Vertical trust/mistrust during information strategy formation

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Abstract

Based on findings of a longitudinal study this paper deals trust or mistrust between superiors and subordinates during the information strategy formation process. Working from within an interpretive framework, through which organisation ‘stories’ are explored, it provides a grounded model of factors which engender trust. The key factors that emerge are that senior managers and/or systems and structures should be seen as competent, coherent, open, benevolent, reliable and as having integrity, if trust is to be established in the organisation. The relationship of this model to existing models and research is explored and existing models are extended and developed.

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1. Introduction

The formation of strategy for the use and management of information resources and services has been a topic of interest for a wide range of public and private sector organisations. There is, however, little empirical research on the process of information strategy formation. This paper provides empirical data on the development of information strategy from within the context of one particular setting: UK Universities. Working from an interpretative perspective this paper focuses on a key issue which was observed to play a pivotal role in the formation process: trust and mistrust between superiors and subordinates during the process. We have described this as vertical trust (after Fox, 1974). Whilst the wider concept of leadership forms the backdrop to this research, the primary focus is on trust. Trust and leadership are the topics of a plethora of articles but there has been very little systematic investigation about their relationship (Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000). Much of the existing research is primarily from a positivistic (Pillai,
Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999) or wholly theoretical (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998) perspective. This research attempts to address this gap by providing data from an empirical study.

The research was limited to a sector of the UK economy which during the mid- and late-1990s was under intense pressure to change: the higher education system. In recent years higher education in the UK moved from an elite system to one of mass education, while the student population profile has diversified to include an ever increasing percentage of part-time and mature students. Government intervention and increased demand for education has introduced significant pressure for change on the higher education sector (Ford et al., 1996), while Government funding has been continuously reduced over the past years (NCIHE, 1997). This has led to changes in the governance (Dearlove, 1998) and in the management of higher education institutions (HEIs). Furthermore, advancements in communication technology and the provision of on-line education, has brought HEIs into competition with international distance learning providers, which is being promulgated as a rationale for further radical change (Dunderstadt, 1998; Farrington, 1998). In most UK universities information strategies took a particularly broad remit and encompassed the use of information and information technologies for teaching and learning, administration and research (Allen & Wilson, 1996).

Whilst most researchers have pointed to the importance of trust, a concise and universally accepted definition has remained elusive (Bigley & Pearce, 1998; Kramer, 1999; Jones, 2002). This elusiveness (Hosmer, 1995; Blomqvist, 1997) has been linked to confusion in the literature and lack of progress in gaining an understanding of the concept (McCauley & Kuhnert, 1992; Jones, 2002). While a body of literature on trust is starting to develop in the research arena of information systems much of it relates to trust between virtual teams on on-line trust related to trading (Heijden, Verhagen, & Creemers, 2003; Nandhakumar & Baskerville, 2001). For this research project it seemed more appropriate to seek intellectual ‘scaffolding’ for the research from within organisational theory. The core concept within the literature on trust is the willingness to make oneself vulnerable to another party (Fairholm, 1994; Bigley & Pearce, 1998). Similarly, Govier defines mistrust as an unwillingness to make oneself vulnerable:

A lack of confidence in the other, a concern that the other may act so as to harm one, that he does not care about one’s welfare or intends to act harmfully, or is hostile. When one mistrusts, one is fearful and suspicious as to what the other might do. (Govier, 1993, p. 160)

2. Methodology and theoretical position

The research approach took an interpretative epistemological position; an approach that has been used within higher education (Tierney, 1988; Tierney, 1987; Tierney, 1989), strategic change (Isabela, 1990) and information systems (Walsham, 1993) research. It adopts a theoretical approach to ontology and human nature described by Garnsey (1992) (as cited by Walsham, 1993) as ‘constitutive process’ theories. Walsham (1993, p. 224) outlines these as being “concerned with the processes whereby social actors are engaged in producing and reproducing the social systems of which they form part”. The research was longitudinal, focusing on cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989) of 12 sites between 1994 and 1998. Collecting data was complicated by the
reluctance of some of the stakeholders to discuss the process openly because of its highly political nature. This was overcome by assuring anonymity to all participants, and by emphasising that the researcher was independent and uninvolved in the strategy process. As a result, all names of HEIs have been changed and all names of individuals have been omitted. The need to protect the participants has meant that we have been more vague about details of events than would have been preferred.

