conceptualization of trust as 'a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another'. Three themes recur in these definitions. The first theme invokes the notion of positive expectations about others' intentions, motives or behavior (Rousseau et al. 1998; Barber 1983; Lewis & Weigert, 1985). The second theme turns on a 'willingness to be vulnerable' (Mayer et al. 1995; Fryxell, Dooley & Vryza 2002; Gainey & Klaas, 2003). The third theme is an acceptance that assumptions of reciprocity and equality of power, drawn from exchange theory, can be applied to the analysis of intra-organizational trust, especially in relation to leader-follower relations (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

However, we argue that these definitions are both limited and limiting for two main reasons. The first of these concerns the question raised by Lewicki and Bunker (1995) – is trust in individuals the same construct as trust in organized systems? This question is important to address because researchers studying organizational trust need to focus on different types of relationships at the interpersonal, organizational and societal levels, e.g. between employees and senior management, between employees and their managers, between co-workers, employee trust in the organization as a system, and the organization's trust in workers. And while it is tempting to suggest that there must be something

in common among all such instances which justifies the use of the same word, i.e. *trust*, it is evident that differences in who is trusted and by whom, and the nature of the sphere in which trust subsists – the referents and context of trust – can mean that we are talking about different sorts of relationship (Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012; Graso, Jiang, Probst & Benson, 2014).   This problem of theorizing across levels has led some researchers to make a distinction between organizational trust and institutional trust, the latter of which is a problematic term. For example, Zucker's (1986) definition of institutional-based trust focused on 'a set of expectations shared by all those involved in an exchange', while Lewicki and Bunker (1995: 137) defined institutional trust as a phenomenon which 'develops when individuals must generalize their personal trust to large organizations made up of individuals with whom they have low familiarity, low interdependence and low continuity of interaction'. Maguire and Phillips (2008: 372) elaborated by adding a further requirement, defining institutional trust as 'an individual's expectation that some organized system will act with predictability and goodwill', which raises the prospect of analysis of trust in institutions at societal level.

This 'levels' problem leads to another criticism of existing definitions - that they fail to do justice to the tension between structure and agency inherent in trust relationships (Möllering, 2005) - in particular,by attributing unconstrained agency in respect of individuals' expectations, willingness to be vulnerable and reciprocity towards their organizations, and to managers' ability to shape these understandings and behaviours. Although we acknowledge that individuals can and do exercise a degree of agency over those actions and expectations which constitute relations of trust in organizations, only a few current definitions of intra-organizational trust reflect the institutional embeddedness of workers' trust in their organizations and the power imbalances between workers and their organizations that are often glossed over by exchange theory (e.g. Bachmann, 2001; Möllering, 2005; 2006a; Kroeger, 2011). A good example of a definition which takes into account both personal trust and the more diffuse notion of organizational and institutional systems is offered by Grey and Garsten (2001), who see intra-

organizational trust as constructed for and by people in organizations and producing some degree of predictability. Trust, they argue, is a 'precarious social accomplishment enacted through the interplay of social or discursive structures, including those of work organizations, and individual subjects' (Grey & Garsten (2001: 230). This definition helps address criticisms made by Tyler and Kramer (1996) of what they identify as the failure of trust research to consider the dynamics of trust at different levels: macro-level (the influence of social organization), meso-level (the operation of social networks) and micro-level (the psychological basis of trust and distrust).   So while using the commonly used definition proposed by Mayer et al. (1995) – with its emphasis on the willingness to be vulnerable – in our work we also recognize and advocate the interplay of social or discursive structures and individual agents.

Fox's conceptual foundations

We now re-visit Fox's (1966, 1969; 1974a, 1974b and 1985) classic insights into the literature on employment relations, management and organizational studies to throw further light on intra-organizational trust relations. Fox is often credited with making two major contributions to sociological accounts of intra-organizational trust (Roche, 1991). The first is a full-blown macro-sociological account of frames of reference in British industrial relations during the 1960s and 1970s, while the second is a penetrating micro-sociological account of how trust dynamics at the workplace are shaped by prevailing societal relations, specifically relations involving power and the division of labour in bureaucratic organizations in capitalist societies (Edwards, 2014).

Yet, despite Fox's continued influence on employment relations, only a small number of trust researchers regarded his analysis as seminal to their own work (Möllering, 2001; 2006). Thus, for example Starkey (1989) and Provis (1996) considered Fox's work on trust as core to explaining the relationship between work organization, contract and power relations between managers and employees, while Sitkin and Roth (1993) and Adler (2001) referred to Fox's low-trust/high-trust

distinction as underpinned by distinct configurations of beliefs in capitalist firms. However, the majority of other trust researchers who cited his work, did so as 'background reading' (for example in Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltma, 1993, Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Fukuyama, 1995; McAllister, 1995; Guest & Conway; 1999), or in relation to distrust, for example Kramer (1999), Jones and George (1998) and Skinner et al. (2014). One possible explanation for the relative absence of Fox's influence on the majority of intra-organizational trust literature, even among those who cite him, might be, as Godard (2014) has argued, that studies of employment relations have been dominated by industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology with their characteristic focus on the micro-foundations of organizational analysis. We take up this last point at various stages in the rest of the paper.

