Organizational Trust Online: A Discursive Perspective

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Trust is necessary for meaningful human existence and for various types of organizing, including business organizations, associations, charities, and, on a larger scale, the society itself. In this article, the focus is on organizational trust online – a specific form of trust that develops between individuals and organizations through interactions and various transactions conducted on the Internet. The author, following in the tradition that calls for building trust discursively, develops a theoretical basis for constructing organizational trust online and provides practical suggestions how to build organizational trust online and, consequently, promote establishing and building relationships with customers and prospective customers.

INTRODUCTION

Robert Putnam was among the first to draw attention to the decline in interpersonal relationships and trust and to call for Americans "to reconnect with one another" (2000, p. 28). Over the past several years, we Americans have been reconnecting with one another, although in a manner that Putnam in most likelihood did not have in mind when he made his statement – by means of mediated communication. Connecting and reconnecting in the virtual world is skyrocketing (Barnes, Lescault, & Wright, 2013; Colucci & Cho, 2014; McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014), and the need to understand the new connections and reconnections is growing. But before we embark on the path of understanding connections and reconnections online, we need, first, to see the breadth and the reach of the virtual world.

The Rise of the Virtual World

Virtual world is expanding at a high pace. The most recent joined report of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration [NTIA] and the Economics and Statistics Administration [ESA], published in 2013 lists the Census Bureau data about Americans' use of the Internet: of those who have computers, 72% use the Internet every day; of this, 77% for personal communication, 66% to obtain general information, 53% for consumer services, and 53% for financial services. The report also indicates the relevance of mediated communication: "the data on frequency of Internet use and reliance on it for a range of activities appear to support the hypothesis that the Internet has become integral to American life" ("Exploring," 2013, p. 17). Various other research also points to the Internet as a crucible of communication. Jennings, Blount, and Weatherly (2014) show a widespread use of social media both by individuals and organizations. McCorkindale and DiStaso (2014) also note ubiquitous use of social media. Barnes, Lescault, and Wright's (2013) annual survey of Fortune 500 companies' use of social media shows that 70% of Fortune 500 companies have Facebook accounts and 77% have Twitter accounts; 34% are now actively blogging, 77 percent maintain active Twitter accounts,

and 69 percent have YouTube accounts. Altimeter, an analyst company that conducts research on newest trends, provides data for 2014: 88% of organizations are undergoing some form of digital transformation – a type of organizational alignment that focuses on technology and business models with the aim of engaging digital customers in an effective manner (see Solis, 2014). Increased presence and growth of the virtual world requires attention and, as we will learn later, the cultivation of meaningful relationships that include trust. Let us now see the role that trust plays in human relationships and in human life.

The Relational Quality of Trust

A relevant component of all human connections and relationships is trust. Trust is a part of the subtle ties that link us to other human beings and make us more human. Without trust human existence would be relegated to a survival mode. It is not surprising, therefore, that many authors write about the importance of trust and social connections for a fulfilling and meaningful life (see, e.g., Boyd, 2003; Fombrum, 1995; Fukuyama, 1995, 1999; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Kasinitz & Rosenberg, 1996; Putnam, 2000; Seligman, 1997).

Trust is also a necessary component of business, various business-related transactions, and meaningful relationships in the business context (see, e.g., Barker & Camarata, 1998; Caldwell & Clapham, 2003; Child, 2001; Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001; Hosmer, 1995; McMillan et al., 2015; Reichheld & Schefter, 2000; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002; Torres & Bligh, 2012; Tyler, 2003). Botsman (2012) makes the case for trust as a currency of central importance for the *sharing economy* – a recent development within the new economy centered around cooperation and trusting relationships.

Trust is hard to build and maintain. With the exception of some very rare cases of high levels of initial trust (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998), much time and interaction between the trustor and the trustee is needed for trust to develop (see Kodish, 2014; Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies; 1998; Morrow, Hansen, & Pearson, 2004). Furthermore, trust is fragile – it can be easily lost and, possibly, never rebuilt (Fukuyama, 1995, 1999; Lewis, 1999). The fragility of trust becomes especially evident in online interactions. While in real life the trustor and the trustee have an opportunity to build a trusting relationship using several channels, including face-to-face communication – the channel with the richest bandwidth (see, e.g., Hynes, 2015) – online interactions rely on channels that are less likely to provide or do not provide nonverbal and other cues that are typically present during face-to-face interactions. Lack of nonverbal and other cues makes building and maintaining trust online a more challenging endeavor. It also calls for developing a theoretical foundation that can serve as a basis for creating practical suggestions for building and maintaining trust online. In this article, we contend that communication theory and, specifically, narrative theory and rhetorical theory, can serve as the necessary theoretical foundation for developing and maintaining organizational trust online.

