

## Beyond locutionary denotations: exploring trust between practitioners and policy

By

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Over the last two decades, many studies have highlighted the significance of trust in leadership (Zaheer, McEvily, and Perrone 1998, Spillane, Halverson and Diamond 2001, Dirks, Kurt, Ferrin and Donald 2002, Walkstrom and Louis, 2008, Daly and Chrispeels 2005 and 2008, Daly 2009 and Samier and Schmidt 2010), with a significant proportion contextualised in educational organisations (Daly and Chrispeels, 2005 and 2008, Daly 2009 and Samier and Schmidt 2010). With many of these studies, the construct of trust analysis employed has focused predominantly on what appears to be the physical essence of the persons involved in the relationships under analysis. This has incorporated in the definition of trust, the notion of expectation towards others while facilitating social and institutional life, underpinning risk-taking behaviour (Coleman, 1990; Mollering 2001; Holligan, 2010), cooperation (Gambetta, 1998) and social capital (Putmann 1995). What emanates from the above is a reinforcement of the facets of physicality and the person in the construct of trust analysis. It is therefore not surprising that most of the discourse on trust tend to forge a link between leaders and the led, managers and the managed, thus evoking the concept of what Thornborrow (2002) describes as Powerful and Powerless ways of speaking in a discursive act.

Yet, there have been refreshing departures from this rigid fixation with the person and the physical in the construct of trust analysis. For example, (Daly and Chrispeels, 2008:33) describe trust

as the extent to which one engages a relationship and is willing to be vulnerable (willingness to risk) to another based on communication and the confidence that the latter party will possess: *benevolence, reliability, competence, integrity, openness, respect.*

These six non-physical features suggest that we can explore trust from the context of factors other than the physical, just as we explore other influential but non-physical features in discourse analysis similar to the introduction of interpersonal and interorganizational trust construct by **Zaheer et. al** (1998), with the implication that while the notion of interpersonal trust can be seen as relying on the person and the physical, the notion of interorganizational trust does not necessarily rely on the personal and the physical. Extending this potential construct further, Holligan (2010) explores the relationship of trust to what he calls 'The hegemony of audit'. Within the framework of this exploration, Holligan can be seen to have concretized a process of analysing trust in a non-physical or personal context.

The ongoing confirms the viability of utilising a different construct in trust analysis. Taking my departure from this point, therefore, I have set out to accomplish two things in this paper. First, I aim to extend the construct of trust further by introducing the notion of 'promise to deliver' in the analysis of trust in relationships within communities of practice. I will draw upon theories of speech act (Austin 1962, Searle 1969 and Thornborrow 2002) to make a case for the role of promise in trust analysis. In particular, I will explore the notion of triple layers of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary contexts in the analysis of speech act.

The second aim of this paper is to apply the proposed construct in the analysis of a particular trust relationship. I will explore the extent to which practitioners in the Skills for Life (SfL) area trust the policies that play a highly significant role in their practice and will explore the extent to which they feel that the realities of implementation match the promises inherent in the policies. This relationship epitomises the non-physical / personal essence of trust relationship which the construct proposed above is aimed at accounting for. The expectation is that the research segment of this paper will provide the opportunity to confirm the viability or otherwise of the extended construct in the analysis of trust in communities of practice.

### **Towards an extended construct of trust analysis: Trust and inherent promises.**

The exploration of trust in leadership has often been linked to the implementation of policies. Typifying this is the work of Daly and Chrispeels (2005) who explored the role of trust on individuals in communities of practice in the process of implementing the No Child Left Behind policy. Yet, many of these studies appear to have drawn a boundary around elements that can be included in the analysis of trust relationships with a predominance of focus on the person and the physical essence of people within communities of practice. This, in effect, leaves behind a salient factor, which arguably, affects practitioners more than most: policy. Central to the frame work I propose is the recognition of labels and titles in the work place as discursive elements. In essence, I argue that variables that are directly or indirectly involved in our practices are components of discourse. The full manifestation of these components is necessarily, therefore, informed by the connotations implied in the label or title with which they are associated. I draw from the speech act theories of Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and their successors to argue that behind each text or label is an inherent set of intentions and implications.

