

Chapter 66

Developing and Maintaining Trust in Hastily Formed Relief Networks

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ABSTRACT

Although there is a vast body of academic and practitioner literature championing the importance of trust in long-term business relationships, relatively little has been written discussing the development and maintenance of trust in networks that are formed at short notice and that often operate for a limited period of time. However, some models of trust and trusting behavior in such “hastily formed relief networks” (HFRN) do exist, and the aim of this chapter is to consider the theoretical application of one of the most prominent examples – that known as “swift trust” – to a post-disaster humanitarian logistics scenario. Presented from the perspective of a HFRN, this chapter presents a discussion of the practical application of the swift trust model.

INTRODUCTION

Pick up almost any supply chain management textbook, and it is a near certainty that one or more sections will be devoted to the challenges of achieving trust between the parties that form the supply chain or network. For example, Christopher’s (2011) definition of supply chain management (SCM) focuses firmly on this area suggesting that

SCM is “the management of upstream and downstream relationships with suppliers and customers to deliver superior customer value at less cost to the supply chain as a whole” (p. 3). Indeed, the area of trust can be seen as a core concept in supply chain management (Barratt, 2004; Mentzer *et al.*, 2001), and particularly in the literature relating to supply chain collaboration (e.g. Skjøtt-Larsen *et al.*, 2003). Whilst, in the opposite sense, Fawcett *et al.* (2008) list a lack of trust as one of the most

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significant barriers to effective management of supply chains and networks.

Given the importance of trust in many walks of life, the last three decades have seen significant research into inter-organizational, intra-organizational and inter-personal trust from a range of perspectives that includes economic, psychological and sociological (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). Yet, in general, such research has focused on the development and maintenance of trust in long-term relationships with much of the relationship management literature focusing on trust in this context where it often seen as interrelated with risk (Das & Teng, 2001), being the obverse of control (e.g. Grey & Garsten, 2001; Knights *et al.*, 2001). Studies on trust in different types of temporary networks, on the other hand, are relatively scarce – even though there is a recognition that different types of such networks exist including planned ones in project industries, virtual teams and even agile virtual networks (Bal & Teo, 2001; Sarkis *et al.*, 2007), “minimal organizations” (e.g. fire fighting teams, Weick, 1993), “emergent multi-organizational networks” (NRCNA, 2006), “emergent response groups” (Majchrzak *et al.*, 2007), and hastily formed networks (HFN Research Group, 2006).

Studies that consider trust in any type of temporary network stress the importance of trust to develop at the very beginning of a project (Bal & Teo, 2001). This is the more important in the case of disaster relief in the absence of prior rules, a common training or a common history. At the same time the link between trust and higher (team) performance can be established in similar veins to supply chain collaboration literature. In specific, Uhr and Ekman (2008) argue that the challenge of developing and maintaining trust in disaster relief networks is significant and can have a major bearing on the success of such relief – or, to put it more starkly, a failure in this regard has the potential to lead to unnecessary loss of life and/or distress to those affected by the disaster. The initial development of trust is at the heart of

Meyerson *et al.* (1996) article that outlines the psychological processes at work in the formation of inter-personal trust and coined the phrase “swift trust” to describe them. However, to date, there has been only limited consideration of how the swift trust model might be applied in a hastily formed network in a post-disaster context, that is, in a hastily formed relief network (HFRN).

With the above introduction in mind, the aim of this chapter is to further the understanding of how, from a theoretical perspective, the concept of swift trust might be used to develop and maintain inter-personal trust in hastily formed networks. To achieve this, the chapter will begin by discussing hastily formed networks in the context of disaster relief in greater detail before a model of swift trust, developed from the work of Meyerson *et al.* (1996), will be used to consider the implications from the perspective of the leader of a HFRN. In the final section, a suggested route for further research to assist the application of the concept is developed.

BACKGROUND

Supply chain management literature describes trust as a basis of collaboration which, in turn, is propagated and leads to high firm and supply chain performance, and as such is an alternative path to the focus on control mechanisms for key assets and resources in traditional management literature. In embracing trust and collaboration in this way, supply chain management offers the possibility for flexible ways of organizing at the same time as observing the traditional aims of effectiveness and efficiency.

Disaster relief is an activity that epitomizes high flexibility requirements. Not surprisingly, relief supply chains have been described as “most agile” (Oloruntoba & Gray, 2006) or “fully flexible” (Gattorna, 2006). In addition to the sheer number of companies involved, relief supply chains also interact with each other in back-office planning

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