Within this longitudinal and interpretative research design, the focus is on actors who create and are constrained by organisational meaning. Meaning is transmitted, reproduced and created through symbols and language. These constructs are the most easily accessed through organisational sagas, legends, myths and stories, which illuminate the organisational climate and power relations and allow the researcher to glimpse the belief systems of the organisation. The interviews focused upon illuminating and exploring these deep structures. The concept of organisational saga was coined by Clark (1971) as, “a narrative of heroic exploits, of a unique development that has deeply stirred the emotions of participants” (Clark, 1972, p. 178). The view of sagas taken in this research is that they can be held at organisational or subculture level. Myths express a shared collective belief that explains how the ‘world’ or the organisation functions but which does not relate to the ‘real’ organisational history or tradition. They are often enshrined in organisational stories. (Alvesson & Berg, 1992) point to three fundamental ideas of the myth: the myth as a fundamental but erroneous assumption about reality; the myth as an unquestioned belief that is untested and not supported by demonstrated facts; and the myth as an expression of natural, deep, archaic, ideological, social or cognitive patterns which influence or are influenced “by the organisation’s structure or strategy or which legitimise contradictions in organisational practice” (Alvesson & Berg, 1992). The third of these ideas is used in this research.

The focus of this research is on organisational stories. Stevenson and Bartunek (1996) note that early work on the study of culture through stories was achieved by studying official published corporate stories (e.g., Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983). They point out that recent research, however, has recognised the importance of stories told by members of the organisation as mechanisms by which it is possible to identify elements of culture as experienced by organisational members and subgroups or by the total organisation. (Stevenson & Bartunek, 1996). Boje (1991, p. 106) states, “…storytelling is the preferred sense-making currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders”. Boje sees storytelling as a way in which organisational members supplement their individual memories with ‘organisational’ memories. The idea that stories reflect common organisational concerns is central to this research.

In-depth interviews were conducted with approximately 20 informants in each organisation. Interviewees were visited on an iterative basis between 1994 and 1998 to capture the temporal dimension of the process. Informants were selected because they were perceived as taking lead positions in their organisation, lead positions in the change process, or as being perceived as significantly affected by the change. A number of research projects in this field have been criticised as taking a ‘managerial perspective’; therefore, an explicit attempt was made to address this issue by interviewing ‘dissenting voices’, that is, those cut from the process, and those uninvolved in the process but affected by it. For the sake of brevity, each site studied will not be described in detail. Instead, the advice of Pettigrew, Ferlie, and McKee (1992, p. 30) has been followed in that this paper will be based on data selected from sites where extreme situations, critical incidents and social dramas took place. Therefore, in this paper data were utilised from two HEIs in
particular: Gamma, and Alpha. Gamma is a relatively small institution moving from a collegial to a more managerial form of management. Alpha is a large, highly managerial, ‘new university’. Given the context of the research two occasions for vertical trust are reported in this paper: subordinates’ trust in the Vice-Chancellor and trust between middle managers and the Senior Management Team (SMT).

3. Subordinates’ trust in the Vice-Chancellor

The importance of trust in leaders has been noted by a number of researchers (e.g., Atwater, 1988; Fairholm, 1994; Brower et al., 2000). Mishra (1996) points out that leaders who are trusted are more effective at acquiring skills, retaining and attracting followers and promoting change and innovation, while Dearlove (1995, p. 168) talks of effective HEI leaders understanding the “need to organize on the basis of trust”. This is particularly pertinent in the HE context as, worldwide, the responsibilities and roles of Vice-Chancellors are radically changing, and the challenges they face are also manifold.

Alpha provides a clear example of an HEI where subordinates had extremely low levels of trust in the Vice-Chancellor. This was linked by respondents to the perceived legacy of past change initiatives, which was shared across the institution through the use of stories and legends passed on by third parties. The role of third parties in organisations as conduits of trust because of their ability to diffuse trust-relevant information through gossip has been established by researchers such as Burt and Knez (1996) and Uzzi (1997). These authors also note the role of established members of organisations in passing on information to others for whom adequate knowledge or history was not available (cf., Louis, 1980). Given the relatively high turnover of administrative staff within Alpha the passing of these stories to new members of staff can be seen to be particularly important in creating mistrust. One of the more powerful legends was about the result of failure, and the trust which could be placed in the Vice-Chancellor. The legend was recounted by a number of informants and was known by most of the managers interviewed. The manager directly involved in this legend was located and interviewed. He recounted the details as follows.