Definitions and Meanings

Trust Online. Trust online is used in this article in its original meaning proposed by Boyd (2003) – as trust that exists in interactions and transactions conducted between organizations and individuals on the Internet. Since trust online can also include myriads of online interactions among individuals that do not include organizations, for the sake of clarity, the word "organizational" was added. Therefore, organizational trust online is trust that develops between organizations and individuals as a result of online communication and various interactions and transactions that take place on the Internet.

Trust and distrust. We use Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies's (1998) definition of trust as "confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct," and distrust as "confident negative expectations regarding another's conduct" (p. 439). We also use their view of the relationship between trust and distrust. While most authors deem trust and distrust opposites, Lewicki et al. (1998) believe that trust and distrust can exist simultaneously as the relationship develops over time. This suggests that building organizational trust online includes a dynamic component, which further supports the need for a theoretical foundation and a strategic and purposeful approach in order to avoid the negative impact of distrust.

Trustor and *trustee.* Trust presupposes a relationship and the existence of a trustor and a trustee (Hardin, 2001; Hosmer, 1995; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Morrow, Hansen, & Pearson, 2004). For the purpose of this article, the trustor is an individual person accessing the Internet with the aim of communicating with an organization in order to obtain information, provide information, and/or transact business. The trustee is an organization that is actively engaged in digital transactions or a range of services and communication-based activities conducted via the Internet.

Trust and trustworthiness. The concepts of trust and trustworthiness are sometimes used interchangeably. Literature on trust, however, indicates a distinction between the two. Morrow, Hansen, & Pearson (2004), for example, write that trust is a belief, expectation, or confidence that the other party will not take advantage of one's vulnerabilities, whereas trustworthiness is the basis or reason behind that belief, expectation, or confidence. According to Hardin (2001), "trustworthiness commonly begets trust" (p. 17). Other authors (see, e.g., Kodish, 2007; Mishra, 1996; Six, 2003) also describe trustworthiness as a prerequisite or a foundation for developing trust. In this article, we follow the generally accepted view in literature on trust that trust and trustworthiness are related, yet distinct categories. We posit trustworthiness as a basis for the trustor's belief that the trustee is trustworthy because the trustee is exhibiting and/or communicating behaviors that instill trust.

Discursive, Rhetorical, and Narrative. In this text, we use the word *discursive* in accordance with extant meaning of discursive as applied in the concept of discursive organizations that refers both to communication events and the constitutive role of communication events in organizations (see, e.g., Cooren, 2004; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Heracleous & Hendry, 2000; Heracleous & Marshak 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst, 200; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). Discursive, therefore, subsumes *rhetorical* and *narrative*, and pertains to both the actual communicative events and to their constitutive role in organizations. In the following section, we address the discursive nature of trust.

Trust as a Discursive Construction

Trust has been conceptualized and defined in a variety of ways. Giddens (1991) views basic trust as a "protective cocoon" (p. 40). For Simmel (1950), trust is a fundamental attitude toward the other. Kramer, Brewer, & Hanna (1996) write that trust is a decision compatible with the expectations of ethical action from others. For Hosmer (1995), trust is a moral duty of the entrusted toward the trustor. The first theorist to conceptualize trust as a discursive construct was Boyd.

Boyd (2003) writes that building trust and trustworthiness is fundamentally rhetorical. He further writes that trust theory attests to the existence of a rhetorical situation that requires an appropriate discursive response. In this article, we use Boyd's postulation of trust as a rhetorical and discursive construct as a starting point. We then build upon this foundational idea by proposing a specific discursive approach to constructing organizational trust online based on the premises of narrative theory. The purpose of the endeavor to construct organizational trust online is to help build trust between individuals and organizations when conducting transactions and interacting on the Internet. Online communication, interactions, and transactions have considerably increased over the past years and are growing in relevance, role, and complexity (Barnes, Lescault, & Wright, 2013; Chafey, 2016; McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). Providing assistance to Internet users when navigating through the exorbitant volume and complexity of transactions and interactions in the virtual world is likely to be beneficial. Boyd (2003) writes:

"Determining a schema for the rhetorical construction of trust online will help make the Internet a more accessible place where users can make informed and reasonable decisions, appropriately balancing risk and opportunity to decide whether or not to take a trusting action" (p. 396).