Fox's frames of reference. Fox's macro-sociological work was written when work relations in the UK were characterised by marked structural antagonisms (Edwards, 1986), during which time managers and employees consciously or unconsciously exploited their inherent power for their own ends. Fox argued that power relations and thus employment relations were typically viewed through a conceptual lens referred to as a frame of reference (Fox, 1966; Fox and Flanders, 1969; Fox, 1974a; Fox, 1974b). By adopting a certain frame of reference managers and workers perceived and interpreted events by means of a conceptual structure of generalizations guided by certain assumptions, which shaped judgment and affected behaviour. Fox's first frame of reference – the *unitarist perspective* – was a normative and descriptive theory held by many managers and right-of-centre politicians of how organizations and society should be based on managerial prerogative, theorized as a 'doctrine of common purpose, and harmony of interests' (1966: 12) which served to legitimize their power, control and leadership. Such ideas supported the belief that conflict in work relations and lack of trust was a pathology, rooted in the pursuit of sectional interest, aggravated by the political motivation of shop stewards and by poor managerial communications and leadership. Managers' response to workplace conflict was a blend of coercion through control and the 'manufacturing of consent' (Burowoy, 1979)

through more effective human relations and the promotion of a discourse of 'high morale', 'team spirit' and 'loyalty' (Fox 1966: 14) in a manner that foreshadowed the human resource management movement and much of the functionalist-inspired trust literature.

The pluralist frame of reference was a way of overcoming the limitations of the unitarist frame of reference, in particular by recognizing the limits of coercion. In his earlier writings Fox (1966; Fox and Flanders, 1969) argued that a pluralist frame of reference was a more realistic analysis of industrial relations, and a more relevant model of industrial organization, which was made up of divergent interests and sectional groups, closely resembling a miniature democratic state. From such a pluralist view of organizations, a multitude of related but separate interests and objectives were the norm including rival sources of leadership and attachment. These sources of leadership needed to be understood and accepted by whoever was in charge of the organization, and their aim – in so far as they were rational – was not to unify, integrate or liquidate sectional groups and their interests, but to control and balance the activities of constituent groups. Acceptance of the existence of divergent interests held by different actors also involved an acceptance that there was only a limited degree of common purpose. Although organizational factions were mutually dependent and interested in the overall survival of the organization, this consideration entered only infrequently into the day-to-day conduct of the organization (Fox, 1966: 4), which meant that conflict at times was unavoidable. So, pluralism, unlike unitarism, did not treat industrial conflict as a disease to be cured but as healthy and inevitable. As a consequence, managers would have to follow the classic pluralist dictum that, by giving up some of their natural advantage in power, overall control could be maintained through sharing control with workers. Such power sharing would create, in appearance and sentiment at least, a rough sense of equality between managers and workers so that their differences could be resolved by a process of negotiation and compromise through collective bargaining, an institutional framework dear to pluralist hearts.

However, Fox's earlier commitment to pluralism began to change to embrace a third frame of reference - the *radical perspective*. This radical perspective took into account the 'coercive duress' (1974a: 272) that bound employees to the contract of employment. In contrast to his earlier analysis of employment relations based on anomie (Fox and Flanders, 1966), Fox's radical perspective had its roots more in alienation caused by exploitation of one group by another in competition for scarce resources. From such a perspective, a genuine power balance in industrial organizations was clearly impossible. Pluralism, which in Fox's earlier view envisaged such a power balance, was a sham and unable to account for unequal access to power by the 'controllers of economic resources' and those whose livelihoods depended on access to those resources, or for the fact that people did not come together 'freely' to set up work organizations (1974a: 284). Like Lukes (1974), he began to see employers' power as both visible and invisible in shaping economic institutions and wider society (Fox 1985). In light of the inherent power of the employers, employees were forced to accept structural inequalities and submit to subjugation as required by the employment contract. Fox's conversion from the liberal pluralist consensus of the day to his radical perspective arose because in his understanding that capitalist development was instigating changes in the labour process that were profoundly detrimental to workers' interests (Fox, 1974a; 1985). It is this aspect of his macro-sociological analysis that led him to focus on the micro-sociological foundations of trust dynamics (Goldthorpe & Llewellyn, 1977; Roche, 1991), which, he argued, lay at the heart of rescuing the pluralist project through a radical pluralist solution (Ackers, 2011; Cradden, 2011; Edwards, 2014). For us, Fox's work represents a significant critique of the functionalist analyses typical of recent intra-organizational trust research, shaped by an over-optimistic vision of the possibilities of trust creation, maintenance and repair. A summary of the key characteristics of Fox's frames of reference is in Table 1.

Fox's trust dynamics. Fox's main thesis was that analysis of intra-organizational trust relations could not 'be fully grasped until the discussion is located within (…) the whole context of emerging industrial-commercial-urban society, with its characteristic features of markets, money, and, above all, contracts' (Fox, 1974a: 150). His examination of trust relations had roots in classical sociological traditions, in which theorizing extended 'beyond the factory gates' (Ingham 1970: 149; Fox, 1985: 42). Firstly, Fox's writing was reminiscent of contemporary radical structuralist analyses of work relations such as Braverman (1974) and Hyman (1975). Although he was not a Marxist himself, Fox echoed the analyses of alienation in employment relations, especially those elements of Marx's writings that emphasized how capitalist modes of production alienate man (sic!) from his essential desires to be autonomous and self-controlled. Fox also drew on Weber's explanation of bureaucracy as a rational and efficient method of managing people, and Simmel's (1907/1978) distinction between economic and social exchange in the increasingly commercialized and urbanized societies. Moreover, Fox embedded much of his analysis and prescription in Durkheim's work on anomie arising from the division of labour and the need to transform societal power relations through equality in contractual relations (Fox, 1985).