Austin (1962) argues that words (*labels/titles*) do not have a simple fixed meaning. Rather, they are to be seen as elements of speech act which has the potential to generate three types of meaning. The first, locutionary acts, represents the utterance of a language item with a certain meaning in the traditional sense. In the context of the current discourse for example, the language item, manager, has the traditional meaning of leader, a person controlling the activities of other persons or team, controller, organiser etc. The second, illocutionary act, indicates a kind of

conventional force (Rhetorica 2010) which implements something that is not explicitly stated in the language item. For example, the label, manager, brings along with it the illocutionary elements of undertaking or promising to provide leadership, support, coaching, guidance etc. The final component, perlocutionary act, describes what is achieved by making an utterance. This might include deterrence, getting people to behave in a particular way, conforming etc.

In the context of an extended construct of trust analysis, I argue that behind every label we use to describe people and other variables that are relevant in a community of practice, there are illocutionary and perlocutionary contexts. In particular, an illocutionary act of 'promise'. What people in a community of practice trust, therefore, is not simply the personality of the people they work with, but their perception of the extent to which they feel that the illocutionary 'promise' can be delivered. This view of trust relationship echoes the concept of producer roles espoused in Discourse Analysis theories (Thomas 1986, Levinson 1988) where trust can be seen as the degree to which one party perceives the reliability of another in delivering the promise behind the title/label.

This construct of trust relationship raises questions about the predominance of the leader-led, powerful-powerless format along which trust analysis is often discussed which can be explained drawing from discourse-related theories about interaction in a communicative setting. For example, Critical Discourse Analysis theory (Fairclough 1992) highlights the fact that some participants are seen as inherently more powerful than others by virtue of status, gender, ethnicity and / or institutional role (Fairclough 1992), and this reflects in the order of dominance in discourse. Similarly, (Thornborrow 2002) emphasises the notion of 'regimes of truth' which identifies expectations between participants in a discourse setting, while (Thornborrow 2002) emphasised the significance of Powerful and powerless ways of speaking. This suggests that higher labels / titles are often more prominent and therefore attract reactions. In essence, the elements of power relations in a discourse setting appear to have pushed the conventional leader-led configuration to the fore in trust analysis and have by implication subdued the less obvious elements like the illocutionary import of policies.

The major impact of embracing this extended construct is that it would enable us to accommodate the role of factors which, though highly influential in the work of practitioners, are usually overlooked. Such a stand lends more credence to some definitions of trust which alludes to the importance of 'the extent to which one engages in a relationship and is willing to be vulnerable [(willingness to risk)] to another based on communication and the confidence that the latter will possess: (a) benevolence (b) reliability (c) competence (d) integrity, (e) openness, and (f) respect' (Daly and Chrispeels 2008:33) in their construct of trust. This extension, I argue, can be applied to the trust relationship between practitioners and policies and will form the central plank for analysing this relationship in this study.

## **Methods of Data Collection and Analysis.**

### **Selection of sample group**

The sample group in this study is a convenience sample (Thomas 2009, Bernard and Ryan 2010) which was drawn from a group of specialist Skills for Life (SfL) teachers who have undertaken a specialist programme taught by this researcher over the last five years. It is considered convenient because it offers easy access to a readily available group. Although convenience groups are often limited by the limited spread of their representation, this limitation was tempered in this study by the introduction of stratification (Thomas 2009, Bernard and Ryan 2010). First, the spread of the group is representative of the location of colleges and other providers of SfL in the region within which the research and researcher are based. Second, there was a full representation of the types of providers ranging from formal FE colleges through providers in the services like The Police and Prison services, to private trainers and voluntary organisations. Therefore, views from the possible range of provider types were represented in the data. Finally, there was a reasonable balance between male (42%) and female (58%) practitioners. This reflects the established pattern within the workforce in the subject area (Cara et al. 2008, Hamilton and Hillier 2006, Fowler 2005). Overall, therefore, there was sufficient stratification within the group to provide a reasonable level of representativeness.

### **Methods of data collection.**

The data for this study was collected through a focus group interview which was a follow up to a survey administered to collect data for another study on the gap between policy and implementation. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they trusted the SfL policy which guides their practice and to highlight the impact of lack of trust on them as people. While the established advantage of using a questionnaire in order to achieve more responses was instrumental to its use in this study, the problems associated with its use such as low survey return rates, problems with memory and rigidity of questions (Wilson, 2009) were all considered and addressed. Low response rate was addressed through the fact that the study focused on a convenience sample which provided a more than average response rate of 76 out of 125 (61%) considered to be representative of the range of possible opinions .