Boyd's conceptualization of trust as a rhetorical and discursive construct and our aim to expand his conceptualization and provide practical suggestions has additional significance. Theoretically, Boyd's conceptualization of trust parallels the discursive school of thought and the discursive view of organizing. At the beginning of the 21st century, when Boyd (2003) postulated trust as a rhetorical construct, research on the organizing properties of discourse was beginning to advance (see, e.g., Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Heracleous & Hendry, 2000; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Over the past decade, the views of

organizing as a discursive endeavor have continued to develop (see, e.g., Cooren, 2004; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Heracleous & Marshak 2004; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). Boyd's conceptualization of trust as a discursive concept reflects the central principles of the discursive school of thought and contributes to the understanding of discourse as an inherent component of human action and human organizing. Research presented in this article, therefore, contributes to the theoretical understanding of the role of discourse in organizing.

Material in the article is organized in the following sequence. In the first section, in order to provide a foundation for understanding the role of trust in human relationships, organizing, and the functioning of community and society, an interdisciplinary review of research on trust is provided. The second section includes an explanation of pertinent concepts from narrative theory that will serve as a basis for developing ideas aimed at helping build organizational trust online. Specific ideas how to apply narrative theory in constructing organizational trust online are then presented. Final section contains concluding remarks.

RESEARCH ON TRUST

Trust has been the focus of study in a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, political science, economics, moral philosophy, leadership, management studies, negotiation, labor-management relations, business, and communication. In order to capture more fully the meaning and implications of trust, the following review draws on literature on trust from a variety of disciplines. We start by reviewing literature that addresses the role of trust in a general sense and then specifically focus on organizational trust and the link between communication and trust.

Trust Writ Large

Sztompka's (1999) intricate conceptualization presents trust as a relational, social, ethical, and existential phenomenon. He shows that trust permeates relationships and is a necessary component in all meaningful relationships. According to Sztompka, trust falls within the discourse of agency because it involves actively anticipating and facing an unknown future and committing oneself to action.

Luhmann (1979) also links trust with agency and an ethical imperative. He writes: "Trust accumulates as a kind of capital which opens up more opportunities for more extensive action but which must be continually used and tended and which commits the user to a trustworthy self-presentation, from which he can only escape with great difficulty" (p. 64). Similar to Sztompka (1999), Luhmann recognizes the importance of trust in society: "trust is not the sole foundation of the world, but a highly complex but nevertheless structured conception of the world could not be established without a fairly complex society, which in turn could not be established without trust" (1979, p. 94). He refers to trust as "the basic fact of social life" (p. 4) and mentions that a complete absence of trust would cause humans to become "prey to a vague sense of dread, to paralyzing fears" (p. 4).

Baier (1986) stresses the moral dimension of trust and the implicit duty the entrusted party has toward the trustor. For her, trust is "reliance on others' competence and willingness to look after, rather than harm, things one cares about which are entrusted to their care" (p. 259). Baier differentiates between moral and immoral trust. She also addresses the qualitative difference between trust and contractuality and stresses that trust is accompanied by risk and vulnerability.

Bok's (1978) conceptualization of trust is centered around veracity as the focal point of human existence and the functioning of society. According to Bok, a society whose members could not discern truthful messages from deceptive ones would collapse, and individual choice and survival would be imperiled because no one could have any expectations from others and every person would have to confirm everything by himself or herself.

Fukuyama (1995, 1999) links trust with social capital – an intangible value that, when in abundance, creates prosperity. For Fukuyama, trust is a commodity with a practical, economic value that is correlated with economic prosperity. For Fukuyama, human propensity to cooperate in groups has "a natural or genetic basis" (p. 168) and is, therefore, innate to human beings.

Inspired by Luhmann's (1978) notion that trust reduces complexity, Lewicki et al. (1998) present a multidimensional theoretical framework for trust that includes tensions between trust and distrust. They contend that trust and distrust are separate dimensions that can exist simultaneously as the relationship develops over time. Some elements "contribute to the growth and decline of trust," and other elements "contribute to the growth and decline of distrust" (p. 439). Lewicki et al. suggest that all these elements grow and develop through experiences in a variety of situations.

Organizational Trust

The cognitive model of trust developed by McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany (1998) focuses on factors and processes that contribute to building high initial levels of trust. The authors start by addressing the paradox that extant research reveals: some research shows that trust develops gradually over time, starting from low levels of initial trust, while other research demonstrates that high levels of trust can be found in situations where coworkers did not know each other. McKnight et al. argue that high levels of initial trust may be explained by specific factors and processes and that they are an exception rather than the rule.

Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman (1995) develop a dyadic model of trust in an organizational context that includes both a trustor and a trustee. They start by defining trust as "the 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" (p. 712). They then focus on the relational aspect of trust.