His main thesis proposed that the increasing division of labour in many advanced societies imposed by the owners and controllers of resources resulted in increasing specificity and impersonal economic exchange in employment contracts (Fox, 1974a), which led to low-discretion work roles. Low-discretion work roles, implying greater control of the individual worker, meant that employers had less commitment to employees who in turn had less reason to trust their employers. In other words low discretion work roles were symptomatic of low trust dynamics, in which workers' predictability needed to be ensured through direct and indirect control mechanisms, contracts and a pure market relationship. Fox contended that:

Given the structural nature of the enterprise, and given the probable perceptions and aspirations of its members, along with the institutions and values of the society in which it is embedded, the prevalent stance among those performing lower-level, low-discretion tasks is likely to be of the sort described here as low-trust (Fox, 1985: 92)

In Fox's view the way modern work was organized resulted in erosion of social integration in the workplace and a destructive social dynamic, which produced an institutionalized withholding of trust by employees, evident in suspicion, jealousy, misreading of people's motives, and lack of cooperation, all of which culminated in the withering of community (Fox, 1974a: 317). These economic exchange relations, in Fox's view, fuelled industrial conflict. Despite his pessimism concerning the potential for improving trust relations in conditions of structured antagonism (Edwards, 1986), Fox retained a degree of faith in high trust dynamics as a possible mechanism of social integration, especially in the case of professional groups whose work was characterized by commitment to the values of the organization, self-control and high autonomy.

Fox's arguments concerning the potential for organizations to develop high-trust dynamics raise interesting questions about trust in post-bureaucratic organizations that are unable to guarantee historic levels of job security and communal norms. So while post-bureaucratic societies were not able to continue to offer long-term careers with one organization, employees were able to exercise agency and could *choose* to trust their employers. In light of Fox's analysis radical and functional theorists alike can envisage circumstances in which trust may take an optimistic, high trust dynamic, as well as a pessimistic, low trust dynamic - often in the same organization (Grey & Garsten, 2004). These two, sometimes co-existing, dynamics cannot be accounted for by structural/institutional factors or micro-organizational factors separately; instead, like Möllering (2005), we recognize the need for a theoretical

device in the intra-organizational trust literature which attempts to reconcile the structure-agency analysis.

Methodology

We adopted a 'systematic approach' to a comprehensive literature review (Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton, 2012), firstly by developing a research protocol in which key words, exclusion/inclusion criteria, and data sources were defined. We searched for relevant intra-organizational trust studies using the key words 'organizational trust', 'trust AND/OR employees', and 'trust AND/OR workers' (Boolean search mode) in ScienceDirect; Web of Knowledge and Business Source Premier by EBSCO. No time boundary was used, with all research published before August 2014 being considered. Only these aspects of intra-organizational trust which are integral to the employment relationship were included: (1) employees' trust in their supervisors, (2) employees' trust in senior management, (3) employees' trust in the organizational systems, (4) organizations' trust in their employees. These relationships guided our choice of works to include and served as a basis for selecting keywords. In our selection we excluded studies based on lab experiments, but included conceptual studies. Although we have not searched specifically for research on distrust, we acknowledge that distrust is inherent in workplace relations, and some studies included in the analysis either explicitly or implicitly raise the issue of distrust.

This search produced 429 studies. Our criteria for selecting influential works were based on citations, as measured by the Web of Science and Google Scholar. Titles, abstracts and key words of the 100 most cited publications were examined to verify their relevance. Where this initial examination was inconclusive, we read the publications in full. During this examination we discarded 27 works because they did not match our selection criteria (for example did not explicitly address intra-organizational trust

relations, they were based on experiments, or because they related to trust between/among workers in teams, hence they were not relevant to the employment relationship).

We acknowledged that a citation count could potentially disadvantage more recent papers, so we drew on our knowledge of the literature on intra-organizational trust and we sought expert advice from trust scholars to manually add 57 publications that were relevant to our analysis. In total, both search strategies yielded 130 works (marked with an asterisk (*) in the reference list), which were read in full. A critical review form was developed to examine relevant articles in a more systematic way. We conducted an in-depth analysis using pre-defined coding criteria: (1) the authors and date of publication (2) number of citations (by Google Scholar); (3) the main focus of the study; (4) methodology, (5) the dominant frame of reference as defined by Fox (1974a). In classifying the intra-organizational trust studies through the theoretical lens of Fox's frames of reference we attempted to answer the following questions: what assumptions concerning the nature of organizations underpinned these publications? Were they best characterised by (a) a unitary consensus among management and workers on the core mission and values suggesting inherently high trust dynamics, or (b) pluralist conflict arising from the different interests represented within the firm suggesting calculative trust dynamics, or (c) structurally-generated conflict arising from divisions within wider society, which produced low trust dynamics? When analyzing these works we also considered the extent to which trust dynamics in a study reflected an awareness of the type of structure-agency analysis as conceptualized by Fox (1974b). So we considered to what extent the work embraced the notion of institutional trust, which refers to the embedded agency of actors and organizational trust dynamics in the wider social system in which organizations are situated, and how such dynamics may be shaped by rules and norms in the wider social system (Child & Möllering, 2003; Lane 1998).

Findings

Our Findings section begins with two disclaimers. First, Fox's framework has attracted critique from scholars who called for more nuanced interpretations of the three frames of reference (Cradden, 2011), so we recognize that our classification and analysis may be subject to the same kind of critique. Second, despite our attempts to use theory-specified criteria for analyzing our findings, inevitably the process of classification, which entailed allocating specific studies into 'columns', is a subjective exercise and is bound to trigger disagreement. With these two caveats in mind, we present the findings from our literature review, which are summarized in Table 2.