In 1988 Alpha was a Polytechnic and had just become independent from the local authority. This meant that management services were no longer received from the local authority. Alpha was forced to develop new management systems for financial, personnel and student record information. The Vice-Chancellor asked one of his closest colleagues (referred to here as Manager X) to be responsible for developing these systems. Manager X wanted to prioritise the development of these systems to new members of staff can be seen to be particularly important in creating mistrust. One of the more powerful legends was about the result of failure, and the trust which could be placed in the Vice-Chancellor. The legend was recounted by a number of informants and was known by most of the managers interviewed. The manager directly involved in this legend was located and interviewed. He recounted the details as follows.

My Vice-Chancellor wanted the good news yesterday…what he did not want is the bad news…tomorrow… But I was given a year. All singing, all dancing, one year-bang.

At the same time, a new academic program was developed which had more complex information needs and took up a great deal of computing power. Alpha was one of the first HEIs
in the UK to attempt to develop this type of system, which, as Manager X noted:

...was seen to be very, very innovative and very new and unprecedented in this country; to be able to produce individual module class lists within two days of students enrolling...ten years ago this was magic.

Adequate resources were not made available to develop the system. The only way the system could be developed, within the budget, was to hire a programmer and for Manager X and his deputies to work with him in developing the system. The programmer:

wrote the program literally, at night; two hours a night for about six weeks or something and we got pieces of software which instead of a consultant charging us £100,000 (for which I was quoted), we managed to pay £1500 for a piece of software which ran this side of the process.

The system worked, but was seen as a short-term solution to an urgent organisational problem. The system had to deal with an exponential growth in student numbers:

We were producing data for staff and students from this piece of software, which was handling the individual record system of 5000 students, which involved some 25,000 module transactions in the first year of its operation. By a year later, we were producing individual records for some 10,000 students involving some 125,000 individual module transactions.

The system had an error rate of about 4–5%, which was perceived by the systems development team as technically relatively successful. As Manager X noted, for “…a new piece of amateurish software, pretty good going, to get it up and running, off the ground and running and producing a 5% error rate is brilliant, brilliant, I think”. Yet, Manager X noted that organisationally this 5% error rate caused an impression with users that the system was not working at all:

5% of 10,000 students...you have now got 500 students in the university all who are going to their tutors saying ‘but my transcript’s got an error on it, my credit’s down...and when you have got academic staff who did not want modularisation in the first place they were able to use 5% error, real people banging on their doors saying my transcript’s wrong, to prove that the system did not work, would never work.

The system was associated with an unpopular change in the academic system (modularisation) and was seen not to be working effectively. Therefore, it was resisted or not used. Staff resisted its implementation passively by stopping using it, or actively, by inputting inaccurate information. The result was that the quality of information produced by the system was degraded:

Effectively what we were getting was errors beginning to increase, at the point of input...it was not a matter of training so much or even software.

At the same time as Manager X was attempting to deal with these problems, and maintain the infrastructure essential for the smooth running of the administration of the HEI, the Vice-Chancellor decided to re-organise the management structure of the HEI again:

The Vice-Chancellor decided, without any reference to the information systems that were developing, to re-organize the university again and he moved from...faculties to...schools in one year and from schools to departments two years later.
The result of these changes was that the system failed to cope:

If you start re-organizing your organization every two years, the impact upon the information systems that you have designed and developed to handle the various features of the organization are going to start cracking all over the place, and of course it did.

Manager X was moved out of his position and left the HEI. While there are many meanings in this legend related to technological change, the primary reason for the transmission of the legend was to illustrate the ‘fact’ that the Vice-Chancellor could not be trusted.

This reinforces Berg’s statement that:

Fixated events become reference points in the symbolic universe within the organization—reference points used to guide the interpretation of present time and thus used to monitor actions. (Berg, 1985, p. 287)

Although the content of the legend differed slightly in the telling by different stakeholders, there were common elements, as shown in Table 1. The first element suggests that the Vice-Chancellor was an incompetent manager. This is shown through his setting of unreasonable goals: the development of a system without adequate resources, rapidly, and in one go. When the system was developed, the Vice-Chancellor did not recognise the fragility of the system and instituted organisational change, without reference to the system, which led to its failure. This view of the Vice-Chancellor as lacking competence was widespread. He was seen as unaccountable; as moving from one managerial fad to another; as reacting to external stimuli rather than planning for change. The result was that the HEI lurched from crisis to crisis in a climate of insecurity and widespread cynicism and mistrust.