For Jones and George (1998), trust is an experience that arises through human interaction and is influenced by interacting with others. The authors begin by noting that the experience of trust is determined by the interplay of values, attitudes, moods, and emotions. They explain trust from a psychological perspective that focuses on the individual and show how trust evolves over time, the factors that lead to the dissolution of trust, and the ways in which trust affects interpersonal cooperation and teamwork.

Hosmer (1995) brings to the fore Kant's deontological approach: trust includes implicit moral duty that the trustor has toward the trustee. Trust is also a principle incorporated in "good" society, and, on a more pragmatic level, a likely precondition for performance of organizations. According to Hosmer, scholars on trust have reached a number of similar conclusions: (a) trusting individuals have optimistic expectations; (b) trust generally occurs under conditions of vulnerability; (c) trust is generally associated with willing, not forced cooperation; (d) trust is generally difficult to enforce; and (e) trust assumes an acknowledged or accepted duty to protect the rights and interests of others.

Reynolds's (1997) model how to promote trust is a combination of structural rules and behaviors that help build a context conducive for trust to emerge. He lists four principles of trust: competence, openness, reliability, and equity and links each principle with specific values, behaviors, and policies, such as promoting learning; choosing the right people; providing feedback and keeping employees informed; acting with integrity and making everyone accountable; ensuring decisive leadership and identifying employees' concerns.

Shaw (1997) developed a model of trust based on his long experience of working as a consultant. He focuses primarily on three prerequisites: achieving results, acting with integrity, and demonstrating concern, and suggests that having a rich assortment of stories or artifacts as visible symbols of trust is important.

Lewis (1999) views trust as a fragile intangible asset that can be damaged through inattention or that can be weak to start with because no effort was made to build trust. He lists eight conditions for the development of trust: priority mutual needs, personal relationships, joint leaders, shared objectives, safeguards, commitment, adaptable organizations, and continuity. If these eight conditions are satisfied in practice, trust will ensue.

Korsgaard, Brodt, and Whitener (2002) show the importance of open communication and of expressing concern for establishing trust. They found that openness can modify the negative outcome of a disagreement between an employee and a manager without impacting trust levels.

San Martin, Gutierrez, and Camarero (2004) describe and analyze the reasons why customers commit themselves to "a brand, an establishment, or a service supplier" (p. 55). They show a direct correlation between commitment and trust and propose a causal model of commitment in which trust plays a prominent role.

Torres and Bligh (2012) link trust in leaders with successful organizational performance. They found that the frequency of interaction and distance have a direct impact on perceived levels of trust, and most importantly, that the quality of interaction may be central for developing interpersonal trust in the workplace. One's immediate managers are likely to be more trusted as a result of the frequency of interactions, whereas trust in the organization's leader is less obvious, again, due to the distance and infrequent interactions between employees and top leaders.

Devos, Spini, and Schwartz (2002) focus on trust in institutions. They point out that value priorities are a critical predictor of institutional trust and that the levels of institutional trust are higher among those individuals who are religious or politically conservative. They also determined that levels of institutional trust correlated positively with values of stability, protection, and preservation of traditional practices.

Communication and Trust

Extant research suggests that communication and trust are inherently linked and that various communication variables contribute to trust formation. For Butler and Cantrell (1994), task communication, career communication, and responsiveness promote trust.

Mishra and Morrissey's (1990) study shows that sharing perceptions and feelings are one of the four factors needed for trust to arise. They also determined that open communication and sharing of critical information were related to trust.

Korsgaard, Brodt, and Whitener (2002) show the importance of open communication and of expressing concern. They write that a negative outcome of a disagreement between an employee and a manager does not necessarily result in low trust if managers used open communication and demonstrated concern.

Gilbert and Tang (1998) address the relevance of the informational content of what is being communicated. Information is valuable, and communication that provides increased levels of information is perceived as more relevant, which in turn impacts trust in a positive manner. They describe mentoring, informal network centrality, and work group cohesion as some of the possible means for establishing a continuous information flow.

Barker and Camarata (1998) show how a combination of communication patterns and prudent decisions can affect performance and create a positive working environment. They found that sharing of information and promoting openness and dialogue facilitated positive organizational transformation.

Summary. Review of trust literature reveals the multifaceted nature of trust and the role that trust plays in human relationships and organizing. Trust is a complex concept and a necessary component of all human relationships and organizing efforts. Any form of organizing, starting from small-scale organizing to organizing at the level of society, requires trust. Building and maintaining trust, therefore, is prudent. Over the past several decades, however, a concerning development has been taking place.