Following a preliminary analysis of the questionnaires, focus group interviews which were designed to elicit from participants reasons for not trusting the policy to deliver its inherent promises were carried out. Prior to commencing the focus group interviews, respondents were provided with a summary of the SfL policy covering eight different elements of the recommendations of The Moser Report (1999). Respondents were then advised to consider their explanations in the context of these policy elements.

Although a focus group interview is often considered limited because of the 'unnaturalness of the setting' (Cohen et al 2000, p.288), this problem was surmounted through the provision of clear thematic boundaries which yielded significant information. More importantly, the interaction was effectively among the participants rather than with the interviewer, leaving room for the views of the participants to emerge. As noted by Chen et al. (2000, p288), 'it is from the interaction of the group that the data emerge'.

### **Methods of data analysis**

The method of data analysis in this study was essentially content analysis (Thomas 2009). The focus of content analysis in this study was to define language use which would identify boundaries of social relations and in particular, trust relations. In order to achieve this goal, the data collected through the questionnaire and those collected from the transcription of the interview were first codified using the connotations of negativity, positivity and a range of medial terms in the context of trust in relationships. Following this, the data was then analysed in order to establish a simple statistical pattern based on negative and positive dispositions towards trust in the context of each policy elements. The explanation provided on the breakdown of trust was subjected to a simple semantic content analysis and subsequently summarised thematically. As such, similar views were integrated leading to the

Table 1: Extent of Participants' trust of policy to deliver inherent promises

<b>No. / % that trust policy/ policy makers to fully deliver promises</b>	<b>No. / % of respondents that trust policy/ policy makers to deliver promises to large extent</b>	<b>No / % of respondents who trust policy/ policy makers to deliver their promises only to a limited extent</b>	<b>No / % of respondents who have no trust in policy makers at all.</b>	<b>Reason/explanations for lack of trust</b>
5 participants (6.5%) trust policy to deliver their promises fully.	19 participants (25%) trust policy to deliver their promises to a large extent.	52 participants (69%) trust policy to deliver their promises only to a limited extent.	Nil	<p>Policy never really means what it says</p> <p>The quality assurance element of policy is a ruse to impose brutal managerial regimes</p> <p>Advice and Guidance is only a process of advertising what we already have and does not take into consideration the goals of potential learners</p> <p>The assessment component merely offers an instrument for allocating funding. It is more about the certificate, often useless, that learners are able to show at the end of their programmes</p> <p>The claim that provision will be learner-focused is not true. It is just another instrument for controlling the ways in which we work.</p> <p>The real priority group that we cater for are those who will enable the government to evidence its wider participation agenda. Many of the people listed in the priority group are unable to access programmes that will meet their needs</p> <p>Overall, there are too many hidden factors that the language of policy does not specify explicitly and which leaves the interpretation open to individual managers.</p>

**Table 2: Impact of breakdown of trust on practitioners**

	<b>Respondents that trust policy to fully deliver promises</b>	<b>Respondents that trust policy to deliver promises to a large extent</b>	<b>Respondents who trust policy to deliver their promises only to a limited extent</b>	<b>Respondents who have no trust in policy makers at all.</b>
Impact on practitioners	<p>Enthusiasm</p> <p>Willingness to go to work</p> <p>Creativity</p> <p>Willingness to take responsibility</p>	<p>Enthusiasm</p> <p>Cynicism</p> <p>Limited level of creativity</p> <p>Willingness to be guided/led</p> <p>Lack of independent contribution</p> <p>Happy to experiment with others</p> <p>Reluctance to make professional judgement</p>	<p>Felt used</p> <p>Deception</p> <p>Cynicism</p> <p>Exploited</p> <p>Bitter because unable to meet learners' needs</p> <p>Ashamed</p> <p>No long-term planning</p>	