A preponderance of studies with a unitarist frame of reference. Our findings concerning the intra-organizational trust literature as seen through the lens of Fox's frames of reference suggests that the great preponderance of this work has strong unitarist underpinnings (Table 2). One of the underlying characteristics of the unitarist frame of reference lies in the assumption of naturally occurring unity of purpose between employers and employees that binds an organization together and functions to achieve beneficial organizational outcomes for all stakeholders. Conflict, when it arises, is seen as a 'result of misunderstanding or mischief', in other words, is pathological (Crouch, 1982: 18). According to Fox (1985: 87), such a unity of purpose was evident in studies that focused on achieving positive organizational outcomes and increasing employee performance through trust. The majority of papers we analysed exemplified these assumptions and characteristics. Good examples include Colquitt, Scott and LePine, (2007) and Laschinger and Finegan (2005). The emphasis on common goals and collaboration is also evident in Dodgson's article (1993) where trust is 'characterized by a community of interests, organizational culture receptive to external inputs, and widespread and continually supplemented knowledge among employees of the status and purpose of the collaboration' (p. 77). Similarly, Mayer and Gavin (2005: 6) assume a natural unity of purpose and note that 'employees who trust management should be able to focus greater attention towards adding value to the organization'.

These authors also argue that trust in top management should allow employees to focus on the work that needs to be done, instead of worrying about issues such as the viability of their future employment with the company. In these and many other papers, there is little, if any, recognition that conflict is inherent in organizations, or that the outcomes of such conflict can be evaluated differently by different stakeholders who pursue different aims. Marked examples include studies by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995), Konovsky and Pugh (1994), Sitkin and Roth (1993), Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, and Werner, (1998), Lewicki and Bunker (1996). Moreover, there are also numerous studies that do not explicitly acknowledge the potential for conflict among organizations and employees (e.g. Palanski & Yammarino, 2009; Korsgaard, Sapienza, & Schweiger, 2002).

Such shared purpose is used to legitimize management prerogative and the 'manufacturing of consent' (Burawoy, 1979) through leadership and human relations techniques, both of which are premised on relatively unconstrained managerial agency. These features also characterize the majority of papers we analysed, for example, Yoon and Suh's (2003) study assumes that managers' engagement in trustworthy behaviour can create a consensus over goals. Similarly, Brockner, Siegel, Daly, Tyler, and Martin (1997) suggest that by showing themselves to be trustworthy, managers may be able to maintain employee support, at least temporarily, when making decisions that lead to relatively unfavourable outcomes. The emphasis on unconstrained managerial agency and the efficacy of human relations techniques is further evident in McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer (2003: 97), who place emphasis on motivating actors to contribute their resources to 'combine, coordinate and use them toward the achievement of organizational goals', and in Edwards and Cable (2009) who stress the importance of creating congruent values in trusting relationships.

Trust research that links to human resource management (HRM) practices in HRM journals is typically underpinned by a, frequently criticized, unitarist ideology (Edwards, 2003; Guest, 1987). These studies

emphasize consensus around common goals (Gould-Williams, 2003): for example, Whitener (2001) in her study discusses the impact of high commitment human resource practices and how the 'beneficial actions directed at employees by the organization and/or its representatives contribute to the quality of the exchange relationships' (p. 518). Related to the unitarist rhetoric of HRM is the emphasis on trust as empowerment in some studies, for example those works by Macky and Boxall (2007) and Laschinger and Finegan (2005). Some of the HRM-inspired studies about trust also refer to the concept of psychological contract (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Robinson & Morrison, 1995), which is based on the essentially unitarist notion of reciprocity that plays down inherent conflict in employment relations. For example, Robinson and Morrison (1995) discuss the reciprocal nature of the psychological contract, and its implications for trust, and argue that by understanding and, more importantly, attempting to manage perceived obligations, organizations will be better able to ensure employee engagement. The question of whose interests are served when employees' trust and engagement in the enterprise is preserved simply does not arise. Reflecting our earlier reference to Godard (2014), trust studies underpinned by unitarism tended to be found in psychology oriented journals such as *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, and the mainstream management journals such as the *Academy of Management Review.*

A pluralist trend. While there has been preponderance of unitarist studies, there was significant evidence of pluralist approaches in the studies we analysed (See Table 2). These studies include: Tyler and Kramer, (1996); Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999), Lo and Aryee (2003), Treadway, Hochwarter, Ferris, Kacmar, Douglas, Ammeter, and Buckley (2004), Deery, Iverson and Walsh (2006), Möllering (2005), and Tomlinson and Mayer (2009). What they have in common is an acknowledgement of plural interests among different stakeholders, a potential for legitimate conflict over aims and a diversity of perceptions of trust. These studies also recognize – to a greater or lesser degree – that not all stakeholders are treated equally – the needs of some may be prioritized over the needs of others. A

number of good examples of this emerging pluralism, sensitive to inequality and potential conflict, were found. First, Kramer (1996) recognized a potential for conflicting agendas between organizational stakeholders, noting that although there are jointly beneficial outcomes of trust, asymmetries of power may give rise to feelings of disappointment and betrayal. Second, asymmetric power relations between stakeholders were also a focus of discussion in research by Schoorman et al. (2007) who saw trust as an alternative to direct control over workers. Third, Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998) acknowledged that although parties may pursue consistency and the resolution of inconsistent views, the more common state is not one of balance but imbalance; social exchange is compatible with inconsistency and uncertainty. Fourth, Gillespie and Dietz (2009) pointed to the diverse nature of employees' emotional and behavioural responses to trust repair initiatives. Fifth, Guest and Peccei (2001) found that there were significant dangers for partnership where the balance of power erred too far in favour of management.