Erosion of Trust

According to an increasing number of contemporary authors (Bennett, 1990; Fukuyama, 1995, 1999; Hardin, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Reina & Reina, 1999; Senge et al., 1999), various indications exist that trust *is* breaking down. Sztompka (1999) writes that trust is "a bet about the future contingent actions of others" (p. 25). In order to trust others, one has to believe that others will act in a trustworthy manner and also one has to be actively committed to action in situations characterized by varied levels of uncertainty. The belief that others will act in a trustworthy manner and one's commitment to action, however, seem to have been shaken.

A number of unethical corporate practices has undermined public trust in corporations. The case of Enron seems like a distant past, but the ripple effects of weakened trust in organizations that Enron engendered can still be felt. The Lehman Brothers collapse (see Stevens & Buechler, 2013) also had a

negative impact on trust in organizations. The 2015 Volkswagen case and the scandals that involved several banks in 2016 further contributed to the diminishing of trust in organizations. Erosion of trust has a number of implications for communication, interaction, and agency.

An atmosphere of diminished levels of trust undermines sincerity, genuineness, and the joy of living and it also limits action (see Arnett & Arneson 1999, Luhmann, 1979; Sztompka, 1999). According to Arnett and Arneson (1999), in an environment of unreflective cynicism and mistrust "we fail to meet life on its own terms" (p. 16). They write that under conditions of "unnecessary interpersonal surveillance" (p. 16), when others' words and actions are constantly being questioned, suspected, and judged, reality becomes distorted and action limited. According to Sztompka (1999), trust presupposes agency because it involves actively anticipating and facing an unknown future and committing oneself to action. For Luhmann (1979), trust is also a core component of agency. Luhmann writes that "trust accumulates as a kind of capital which opens up more opportunities for more extensive action but which must be continually used and tended" (p. 64).

Summary. The following tenets can be drawn from trust theory: (a) trust is relational and interactional; (b) trust is a necessary component of human relationships and organizing; (c) trust is hard to build and maintain; (d) trust presupposes agency; (e) trust and communication are interconnected; (f) erosion of trust has dire consequences. These tenets will serve as a basis for establishing the need for a discursive construction of organizational trust online later in this text. Specifically, we will propose a narrative approach when constructing organizational trust online due to the role that narratives play in human life. In the following section, we explain the relevance of narratives and their role in various aspects of human lives.

NARRATIVE THEORY

Narratives permeate human existence and play a significant role in human lives. They form a powerful communicative and cultural web that impacts various facets of our lives. Narratives assist us on our path of individuation, identity development, and acculturation. They also help us create bonds with others; they convey messages of morals and moral behaviors; they help us make sense of the world around us, and they inspire action. The impact of narratives on human life has been noted by scholars and researchers.

The work of Campbell (1972), MacIntyre (1984), and Fisher (1984, 1989), respectively, shows that narratives are intrinsically linked with human existence and humanity. According to Campbell (1972), human life and human actions are linked with powerful narratives dominant in a particular culture. MacIntyre (1984) addresses the actuating and inspirational role of narratives when he writes that humans are story-telling beings in their "actions and practice, as well as in [their] fictions" (p. 201). Fisher (1984, 1989) draws attention to the central role of narratives in reasoning and decision making.

Many other authors also point out to a very special role of narratives in human lives. Some authors link narratives with sensemaking or meaning-making (see, e.g., Cooren, 2000; Greimas, 1987; Koschmann, 2005; Postman, 1999; Weick, 1995). Greimas (1987) explores the deep structure of narratives and the relationship between narratives and meaning-making within his general interest in meaning and discourse. For Greimas, a narrative is structured according to a limited number of universal forms that can also serve as a basis for making sense of various events and aspects of human life. Cooren, in answering the question, How is sense produced, follows Griemas' central premise that narratives possess an organizing principle. Koschmann (2005) also stresses the sensemaking role of narratives: "People see their lives as a story and make sense of the world around them through the context of a narrative" (p. 2). Postman (1999) views narratives as a central sensemaking and action-inspiring tool. Weick, in his 1995 book on sensemaking writes that stories "are templates. . . . [that] explain . . . [and] energize" (p. 61).

Narratives have gained special attention in organizations. Barker and Gower (2010), for example, suggest that narratives fulfill the need of an increasingly diverse workplace and promote organizational communication. Eisenberg, Goodall, Jr., and Tretheway (2014) show the relevance of organizational

narratives for building organizational cultures and for taking action. Narratives can also impact the levels of trust in organizations, as illustrated by the following example described by Kodish and Pettegrew (2008).