The link between openness and trustworthiness has been made by a number of studies (cf., Hart, Capps, Cangemi, & Caillouet, 1986). Mishra (1996) points out that leaders who are seen to be open with information and more honest are more likely to be trusted. The legend, however, presents the Vice-Chancellor as someone who was not open, who neither discussed the re-organisation nor its impact with his second-in-command, nor was he open to advice which clashed with his own political agenda. Therefore, the Vice-Chancellor ignored advice from Manager X.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action by Vice-Chancellor</th>
<th>Perceived as illustrating</th>
<th>Action by manager</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Vice-Chancellor gave a manager a task in a way that made it almost impossible to achieve.</td>
<td>Lack of competence</td>
<td>Advised the Vice-Chancellor of more effective ways of achieving the task and the implications of failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vice-Chancellor ignored the manager’s advice.</td>
<td>Lack of openness</td>
<td>Attempted to complete the task as instructed and was partially successful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Vice-Chancellor then made changes to the organisation which ensured the manager failed in his task.</td>
<td>Lack of competence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The manager was blamed by the Vice-Chancellor for the failure and then removed from the organization.</td>
<td>Lack of reliability, benevolence or integrity</td>
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This is particularly important in the light of the statements, already noted, that the Vice-Chancellor made about his avowed focus on communication and listening to his staff. This view was reinforced by another respondent who emphasised this view of the Vice-Chancellor and widened it to include the SMT:

They do not like bad news, bad news causes problems, you know. Everything is a bit ‘Hooray Henry’ or else is not ‘Hooray Henry’ and I tend not to have the typical academic, skeptical stance to most things. But I am not actually a destroyer either, I actually want the best for student’s and whatever I do…has an effect on them.

The reliability of the senior managers can be seen in terms of the consistency between their words and their actions. As already noted, many of the managers spoke of a gap between the ‘rhetoric and the reality’ of the language used by the Vice-Chancellor and SMT. The legend again touches on this credibility gap: Manager X is seen as taking a risk on the direct instructions of the Vice-Chancellor. The assumption that Manager X made when continuing with the development of the system was that he would be supported if anything went wrong. Yet, in the event of the system failing, not only did the Vice-Chancellor not support Manager X, he removed him from his position. The result of the lack of trust between the SMT and the managers was that many senior managers wanted to disassociate themselves from any change management initiative as they were fearful that blame would be attached to them in the case of failure. Similar problems were experienced in Gamma, where mistrust in the Vice-Chancellor stemmed, primarily, from the service managers’ lack of faith in his credibility. Alpha and Gamma are quite different types of HEI, but are linked by their Vice-Chancellors’ styles of leadership. In both, the Vice-Chancellor adopted a transformational (cf., Bennis, 1992) leadership style often associated with managerialism (Keen & Scase, 1998).

The impact of this form of leadership is that “followers feel trust and respect towards the leader and are motivated to do more than they are expected to do” (Yukl, 1989, p. 272). A transformational approach to leadership also implies a management of meaning and values within the organisation. In Alpha and Gamma the Vice-Chancellors envisaged change for the HEI that was radical, and they attempted to drive the HEI towards this vision. Indeed, their style of leadership can almost be described as ‘messianic’. They provided a clear vision of a ‘better world’, towards which they would lead the organisation. This vision was identified with, derived from, and articulated by a single person: the Vice-Chancellor. Both Vice-Chancellors also gathered a small group of individuals around themselves with whom they looked to implement change. They used symbolic language and actions in attempts to implement cultural change. In both HEIs, this messianic approach to leadership also emphasised the personality of the Vice-Chancellor: both portrayed themselves as approachable, benevolent, and open.

This research suggests that this style of leadership was counter-productive; it actually reduced levels of trust. Because, in both institutions, the Vice-Chancellor was personally identified with the ‘vision’ and the resulting changes, he was held responsible for their failure or lack of success. In each case, the Vice-Chancellor found himself in a situation where any initial trust in him, or his vision for the future of the HEI, was leached away as change initiatives failed. In both HEIs the Vice-Chancellors’ attempts to deflect responsibility away from themselves and towards their subordinates created further mistrust. In Alpha, cynicism and mistrust were increased by the Vice-Chancellor’s actions to preserve his own position and to pursue his vision for the HEI. These
malevolent actions included aggressive attempts to manage peoples’ perceptions of his management, isolate and silence any opposition within the HEI, centralise power in his own hands and promote his own appointees. His use of power moved from one based on persuasion, to coercion, an approach which has been proved to reduce organisational trust (Allen, Colligan, & Finnie, 1999). Whilst these actions were successful in preserving his position they also created a poisoned organisational climate, one element of which was extremely high levels of mistrust.