One of the most notable contributions that questioned the emphasis on common goals is by Skinner et al. (2014). These authors called into question the taken-for-granted nature of the benefits of trust, pointing out that in some organizational contexts trust can become a poisoned chalice. This might be the case, for example, when managers 'trust' their under-skilled workers to do tasks beyond their capability in an attempt to increase their workload; trust lock-in can be problematic when trade unions want to withdraw trust in negotiations despite a long-standing relationship with the employer; excessive micro-management and superficial empowerment schemes can undermine *alleged* trust put in employees, since it is obvious that employees are not really trusted when there is no evidence of real risk-taking on the part of the managers. In general, Skinner and her colleagues demonstrated that the rhetoric of trust often fails to deliver on the promise of trust, with disastrous effect, since failure to deliver on a promise is itself further destructive of trust.

It is important to note that in classifying intra-organizational trust studies as pluralist we applied a 'soft test' of pluralism that focuses only on recognizing legitimate conflicting interests and power asymmetry between contending parties. Classical pluralism, as described by Fox and his fellow industrial relations scholars, was as much concerned with the nature of pluralist prescription as analysis, recognizing a need to deal with asymmetrical relations between management and workers by creating an institutional framework of collective bargaining and formal and informal processes of compromise to allow workers voice in a system that was inherently stacked against them. Concerning institutional frameworks, Butler, Gover and Tregaskis (2011) noted that levels of trust among local managers and employees were not sufficient to generate stable partnerships and good trust relations. Context mattered in their case study, and 'strong and well organized trade unions that may 'shock' managers into best practice are a further prerequisite' (p. 685). Concerning processes Dietz (2004) argued that good processes mattered more than institutions when considering high trust initiatives such as partnership agreements between management and unions. Dietz's 'reflections overwhelmingly, though not unanimously, pointed to major improvements in trust following partnership (…) between people previously locked in bitter industrial conflict' (p.17). Similarly, Guest et al.'s (2008) examination of whether partnership agreements between managers and unions improved trust relations concluded that 'The case for partnership and more particularly representative partnership as a basis for mutuality and trust is not supported… direct forms of partnership have a more positive association than representative partnership' (p.124). However, applying such a 'hard test' in modern employment relations would be inappropriate and would lead to ruling out the emerging pluralist trend we have found in the trust literature.

The radical perspective. The core assumptions of unitarism with its emphasis on common goals and the functionalist tendency to endorse unfettered managerial agency were what most disturbed theorists with a radical frame of reference. Kramer (1996: 227) caricatured these two assumptions in trust

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research by suggesting that 'managers may decide that trust is important because it improves the motivation, morale and compliance of subordinates – all of which are in the service of enhanced organizational performance and help advance the manager's own agenda'. Suffice to say, we found little evidence of papers written from a radical perspective; those that were tended to have their roots in industrial relations scholarship. For example, Starkey cited Fox's (1974a) work in an analysis of how industrial capitalism led to a focus on contract and to the commodification and intensification of time in the contracts of employment of all groups in society, including hitherto autonomous workers such as professionals. In a study of school teachers, hospital consultants, general practice physicians and further education lecturers, he showed how professional groups have been made more accountable for how they spend their time and the effects these developments have had on creating a low trust dynamic.

> *'Fox suggests a link between stricter contractual relations and the erosion of trust between employer and employee. Employers emphasize the obligations of contract, employees its limits. Moves towards contract, by employers or employees, testify to disequilibrium in the psychological contract. Employees subject to less discretion at work and closer monitoring react by paying closer attention to the efforts they are willing to devote to it' (Starkey, 1989: 392).*

Godard (2004) examined the effects of high performance work practices on employers and employees' work outcomes. Many of these practices claimed to be high-trust initiatives intended to impact positively on trust relations, however he concluded that their effect was uncertain and unproven. In his political economy account of the employment relationship, in which 'employee interests are subordinated to those of owners', he hypothesized that high performance work practices 'have declining marginal returns owing to underlying sources of distrust and commitment arising out of the structure of the employment relation' (Godard, 2004: 365). This would explain why, according to Godard 'high-

performance programmes tend to be fragile, often seeming to have a limited life-span and why workers appear to become disillusioned with them over time' (Godard, 2004: 367).

Appelbaum, Batt & Clark (2013) examined the impact of the recent 'financialisation' of the American and British economies in the form of private equity buyouts on trust relations and implicit contracts. Private equity takeovers, they argue, is an extreme form of shareholder value, in which the overriding goal is to maximize returns to the fund's partners within a relatively short time frame (Appelbaum et al., 2013: 503). The authors demonstrated how incentives for private equity firms to maximize short run profits are usually associated with a breach of previously existing implicit contracts, which in turn creates low trust relations. This *'leveraged debt model of disciplining workers (…) is at odds with business models that drive competitiveness through knowledge based assets and innovations (…) Breach of trust may facilitate financial restructuring, but it undermines long-term investments to improve cost, quality and innovation' (Appelbaum et al., 2013: 514).*

Other studies underpinned by the radical perspective include Knights and McCabe (2003) and Child and Rodrigues (2004). These latter authors argued that breach of trust in many contemporary organizations is caused by a number of internal and external factors: takeovers and reorganizations that resulted in job losses, workplace hierarchy, social and pay distinctions and divides, vast pay differentials and unequal levels of reward for performance, and prior experience and socialization in the labour market. They also argued that neo-liberal thinking encouraged the free allocation of resources, and under the guise of flexible employment practices justifies disadvantageous treatment of employees. This may explain why, despite an increasing awareness of the importance of employee trust to organizational performance, evident in the functionalist literature, many employees appear to be more afraid, more cynical and less engaged with their organizations.

Studies underpinned by Fox's pluralist and radical perspectives have tended to appear in European journals with a more critical sociological and industrial relations orientation, for example the British Journal of Industrial Relations, the Journal of Management Studies, and Organization Studies.