Kodish & Pettegrew compare two narratives that have influenced customers' trust in two different organizations. In the first case, customers' trust was reinforced, whereas in the second case it was undermined. The first case involves Johnson & Johnson and the Tylenol crisis. In 1982, seven people died in Chicago after taking a very popular over-the-counter pain reliever Tylenol. Someone had tampered with Tylenol bottles and added a poisonous substance to the original content. The manufacturer of Tylenol, Johnson & Johnson, decided to act immediately and to show that customer safety was their primary concern. From a narrative perspective, they followed narrative reasoning and universal values that can be found in all major narratives – the values of preserving human life and safeguarding others. Johnson & Johnson withdrew all Tylenol bottles from the market and had a new, tamper-proof bottle, designed. By taking immediate and clearly understood measures that sent an unequivocal message to customers, "We care about you and your safety," Johnson & Johnson were able to maintain customers' trust and to reinforce and strengthen the foundation of their trusting relationships with customers. Several years later, in 1986, another organization had to deal with an unexpected crisis.

A mother informed the media that she had found pieces of glass in a jar of Gerber baby food. The baby was not hurt, but we can imagine the fear, the shock, and the concern of parents who were buying Gerber baby food. Unlike Johnson & Johnson whose board of directors followed narrative logic, Gerber's board of directors followed a different type of logic. They determined that there was no need for concern – their baby food was safe – and that they would not be withdrawing their product. In this case, the decision was based on logical rather than narrative reasoning. The conclusion of the board of directors was correct if we follow logic and logical reasoning. This is not, however, the logic that can abate human fears, and especially parents' fears. Parents reacted by switching to baby food made by other manufacturers. Furthermore, the story of Gerber food as unsafe continued to persist in Middle America for several decades despite the fact that Gerber baby food is very safe. Kodish & Pettegrew (2008) write: "The narrative structure possesses a magic of its own and a path that cannot be explained by facts, statistics, logic, or science" (p. 168).

Fisher's Narrative Paradigm

Of special interest for the purpose of this article is Fisher's (1984; 1989) narrative paradigm – a multimodal and multifaceted model of communication, reasoning, decision making, and action. Disillusioned by the limitations of the dominant rational paradigm centered around logic and argumentation and inspired by MacIntyre's notion of *Homo narrans,* or the story-telling human being, Fisher developed a model centered around narration and narratives. For Fisher, narration includes words or actions, or a combination of the two "that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (p. 2). Narration, unlike the rationalistic world view and its linear, unidirectional, and argumentative nature, views human experience in its multifaceted, dialogic, dynamic, and multi-layered richness – as reason and emotion, intellect and imagination, fact and value. Another characteristic of the narrative paradigm that can help us understand its pervasiveness and its relevance for human beings is that it is acquired culturally, and is, therefore, shared by all members of a culture. The rational world paradigm, on the other hand, has to be learned. Let us now take a look at narratives as a tangible and discursive expression of the narrative paradigm.

A general characteristic of narratives is that they are holistic. They synthesize two rhetorical strands – the persuasive and the literary/aesthetic strand – and they include historical, situational, rational, and moral aspects. As a category, narratives are rather broad: they can be true or fictitious; they can be oral or written; and they can be public or private. Narratives are pervasive and common. According to Fisher, narrative as a mode of discourse in non-technical forms of communication is more common than the rational world paradigm. A relevant characteristic of narratives is their moral aspect which is expressed through narrative probability, narrative fidelity, and good reasons.

Two central components of narratives are *narrative probability* and *narrative fidelity*. Narrative probability refers to the coherency of a story, whereas narrative fidelity refers to the comparison that people make between the stories they experience with the stories they know are true. Another relevant component of Fisher's model are "good reasons," which refer to values and the overall ethical message of a narrative. Good reasons can take various forms depending on situations, genres, and media, and are influenced by history, biography, culture, and character.

Summary. Fisher's narrative paradigm draws attention to the manner in which human beings communicate, think, make sense of the world around them, reason, make decisions, and act. According to Fisher (1984, 1989), narratives and narrative reasoning are central to human existence. The centrality of narratives in human life suggests that various matters relevant to human beings, including trust, are likely to possess a narrative component.

NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ORGANIZATIOAL TRUST ONLINE

As noted earlier, this text follows in the tradition of discursively constructing trust online (see Boyd, 2003). Boyd writes that trust tenets and trust characteristics create a rhetorical situation in Bitzer's (1968) terms that requires an appropriate response. Let us now see in more detail what Bitzer means by a rhetorical situation and what constitutes an appropriate response.

Rhetorical Situation
A rhetorical situation is an emergency or a necessity that requires attention and an appropriate discursive response. For Bitzer, a rhetorical situation is a "natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance" (p. 5). Bitzer writes:

"The world presents objects to be known, puzzles to be resolved, complexities to be understood — hence the practical need for scientific inquiry and discourse; similarly, the world presents imperfections to be modified by means of discourse — hence the practical need for rhetorical investigation and discourse" (1968, p. 14).