The majority of respondents, (69%) trust policy makers to meet their expectations only to a limited extent. As is established in the literature, this status attracts feelings of negativity (Wahlstrom and Louis, 2008, Zaheer *et. al.* 1998). Within this group, there is an interesting element of fatalism which appeared to be dominant: *'I don't think we expect them to deliver on their promises. No government or policy maker ever does'* (participant 44). Another instructive comment draws attention to the ever changing policy terrain in the SfL area. Participant 4 noted, *'One cannot expect policies' or policy makers to deliver fully because the policies are changed so regularly that there cannot be time to deliver'*. In a way, this suggests that some of the participants who held this view saw the problem as located in policy makers rather than policies. Predictably, many of the participants indicated that this lack of trust leaves practitioners with a range of negative feelings including 'feeling used, deceived, exploited, bitter, ashamed and unable to plan long-term.

More instructive, however, is the thrust of the explanations given by respondents. For example, in addition to individual suggestions that no one really expects policy to deliver its promises, there is a suggestion that there are hidden intentions behind the language elements of the policy. This brings to fore the concept of speech Act theory (Austin 1964, Searle 1969 and Rhetorica 2010) which suggests that behind every utterance, there is a possibility of a three layered interpretation comprising of the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary import. In the context of policy, it would seem that the locutionary is the language essence which in this case does not account for the entirety of respondents' interpretation of policy. Respondents' contributions during the interview suggest that they see a kind of surreptitious role for many policy elements which deterred them from trusting policy to deliver its locutionary import. Illustrating this is the general view for instance that, 'the quality assurance element of policy is a ruse to impose brutal managerial regimes' (summary of responses from participants 23, 18, 56, 62, 14, 6, 19); 'Advice and Guidance is only a process of advertising what we already have and does not take into consideration the goals of potential learners' (summary of views from respondents 2, 12, 68, 26, 44, and 55); 'the assessment component merely offers an instrument for allocating funding and that it is more about the certificate, often useless, that learners are able to show at the end of their programmes' (summary of views from respondents 9, 18, 27, 30, 36, 43, 49, 66, 70).

All of these suggest that there is an illocutionary interpretation of the language element of policy by practitioners which effectively triggered the breakdown in trust between policy and policy makers. In essence, while the locutionary import of policy statement might not induce trust breakdown, it would seem that practitioners' perceptions of the illocutionary import of policy statement might be responsible for triggering the breakdown in trust.

The participants who felt that policy can be trusted to fully deliver their inherent promises (6.5%) highlighted the need for realistic expectations. They argued for instance that, 'policy implementation is a process and that no one should expect all aspects of policies to be delivered fully ( summary of views from participants 1, 17, 39, 58 and 76) : *'to expect every part of it to be delivered at all times is naive'* (participant 1). The position of this group of respondents requires further exploration. While it is true that they are relatively small in number, it is important that we explore the reason for the difference in outlook. On the one hand, the perception that 'policy is a process' appears to have offered the required explanation. However, within the framework of the Speech Act theory, it is possible to offer another explanation. Given that the interpretation of text at the first two of the three layers of Speech Act, the locutionary and the illocutionary, is the prerogative of the text interpreter, it is plausible to argue that the minority who felt that they fully trusted the SfL policy to deliver its inherent promises have not looked beyond the locutionary level and, therefore, do not see the policy text as an embodiment of other illocutionary imports. This is in contrast with the possibility of the majority group's lack of trust which as earlier suggested might have been induced by their perception of potential and real illocutionary imports of the policy text.

Interestingly, however, participants who admitted to trusting SfL policies to a large extent to deliver their inherent promises (25%) indicated that the failure to fully deliver promises had both a positive and a negative impact on them. Some of the themes emerging from this group in terms of their explanation around policy elements include; the claim that provision will be learner-focused is not true (summary of views from participants no 4, 14, 22, 26, 35, 43, 60 and 74). 'It is just another instrument for controlling the ways in which we work; the real priority group that we cater for are those who will enable the government to evidence its wider participation agenda' (participant 60).

Another explanation is the perception that, many of the people listed in the priority group are unable to access programmes that will meet their needs; overall, there are too many hidden factors that the language of policy does not specify explicitly and which leaves the interpretation open to individual managers' (participant 43). These summations of views again offer some insight into the potential for these respondents to have been induced by an engagement with the illocutionary import of the policy elements in question. As suggested in the overall slant of their explanations, they tended to see policy elements as intended to deliver something beyond the locutionary or the immediate linguistic denotations. Hence, we might argue that their position and the attendant breakdown in trust is a product of their perception of the illocutionary import of the policy text.