High-trust and low-trust dynamics and the link with external institutions. Our review of intra-organizational trust literature revealed that very few studies took cognizance of how exogenous factors such as the division of labour in wider society affect work organization and, through this variable, high-trust and low-trust dynamics in organizations. In considering trust relations, trust breakdown or trust repair many researchers focus on the organization as the appropriate unit of analysis, and by ignoring the external environment, they neglected or played down many important contextual variables such as the impact of different actors' ideologies and power, regimes of governance and the influence of the wider political economy.

Only a few studies acknowledged how external institutions in society shape internal processes such as trust dynamics. Among the most important of these from an empirical perspective were Child and Möllering (2003) whose data pointed to the importance of contextual confidence in Chinese institutions in building trust in business relationships, and role played by difficulties with the institutionalization of legal norms as well as administrative systems. Similarly, Pearce, Branyiczki, and Bigley's (2000) explanations of intra-organizational trust in American and Hungarian firms were embedded in the different political systems of these two countries and how they shaped personnel practices. From a conceptual perspective, Schoorman, et al. (2007) commented on the importance of cultural differences, and recognized different forms of governance as having an impact on trust relations in the workplace. Also important are Macky and Boxall (2007) who acknowledged the nature of work organization in the context of trust, commenting, for example, on the preponderance of professionals as employees in the public sector. Similarly, Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999) referred to high and low trust dynamics, and

attempted to link changing trust dynamics to economic and social factors, while Deery, et al. (2006) considered the role of external market conditions in influencing employment relationship and trust dynamics. The national context for development of trust relations was considered by Bradley and Gelb (1981) who investigated the nature of Basque culture and its impact on trust relations, and Timming (2009) who argued that in cross-national collaborations 'parochial self-interest' of workers from the Netherlands and the UK took precedence over trust. An example of a conceptual attempt to look beyond the organization as a unit of analysis, though not ideologically radical, is by Gillespie and Dietz (2009) whose discussions of major trust failures in large corporations demonstrate recognition that trust repair may be embedded in institutions and societies external to the organizations. Also, Tsui-Auch and Möllering (2010: 1016) developed a case-study based model that 'links perceptions of the macro-level environment to micro-level management'. More recently Applebaum et al. (2013) argued that damage has been done to trust relations in workplace partnerships embedded in the 'new financial capitalism', with its focus on short-term shareholder value.

These works that take cognizance of exogenous explanations of trust dynamics are very much in the minority, and tend to be most evident in the industrial relations journals. A general point which emerges from reviewing this literature is that while some of the above studies implicitly draw on Fox's notion of high and low trust dynamics, they do not theorize these dynamics in the context of the structure-agency debate in organization studies, which concerns the ability of individuals to make free choices and act accordingly (Delbridge & Edwards, 2013). Among the few that do is Möllering's (2005) work on how structures and agency shape trust dynamics and Kramer's (1996) chapter which explicitly discusses hierarchical relationships in the workplace that result from the division of labour in wider society. Kramer recognizes that those 'at the bottom' and those 'at the top' experience trust differently and have different vulnerabilities related to trust. For example those in low-level jobs need trust because they depend on tangible resources such as pay, promotions, and expect positive reinforcements. Those in

power, on the other hand, have more diffuse expectations that the workers will accomplish their tasks competently.

Discussion and conclusions

So what does Fox's analysis tell us about the extant research into intra-organizational trust? The first point to note is that although his work was situated in the political, economic, industrial and employment relations context of Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, his analysis of trust dynamics continues to be highly relevant to contemporary workplaces in many industrial sectors and types of organizations in many countries. Fox (1985:12) himself acknowledged the problem of changing contexts in the preface to his second edition of *Man Mismanagement*, which led him to re-write substantially later chapters that dealt with political and organizational changes in Britain and much of the developed world during the 1980s. He acknowledged how elements of his work had been impacted by Thatcher-Regan market economics and philosophies, and the emergence of post-bureaucratic forms of organization, with their characteristic emphasis on the manufacturing of consent through soft power and human resource management techniques. However, he found no reason to reject or change his fundamental analysis of trust dynamics associated with his original distinction between high and low-discretion work, a conclusion with which we largely agree. For example, we believe Fox's analysis of low trust dynamics is highly relevant to industrial relations in industrializing economies such as China (Appelbaum, 2006; Cantin & Taylor, 2008) and in traditional industries such as motor vehicle manufacturing, where Fordist and neo-Fordist modes of production still largely dominate (Peters, 2012). His analysis can also provide insights into much of the service sector of developed economies, for example call centres and the restaurant industry (Stuart, Grugulis, Tomlinson, Forde & Mackenzie, 2013), and in new internet-enabled forms of work organization such as e-Lancing, which are based on impersonal forms of control (Aguinas & Lawal, 2013). With respect to his analysis of high-trust dynamics, his references to professional work and responsible autonomy exemplify Fox's current relevance. While much

professional work is increasingly carried out in large bureaucratic organizations, some professions enjoy a high discretion work environment and operate under conditions of high trust. Professionals in such organizations are valued for their personal and creative skills, commitment and self-control and they respond accordingly in exhibiting high degrees of trust and commitment. The experience of work is for them a relational and sometimes ideological contract rather than purely economic one (Fox, 1974b). But even in the case of professional work, the low trust dynamic analysis still applies. This has become particularly evident in healthcare and education, where senior doctors and academics have complained about de-professionalization as a result of new low-trust initiatives such as job plans, target setting and increased managerial control (Numerato, Salvatore, Fattore, 2012; Radice, 2013).