In Beta, Delta, Epsilon, and Theta, where a more participative and consensus-based approach to management was followed, higher degrees of trust were expressed in the leadership of the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor in Epsilon, for example, tended to work primarily through his Pro-Vice-Chancellors who were given a great deal of authority. In these HEIs interviewees did not discuss the Vice-Chancellor directly because past change management initiatives were not attributed to him. If they were attributed to any individual, it tended to be the person who had been perceived as leading the change. Another factor that flowed from this style of leadership was that participants strongly identified with the HEI and with past decisions. Interviewees demonstrated this by talking in ways that implied a belief in collective responsibility derived from membership of, and involvement in, a community. In these HEIs, when the Vice-Chancellor was referred to he was talked of in terms which seemed quite unrelated to the decision processes. In Epsilon, for example, interviewees spoke about the Vice-Chancellor in terms of ‘his academic brilliance’ or ‘his strong advocacy of the HEI’, rather than his involvement in change initiatives.

4. Trust between the middle managers and the senior management team

Trust between employees and top (or senior) management has been identified as important (McCauley & Kuhnert, 1992). In Alpha, as noted earlier, the lack of trust in the Vice-Chancellor extended to the SMT. The following two quotations are typical of the statements made about the SMT by managers:

I actually believe that most of them get their management theory out of the pages of Inter-City magazine.

Maybe one or two of them go off on a week residential course to be given, you know, 10 points from Charles Handy or something and then come back with it.

Lack of trust in the SMT was linked to actions in past initiatives being perceived as incompetent. It was also linked to the fact that they were not seen as open or reliable. Rather, they were seen as following their own agendas, not listening to debate, and there being a significant gap between the rhetoric of their statements and the reality of their actions. One respondent noted:

The academics I know…would expect argument and debate and all this kind of thing,…in the end given all the things there are about political constituencies within an organization such as yours and mine… they would still probably tend to argue the best idea should prevail. I am not sure that necessarily is the case at the top of the institution. It has its own agenda which is opaque and…it’s like I suppose ad hoc selection of statistics to suit a case or something like that, rather than actually something that provides a steer which people can argue with or accept.
In Gamma, although the executive was small, it retained the trust of much of the academic community. The primary reasons for this were that its power was bounded because much of the power of decision-making was retained at departmental level and the executive comprised of academics. This HEI can be seen as a ‘federation’ of semi-autonomous departments. As one respondent explained:

The approach in the past has been strong departments, full responsibility to departments and minimize things outside departments and that really explains why there is such small executive group.

A major factor in this HEI was, however, the lack of trust between the professional service managers and the SMT. One head of an information service noted:

So they are people who come from a distinguished academic background have a very narrow focus generally, because that has been their whole training, focusing more and more on smaller and smaller areas. So, many of them lack the strategic view of the role of information and even the role of technology in universities.

Many of the service directors felt excluded from decision-making within the HEI:

Many of them see the services as doing what they are told. …there still is a view that strategic decisions should made by the academics as to what sort of university we should be, how the services should be provided and then the academic services will deliver.

This created a degree of resentment by the service managers; one of them noted that the academic management team were ‘gifted amateurs’ another stated that:

And being at heart a traditional University it tends to be driven more by the academics than by the service providers, so they have to grapple with the problems and understanding takes them rather longer than it does the service providers, to understand problems.

This lack of trust in the SMT by the professional managers was illustrated through a number of critical incidents. One of these was observed by the researcher: the process by which one service manager attempted to get authorisation for a substantial (multi-million pound) purchase. An important characteristic of this incident was the failure of the SMT to communicate with the Service Directors. The manager in question, for example, explained in one of the first interviews that he was not told the amount of his budget until almost at the end of the financial year.