One relevant engagement with the nature of the findings that have been discussed above is to find out why such a sizable percentage of respondents tended to draw on the illocutionary potentials of the policy text to inform their position on trust. In the

context of the findings of this study, it is difficult to offer any specific reason for this. However, we can draw from previous studies on trust relationship to account for this situation. In their study on trust relationship within the Health Service, Calnan and Rowe (2008, p1) concluded that 'For many informants trust can no longer be assumed, it is conditional and has to be earned'. One possible reason why trust can no longer be taken for granted is the previous experience of respondents with previous policy. As noted by one respondent, 'It is not new to us. Policy promises something and at the stage of delivery, imposes another dimension'. It would seem that previous experience might be one of the factors that have driven practitioners to look beyond the locutionary to the illocutionary import of policy texts. This aligns with the position argued in Covey (2006) who identified 'create transparency' as one of the thirteen behaviours that can help build trust. The essence of this behavioural trait, for Covey, is the expectation that 'what you see is what you get'. It is probable that practitioners in this study make a natural recourse to the illocutionary connotation of policy texts because their past experience has led them to assume that, 'what you see is not necessarily what you get'.

### **Impact of lack of trust on practitioners**

As expected, the impact of breakdown of trust attracts varying reactions depending on the category respondents belong to in terms of their perception of trust level. Respondents who felt that they trusted policy to fully deliver its inherent promises cited many positive impacts of the trust relationship on them. For example, many highlighted enthusiasm, willingness to go to work, creativity and willingness to take responsibility as manifestations of the impact that the trust relationship between them and policy has. By contrast, those who trusted policy to deliver to a large extent cited a mixture of positive and negative impacts. For example, in addition to citing enthusiasm as an impact, they also cited inevitable cynicism. Similarly, many reported that while they were willing to be guided or led by their managers, they are not over enthusiastic about taking independent creative decisions. Another contrasting set of impacts reflects a combination of willingness to experiment within the group with a reluctance to make independent professional judgement. Overall, therefore, the impact on practitioners in this group appears to be a dilemma of paying homage to conflicting allegiances. While on the one hand, their experience and perception of the transparency of policy in terms of delivering its inherent promises elicits many positive reactions, the contrasting experience which limits the extent to which they see policy as being transparent tended to reduce the positivity in their reactions and to replace it with negativity.

Respondents who trusted policy to deliver its promises only to a limited extent cited more negative impacts. Amongst the impacts cited were 'feeling used', 'feeling deceived', 'being cynical', 'feeling exploited', 'feeling bitter', 'feeling ashamed' and 'unable to plan long-term'. When questioned further, respondents in this group admitted that their overall experience has tended to deter them from acknowledging

the positives and as such, they have sub-consciously eliminated the potential positive impact of policy on them. This position simply confirms the well-documented debilitating impact of the breakdown in trust amongst practitioners in various fields. For example, Covey (2006) argues that while low trust stymies innovation and productivity, trust produces speed, feeds collaboration, loyalty and ultimately results. In the context of this study, the reported impact of trust/lack of trust/ low trust appears to have selected from the range of impact offered by Covey above. Overall, therefore, it would seem that the trust relationship between practitioners and SfL policy, though varied, conforms to a particular pattern which is mostly determined by expectations.

In the context of the Speech Act theory framework, the impact of trust relationship on practitioners brings us to the realm of perlocutionary act. In the first instance, we have a clear indication that language act which in this case is represented by policy text can actually induce a range of responses and impacts on the listener/interpreter, as is illustrated above. However, this leaves a major question. Were the perlocutionary imports intended by the text/policy makers? Did they, for instance, aim to promote bitterness and cynicism in practitioners? The obvious answer to this is likely to be no. Nonetheless, there is a lesson for policy makers in terms of the impact that the way they construct and implement policy can have on practitioners and effectively on the realisation of the goals of policy. It is important that policy makers are aware that practitioners perceive policy beyond its immediate locutionary import to its illocutionary and perlocutionary import and that these levels of perception are informed by experience and history of previous policy implementation. The less transparent preceding policies have been, the more negative illocutionary and perlocutionary imports practitioners are likely to draw from such experiences. Transparency, therefore, should be the watchword, as the less transparent practitioners perceive policies; the less trust they will have in subsequent policies to deliver their inherent promises. As Hannon (2006:1) notes, 'The beauty of trust is that it erases worry and frees you to get on with other matters'.