Moreover, Fox's frames of reference shed light on strengths and weaknesses of current trust research by revealing their underpinning assumptions, and opening up such research to critique and progress. More than two decades ago Gioia and Pitre (1990) argued that knowledge in management and organizational studies was underpinned by key meta-theoretical assumptions and that understanding these assumptions could help researchers establish gaps in our knowledge. However, gap spotting is not the only way of progressing knowledge (Sandberg & Alvessson, 2010), and in some respects, a relatively unadventurous one. Exploring a phenomenon from different meta-theoretical perspectives enables us to go further to challenge or problematize underlying assumptions and ask more interesting questions that break existing paradigmatic boundaries, as well as generating novel theoretical and practical insights (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Gioia & Pitre, 1990). Thus, we argue that looking at existing intra-organizational trust research through Fox's alternative frames of reference and explanation of trust dynamics may help trust researchers reflect on their own meta-theoretical assumptions and understand how these assumptions shape their research questions. This need for greater researcher reflexivity in trust research has recently been acknowledged by Isaeva, Bristow, Saunders and Bachmann (2014). Our analysis indicates that most of the extant research embodies a functionalist perspective and a claim

to instrumental relevance based upon the development of new schemes and technological recipes for guiding managerial action (Palmer, Dick & Freiburger, 2009). However, echoing Nicolai and Seidl's, (2010) views on practical relevance for managers and academics being better served by theorizing from multiple perspective, we argue that trust research and the practical interests of employees and managers are also enhanced by adopting a multi-perspectival approach. As Nicolai and Seidl (2010) argue, practical relevance leads to greater conceptual relevance and, in doing so, challenges institutionalized thinking and practice and uncovers previously unknown causal relationships and side effects.

Three further points emerge from our analysis of intra-organizational trust research. Firstly, by examining the literature through the lens of Fox's frames of reference, we have suggested that the majority of studies of intra-organizational trust reflect a unitarist frame of reference and play down the plurality of interests and power asymmetries in the organizations. The unitarist perspective was regarded by Fox as a heavily institutionalized form of socially constructed values, practices, beliefs and rules that privileged elite managerial power and agency. It rested on the assumptions that order and cooperation were natural and that employees' trust could either be presumed as the default position (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999) or regarded as a desirable state to be achieved. While in certain situations and time periods, as Fox (1985) acknowledged, unitarism may be relevant, its premises largely fail to describe the nature of employment relations in most organizational contexts. The pluralist perspective premised on the assumption that different groups have different aims is reflected in some intra-organizational trust research but we argue that more pluralist approaches to trust research are needed to better reflect the nature of modern work relations. Thus, Fox's early advocacy of this pluralist perspective may enrich intra-organizational trust research, especially in light of the global financial crisis, recent leadership and corporate governance scandals, and evidence of the de-professionalisation of powerful professional groups. A pluralist theory of trust is at its most useful in acknowledging the

legitimacy of different interests and conflict among stakeholders as well as their needs and desires to cooperate, so viewing trust and control as two sides of the same coin (Grey & Garsten, 2001; Möllering, 2005, Hope-Hailey, Searle & Dietz, 2012). Such pluralistic assumptions are embedded in agency theory, which is predicated on the notions that those who control enterprises have different interests from those who own it (Lan & Heracleous, 2010; Dalton, Hitt, Certo & Dalton, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989); they are also embedded in the sociology of the professions, which points to the different identities, interests and logics of managers and professionals (Leicht & Fennell, 2001; Macdonald, 1999). Perhaps even more importantly, pluralistic trust research provides great insights by acknowledging the importance of processes of dialogue, negotiation and compromise in resolving problems of trust (Dietz, 2004).

Secondly, our analysis indicates that Fox's radical perspective is under-represented in intra-organizational trust research. His radical perspective raises important limitations of most intra-organizational trust research – that it embraces an overly agentive analysis, places undue faith in managers' ability to manufacture consent, and that it stops 'at the factory gates'. In doing so it fails to acknowledge the structured antagonisms and contradictions in the employment relationship created by the mode of production and power relationships in most Western economies, which are based on an ever-increasing division of labour and specialization. Radical analyses offer trust researchers a potential to explain declining levels of organizational trust in terms of social disintegration and deficits in societal level institutions. Radical analyses can also focus on fair pay, job security, labour process, worker representation, employment contracts, class divisions and the rise in importance of finance and global capital in societies – in short, the traditional territory of industrial relations and industrial sociology. Furthermore, approaching trust from a radical perspective might also illuminate the debates on distrust. Saunders, Dietz and Thornhill (2014), Schoorman et al. (2007) and Lewicki, et al. (1998) suggested that low trust and high distrust are not equivalent concepts. Unlike low trust, distrust is

rooted in structural antagonisms, in which employees' agency is deeply embedded in macro- and meso-level structural and institutional constraints (Möllering, 2005; 2006a; Bachmann 1998). Recognition of structurally influenced distrust may explain why repeated transgressions occur and why technological recipes for trust restoration may not work.

As noted earlier in this discussion, a radical perspective might also raise questions about institutionalised trust in the context of modern capitalism, such as why employees should trust organizations that do not trust them (Appelbaum et al., 2013; Martin & Gollan, 2012), and why distrust rather than low trust is sometimes inherent in many managerial strategies and practices (Fox, 1985; Saunders, et al., 2014). Indeed one possible useful re-interpretation of Fox would be to see his low trust dynamic as distrust. Although we have not searched specifically for research on distrust, we acknowledge that the focus on distrust might suggest a different interpretation of trust relations in organizations. A focus on distrust might also highlight more radical studies which are absent from our classification in Table 2.