It is important to note that for Bitzer, rhetorical situation is a reality rather than a sophistic or imaginary enterprise. The appropriate response, or in Bitzer's words, "fitting response" (1968, p. 6) to the rhetorical situation must also be grounded in reality. According to Bitzer, discourse created in response to a rhetorical situation should be purposeful, pragmatic, and transformative. It should also take into account the "constraints" that affect both the rhetorical situation and the response to the situation.

A rhetorical situation contains constraints or a variety of factors that can influence or constrain the rhetorical response -- both the decision and the action – that are required for responding to the exigence. According to Bitzer (1968), constraints are made up of "persons, events, objects, and relations" (p. 8) that stem from "beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives . . . " (p. 8) and also the speaker's or writer's personal style and characteristics.

We argue that organizational trust online is a rhetorical situation that requires an appropriate discursive response. In the following paragraph we explain what makes organizational trust online a rhetorical situation.

First, the popularity of the Internet has grown tremendously. The number of organizations and individuals who are using the Internet for communication, interaction, and transactions has skyrocketed (see, e. g., Barnes, Lescault, & Wright, 2013; McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). The Internet exemplifies Bitzer's (1968) description of a rhetorical situation as a "natural context of persons, events, objects, relations" (p.5). Second, the Internet with its myriads of messages and interactions is a reality rather than a sophistic or imaginary enterprise, which meets Bitzer's criterion that a rhetorical situation must be a real rather than imaginary situation. The third reason why organizational trust online constitutes a rhetorical situation is the multifaceted nature of trust and the many functions and roles of trust in society, organizing, and relationships. Trust theory indicates that (a) trust is relational and interactional; (b) trust is a necessary component of relationships and all forms of organizing; (c) trust is hard to build and maintain; (d) trust presupposes agency; (e) trust and communication are inextricably linked; (f) erosion of trust has

dire consequences. The nature of trust and its role in human relationships meet Bitzer's criteria of a natural context of persons, relations, events, objects, and reality. Organizational trust online also contains "constraints" or various factors that influence a rhetorical situation and that stem from individual, cultural, social, and historical backgrounds of persons, events, objects, and relations.

Summary. The Internet with its numerous interactions and transactions is a reality that falls under the definition of a rhetorical situation in Bitzer's (1968) sense. The indispensable role of trust in human interactions and communication further supports postulating of communication, interaction, and transactions on the Internet as a rhetorical situation. According to Bitzer (1968), a rhetorical situation is an exigence that requires an appropriate or fitting discursive response. In the following paragraphs, departing from Boyd's (2003) initial idea of the rhetorical and discursive nature of trust online, we propose a specific appropriate or fitting response to the rhetorical situation created by the reality of the Internet and its myriads of interactions and transactions between individuals and organizations.

An Appropriate Discursive Response

We argue that Fisher's (1984, 1989) narrative paradigm provides a sound theoretical foundation for constructing an appropriate response to the rhetorical situation created by the increasing number of interactions on the Internet. In the following paragraphs, we explain more specifically how Fisher's narrative paradigm can be utilized as a foundation for building organizational trust online.

Fisher's narrative paradigm presupposes the presence of narrative probability, or a coherent and complete story. It also presupposes the presence of narrative fidelity, or the comparison between the stories people experience with the stories they know are true. The third relevant component of the narrative paradigm are "good reasons," or ethical principles, values, and value-based archetypes that must be interwoven into the story in order for the story to be recognized as relatable, inspiring, and actionable. Translated into practical and pragmatic discourse, as required by Bitzer's (1968) model, messages online should be constructed according to narrative probability, or, in other words, they should be coherent and complete. This means that an organization needs to provide sufficient information about its purpose, vision, goals, staff, history, products, and practices that will enable the "audience" to gain a full understanding of what the organization does, how it functions, and what benefits it provides to its customers. The coherence and completeness requirement applies to both the verbal and visual parts of the message. The following case exemplifies the relevance of narrative probability expressed both verbally and visually.

In the summer of 2015, Chrysler decided to recall a number of vehicles due to a hacking threat. Its website provides general information about recalls. Specific information is provided for owners who are required to enter a VIN number in order to access the information (see "Chrysler," 2015). It is understandable that the creators of Chrysler's website wish to bring attention to beautiful and functional cars rather than to the recall, but a question is warranted: Does Chrysler provide sufficient information about recalls to prospective customers? Questions can also be asked about the webmaster's choice of font type and font size that is not easy to read, and about the terse content that does not provide detailed information. The question to ask, in view of the requirements of Fisher's narrative paradigm, is: Does the Chrysler website exemplify narrative probability? A dedication to narrative probability which calls for coherence and completeness is likely to contribute to creating trustworthiness, which is a necessary condition for trust to arise.