## **Conclusions**

This paper set out to carry out two things. First, it sought to argue a case for the existence of a trust relationship between practitioners in SfL and policy. This perception is anchored to the view that such a relationship can exist in the realms of illocutionary and perlocutionary essence of language (Kissine, 2008) and in the context of discourse analysis where such a construct of trust assumes a critical essence. Based on this, the study offers a new construct of trust analysis that draws from the components cited above. The viability of such a construct appeared to have been justified for two reasons. Firstly, there is an element of psychological connection which is reflected in the ability of all the participants who responded to

the questionnaire to engage with the question on the extent to which they trust policy to deliver its inherent promises. This suggests that this type of relationship has a real presence in workplace reality even if only in the subconscious domain. Secondly, all participants provided some information on the impact that the trust relationship that exists between them and policy has on them. This again adds an element of reality to the notion of trust presented in the proposed construct. In essence, this study has provided a verifiable justification for the claims that there is a trust relationship that exists between SfL practitioners and policy/policy makers.

The second goal of the paper was to establish and map out the trust relationship between SfL practitioners and policy makers. In this context, the study established that the majority of participants only trust policies to deliver on the promises inherent in them. Central to the notion of lack of trust is the issue of expectations. This raises the crucial issue of the gap between policy rhetoric and the reality of implementation. In my view, there are a number of potential reasons for this gap between expectations and reality. First is the frequently moving goal post of policy position. In a comprehensive research on FE teaching and learning culture, TLRP (2008) highlighted the impact of continuously changing goal posts in policy implementation and emphasise 'the turbulence created by policy change' (p.24). This 'turbulence' affects both the practicalities of practice and the psychological essence of the relationship between practitioners and policy in an insidious way, sometimes resulting breakdown in trust. There are two direct implications for this unending flux. First, it creates the potential for breaking down one of the two pillars of trust identified by Arrow (cited in Delude 2004): conscience. According to Arrow, two pillars: competence and conscience are indispensable in building trust. He argues further that, while competence is a product of 'faith in another person's expertise, conscience is faith in that person's integrity, values and honesty' (Delude, 2004, p 3). The evidence provided by this study suggests that perhaps because of the constantly changing goal post of policy, practitioners might have lost faith in the 'conscience' of policy and policy makers.

The second point, which follows from the first, leads us to the speech act theory framework. The lack of faith in the conscience of policy and policy makers leaves room for practitioners to explore policy text beyond its mere locutionary import. The result is that many of them delve into the realms of the illocutionary and perlocutionary imports of policy text and come up with justifications for not trusting policy to deliver on its inherent promises. As suggested by the data in this study, this predominantly has a negative impact on practitioners and practice.

Another possible explanation is the divergence in perceptions between practitioners and policy makers. This is not surprising as there are often very limited opportunities for the two stakeholders to collaborate. In the case of the SfL policy, there was very limited input from practitioners into the creation of the policy position (Ade-Ojo 2008, 2009) potentially resulting in the gap between practitioner expectations and the

reality of policy implementation. Related to this is the divergence in value positions between policy makers and practitioners. In the SfL area, studies have demonstrated that the underpinning values of the Moser committee recommendations were more driven by economicist values than any intrinsic educational values (Ade-Ojo 2009, Hamilton and Hillier 2006, Fowler 2006). It is therefore not surprising that there is a lack of convergence between practitioners' expectations and the reality of policy implementation. This again creates the potential for breakdown in trust and facilitates a multi-layered exploration of the intention of policy text as illustrated above.

Finally, the role of policy mediators in the form of management cannot be discounted. McNay (2008) identifies the gap between practitioners' perception of 'credible policy' and how it can and should be implemented by management. It is probable that this gap in perception is also showing through in the context of SfL policy, leading to a further gap between expectations and reality and ultimately, leading to a breakdown in trust between practitioners and policy.

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