Employees' distrust of their managers of course is not a new phenomenon (Child & Rodrigues, 2004; Knights & McCabe, 2003; Kramer, 1996; Luthans & Sommer, 1999) and the radical literature has acknowledged deep and structurally embedded conflicts of interest, and high levels of worker alienation under 'financialised capitalism', which privileges the interests of shareholders, and permits managers very little choice over strategy other than to minimize long-term costs (Thompson, 2011; 2013). Such a critique led Sennett (2006) to point to three social deficits in the social capital of modern economies and organizations, which can explain declining levels of organizational trust. These are: low institutional loyalty and involvement; the weakening of institutional knowledge, where people no longer know what is expected of them and what they can expect from their post-bureaucratic organizations; and diminishing levels of informal employee trust, whereby employees no longer know who they can rely on.

Not being invested in any particular ethical evaluation of trust, the radical perspective could raise other, less tendentious questions. One such question is – do employers need employees' trust, for example, in situations where employees' performance and engagement with clients is more related to identification with the values of a profession or an industry such as healthcare or education rather than with a particular employing organization? If so, what degree of trust among employees is necessary for an organization to function effectively? So, as well as trying to identify the antecedents of trust and analysing a range of cause-and-effect relationships, researchers may ask questions about the origins and stability of divergent views on trust among different groups of employees and other stakeholders, and how these might be reconciled. The answers to these questions are likely to go well beyond the typical leadership, high commitment - HRM and communications solutions that characterize much of the trust literature, which are predicated on a sometimes unrealistic unitarist frame of reference in organizations. This is not to argue that overt conflict is the norm in most organizations at most times. Clearly, it is not – employees and managers cooperate most of the time to achieve their respective aims and neo-human relations strategies have a role in creating and maintaining such cooperation. However, as Edwards, Belanger & Wright (2006) point out, the absence of overt conflict does not mean that employees and employers share a unitary purpose or do not recognize a deeper set of conflicting interests. Many large organizations with diverse workforce will be characterized by varying types of trust dynamics – from high through low, to active distrust (Saunders, et.al. 2014).

Thirdly, by drawing on Fox's perspective on trust dynamics, we argue that an analysis of organizational trust should begin 'outside of the factory gates', shifting emphasis from the focus on organizational trust to a broader focus on trust in institutions and social structures (Child & Rodrigues 2004). Such a rebalancing that acknowledges the structure-agency debate in organization studies (e.g. Delbridge & Edwards, 2013; Giddens & Pierson, 1998) may allow trust researchers to recognize the limitations of

sophisticated HRM prescriptions to trust building, maintenance and repair, which often raise unrealistic hopes of employees and managers in the effectiveness of technological recipes (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010) and fail to acknowledge that more fundamental or radical changes are required in the institutions of modern societies. The industrial relations literature reminds us that there is a clash of economic interests and conflict structured into the employment relationship by the modes of production and control in advanced capitalist societies and the financialization of economies. As well as rewards that reflect their labour, many employees seek equity, voice, fulfilment, social identity, autonomy and control. Employers in the private sector, on the other hand, have to satisfy demands for profit maximization, control over labour costs and short-term shareholder value, which leads them to exercise power and control and consequently creates a low trust dynamic (Appelbaum et al., 2013; Budd & Bhave, 2008; Saunders et al., 2014).

Extending the metaphor, we argue that trust researchers could look not only beyond the factory gates but also look beyond national borders and engage more in comparative studies. As Möllering (2006) has cogently argued, comparative studies at the institutional and societal level provide important insights into trust dynamics in organizations. Fox (1974; 1985) recognised this point when comparing national systems of industrial relations and collective bargaining structures in Britain, America, Japan and (West) Germany. He argued that the industrial relations systems of Japan and Germany were premised on high trust relations, which in turn shaped and were shaped by firm-level trust dynamics in these two countries. Fox contrasted this picture with the characteristic low trust dynamic in the British and American systems. In other words, we see the 'beyond the factory gates' thesis as a timeless metaphor for an inward looking perspective on trust in organizations rather than a time-bound metaphor tied to a particular mode of production such as Fordism.

So what would such research look like? Following the logic of Fox's analysis of trust (1974; 1985) and the structure-agency debate in social sciences (e.g. Delbridge & Edwards, 2013; Giddens & Pierson, 1998), we pose three suggestions that might shape trust researchers' focal questions, theoretical framing and choice of methodologies. The first one is that researchers acknowledge that employees' trust in their organization may be conditioned by, or even embedded in, social structures and prior socialization in the labour market. The second is that researchers recognize that managers and employees can be seen as autonomous and reflexive actors capable of making free choices over their trust decisions and behaviour, and in so doing, they are capable of reproducing or recreating trust dynamics in organizations and societies. The third is that structural and agentive approaches to trust research need to be reconciled so that its theoretical and practical relevance might be enhanced.   Taking into account what goes on 'beyond the factory gate', trust research may be better able to show how actors in and around organizations are able to exercise agency and bring about changes in these higher-level institutions: by choosing particular institutional signals, such as distributing wealth and profits more evenly; by drawing on different, more socially responsible, identities, frames of reference and goals, and ways of interacting socially; and by engaging in novel forms of sensemaking, and mobilising resources and making decisions that seek to bring about transformational change in trust and distrust relations in organizations (Gillespie, Hurley, Dietz & Bachmann, 2012). Like Fox (1985), we argue that developing a perspective on organizational trust that combines the structurally influenced and agentive aspects of organizational trust relations is probably the best way forward to look beyond the factory gates while working constructively within them.

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The references marked with an asterisk (*) were analysed through the lens of Fox's frames of reference and trust dynamics, and appear in Table 2.

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