The second principle of Fisher's narrative paradigm – narrative fidelity – requires the stories to withstand the test of the comparison between the stories people experience and the stories that they know are true. In order to promote trustworthiness, the principle of narrative fidelity must be present in organizational messages. The following example illustrates the importance of narrative fidelity.

In 2011, the CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, decided to take an unprecedented move and close down all Starbucks stores for three and a half hours in order to improve the levels of service and quality ("Starbucks Closing," 2011). Starbucks' competitors were delighted, gleefully hoping to win over Starbucks' customers, but to their surprise, Starbucks emerged from the unprecedented hiatus stronger. Closing down of the stores, despite the cost and the potential loss of customers, sent out a powerful

message that Starbucks places quality and service to customers above profits. The message resonated with the customers as true and reliable, and, consequently, contributed to Starbucks' trustworthiness.

The third major component of Fisher's narrative paradigm -- the concept of "good reasons" -- calls for an inclusion of values and an overall ethical stance. Organizational messages should not only be truthful and honest; they should also include caring, understanding, and humanity. Information about Gerber baby food that the company provided during the crisis, as described earlier in this text, was true and factual, but it lacked "good reasons" – values of caring and of humanity and, thus, failed to resonate with the customers.

Let us now summarize what organizations can do to contribute, on their part, to higher levels of trust on the Internet. In order to ensure that they are contributing to the creation of trust online, organizations need to ask and answer truthfully the following questions:

Are all of our messages coherent, complete, true, and ethical?
Are we providing sufficient information to the customers?
Are our efforts sufficiently personal rather than cold and detached?
To what extent can our customers relate to our "story"?
Are all our efforts when communicating and conducting transactions on the Internet aligned?
Are we providing goods or services that we promised?
Do the experiences of customers match the description of our goods or services?
How are we treating our customers?
What type of messages are we sending?
Do the messages reflect our code of ethics and the organizational character and reputation?

Responsibility for Building Trust

Trust is relational and dynamic rather than unidimensional. Ideally, organizational efforts aimed at developing trust would be complemented by customers' and prospective customers' messages and efforts. In view of the specificity of the nature of interactions on the Internet, we argue that the responsibility for building trusting relationships with customers rests with organizations. Modern-day customers are well informed (Denning, 2011; Merchant, 2012) and empowered (Coleman, Chandler, & Jian, 2012; Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012), which suggests that their Internet messages are likely to contain well-informed and meaningful content. To a certain extent, well-informed and meaningful content may satisfy some but not all of the principles of the narrative paradigm that calls for coherent, complete, true, and ethical messages. Modern-day customers are also a disparate group with varied interests and goals. Expecting of them to make an effort at building trust online would not be realistic. Just as the responsibility for building relationships with customers rests with organizations (see Kodish & Pettegrew, 2008), we argue that trust building, similarly, is the responsibility of organizations.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we posit organizational trust online, a specific type of trust that develops between individuals and organizations on the Internet, as a discursive construct and draw attention to the discursive, narrative, and rhetorical nature of organizational trust online. The starting point for postulating organizational trust online as a discursive construct was Boyd's (2003) conceptualization of trust online and his call for discursively constructing this specific type of trust. Inspired by Boyd's idea, a theoretical foundation for understanding and building organizational trust online was developed and practical suggestions were provided. Specifically, Fisher's (1984; 1989) narrative paradigm, Bitzer's (1968) concept of a rhetorical situation, and an overall discursive framework (Boyd, 2003; Cooren, 2000; Eisenberg, Goodall, Jr., and Tretheway, 2014; Greimas, 1987; Koschmann, 2005; MacIntyre, 1984; Postman, 1999; Weick, 1995) were applied as a basis for building a theoretical foundation for constructing organizational trust online and for developing practical suggestions. Narrative theory was selected because it provides holistic insights into the ways human beings communicate, think, make

decisions, and take action. Bitzer's concept of a rhetorical situation was selected because it highlights the discursive aspect of events and human actions. The overall discursive framework of the article draws attention to communication as constitutive of all organizing efforts.

At the theoretical level, the article reflects the central principles of the discursive school of thought (see, e.g., Cooren, 2004; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Heracleous & Marshak 2004; Heracleous & Hendry, 2000; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004) and contributes to the understanding of organizing as a discursive endeavor. Ideas presented in this article have also practical implications. At the practical level, suggestions provided in the article have an applicable and actionable potential and can help organizations build trust online and, consequently, promote establishing and building relationships with customers and prospective customers.

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