The unwillingness of the senior management team to inform their service managers of the budgets appeared to be a consistent feature in Gamma. The same service director, some 2 years on from the first interview, stated that he had only been able to get an informal, oral confirmation of his budget:

To be quite frank, I haven’t had formal confirmation of the funding, I have verbal confirmation from as many people as I possibly can, and I still feel slightly vulnerable in the sense that I do not have a written statement from anywhere saying you have got this budget. I have memos which I have sent up to the finance office saying, I gave them a cash flow chart saying this is my financial expected projected for the next three years split into quarters based on a plan I wrote just after I saw you last autumn and as far as I am concerned that is what I am working to.
He also explained that his senior managers had made mistakes in the past with the allocation of funds for his service:

One of the things that almost caused a sort of hiccup was that, in explaining various things, there happened to be one sum of money, like 120 K, which matched another sum of money for a completely different project and they only counted it once. You can see how that can happen:...it goes back to about a year ago; they were asking for two parallel channels for budget submissions, one was for development and one was for the normal budget submission for carrying on. And what they seem to have done, one of the figures in my budget for carrying on in terms of current maintenance and costs [were] say 120 K, and one of the figures in my cover for development...was 120 K and they counted the figure only once.

This manager went on to explain that this mistake was made because of the lack of communication between the different committees within the HEI:

I'd explained that, and I'd put it in two different documents, but the trouble was one document was going to one group and the other document was going to the other group. The fact that several people sat on both groups did not seem to register...they were wearing the hat that said...this is the development group here. The fact that the very next day they were meeting talking about the on-going budgets did not seem to have registered... And that was potentially a difficulty...

Based on this perception of past events, he did not trust the competence of the SMT. When requested to make a major purchase which would have a strategic impact on his department and the university as a whole he stated:

But I yet have to have a piece of paper from the Finance Office which tells me I have the money. Now, this morning we were going through an evaluation exercise with various tenders and we could be in a position within three or four weeks of placing an order for equipment, but I have gone through a period of six months when it’s looking good. Its no good my having a verbal commitment.

The Service Directors also perceived the managers in the following terms:

...but in a University you have got this whole mixture of academic status with service relationships all mixed up together, and the fact that academics are made into managers when they have no management or strategic experience: they have got there being distinguished academics.

They were also seen as not being in position long enough to be able to gain the necessary expertise, as one service director stated:

At heart they like to feel that they are controlled by the academics; they like this constant turnover of management at the level in the hierarchy below Vice-Chancellor. They tend to be turning over every three or six years or whatever the cycle is.

The Service Directors also saw the academics as 'serving two masters’ that of their academic responsibilities and their own careers and that of management within the HEI. As one of the
service directors noted of the Chair of the ISG:

Quite honestly it is not working, (the Chairman) is doing his best… and I think he means well and I certainly respect his views on a lot of things. But, again, he does not have the time, he is over-worked as it stands. And, without insulting him, he does not have the time or the real depth of knowledge about the area to really get into it.

The service directors felt that the strategic decision-makers lacked the necessary expertise, they lacked credibility. As one Service Director commented:

The problem is, as I see it, this is where the expertise lives down here in many areas and it is so far from the gifted amateurs.

The general perception of the senior management was, despite the grandiose visions outlined by the Vice-Chancellor, that:

I think the management is confused, or is confusing, it has been really crisis management over the last few years.
At the heart of the problem in Gamma was the fact that the service directors perceived the managerial system, which excluded them from decision-making process, as both being ineffective and inequitable.

5. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the characteristics or qualities that engender, create or support trust during a strategic change process. The five key concepts that were generated were a belief that your manager is: competent and coherent, open, benevolent, reliable and has integrity. These five concepts were developed from the data using a grounded approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992). Each of these terms contains a cluster of sub, or related concepts. This is described in table one below. Once the theory had been generated it was then compared with the extant literature (Table 2).

This model provides an extension to existing relational models (Brower et al., 2000). In this paper the significance of organisational trust on a vertical level has been demonstrated and a model of factors that encourage organisational mistrust or trust has been developed. At the start of the research the concept of organisational trust was one which was perceived by the researcher as lacking in clarity. The analysis provided here offers a clearer conceptualisation of the term. The diffusion of trust-relevant information through informal communication mechanisms has been described and the significance of the use of stories has been explored. Significantly, the research points to dominant stories emerging from within the academic community, being shared, and then affecting interpretation and action. The research clearly demonstrates the importance trust–mistrust relationships in influencing both the process of information strategy formation and the possible content of the strategy.

References


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