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**Trust in the Organisations of Modernity and  
the Role of Intermediates in Times of Change  
from a Socially Sustainable Perspective**

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	<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Psychological and political views on the organisations of modernity</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Human well-being and organisational change	
1.2	Socially sustainable working conditions and change processes	
<b>2</b>	<b>Trust theory in the light of organisational change (Luhmann, Rosa)</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1	Trust in times of organisational change	
2.2	Trust and time with respect to organisational change	
2.3	Trust as a selective social erosion inhibitor in organisations of the modernity	
<b>3</b>	<b>The relationship between theory and empirical insights</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Roles and feelings of an intermediate in times of change</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1	Context of the empirical example	
4.2	The metaphor: "Like Hercules with five arms or so"	
4.3	Interpretation with respect to trust and change	
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusions from the empirical reflections and the theoretical framework</b>	<b>39</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>44</b>

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# Trust in the Organisations of Modernity and the Role of Intermediates in Times of Change from a Socially Sustainable Perspective

## Summary

Trust is one of the key components for a positive and motivating working environment in the perpetual reorganizational processes in organisations. This paper examines cornerstones which are essential to providing a trustworthy climate particularly under constantly changing working conditions from a psychological perspective. As a basic assumption and framework of the discussion, social sustainability in organisations is introduced as a normative goal, which cannot be achieved without the existence of an organisational climate that addresses human needs for orientation, security, planning reliability, comprehensibility and human acceptance, especially in times of rapid changes. Furthermore, the importance of incorporating 'mindful' considerations into all organisational activities which influence the climate of trust at the workplace will be highlighted. Deceleration through trustworthy dialogue is emphasised as a most sensitive factor in times of change. Theoretical considerations as well as empirical findings are followed by conclusions for repetitive efforts related to trust, time, mindfulness and change, particularly on the part of intermediates in organisations.

## 1 Psychological and political views on the organisations of modernity

### 1.1 Human well-being and organisational change

When I recently attended a symposium on modern trust relations in globalised societies and companies, a claim was made that in organisations personal trust would not be of importance any more, while system-related forms of evaluation, which was more specifically described as control and formalisation, would become the most important trust builders. I wondered whether such a claim could be called trust at all.

As an Industrial Psychologist I was amazed and deeply concerned, since from my point of view *human beings are still after all human beings*: They have their needs, emotions, expectations, they feel hurt, understood, or supported. If *trust toward relevant others cannot be experienced* in a social environment, persons will, in my understanding, feel utterly lost, even threatened, and find themselves burdened by the very absorbing motions of distrust. It should not escape our notice that human psyche is not as much subject to change in the same way as modern organisational structures seem to be.

On the other hand, the *structure people work in* has undeniably a strong impact on the way of thinking, feeling, and processing their experiences (cf. Gustavsen 1996, 18;

Leithäuser & Volmerg 1988, 96ff; Meyerhuber 2009, 95ff). As a result of this psychological and interactionistic conclusion, I would like to emphasise: *Objective conditions and subjective experiences are always closely interwoven* at the workplace. In other words, surrounding working conditions influence the way people feel, think, and act substantially. Furthermore, human beings are not only conscious rational beings (like the rational-choice-theory or the principle-agent-theory in management theory might suggest; cf. Rees 1985; cf. Bicchieri 2003 ). Additionally, irrational and personality specific aspects of the psyche invariably constitute parts of what people bring into their everyday life interactions at the workplace. Hence my objective is to build a bridge for an understanding of trust in modern organisations which includes the psychological perspective.

Therefore, a framework for an understanding of the human psyche at the workplace and its importance with regard to organisational change processes and trust needs to be established. Sigmund Freud as the father of psychoanalytical psychology describes work as an ongoing operation of processing the inner and outer nature of human beings. His understanding is based on a reflection of the mechanisms of a *double socialisation* – namely through the two agencies of socialisation family and work – as well as individualisation and socialisation *in and through work* itself. These processes shape, to a certain extent, the identity of human beings; besides additional impacts from ongoing societal developments.

Freud (2000a/1933], 496ff) differentiates in his structural model aspects of the psyche, which can in short be described as the I (a persons personality core), the It (basic needs and emotions) and the Over-I (learned values, social demands), which on an unconscious level have to be constantly balanced out for a peaceful mind. In his reflections on *how culture becomes part of the psyche of human beings* the author (2000b/1930, 267) explains that by being socialised into a [here as well: work-] culture, “the cultural Over-I develops its own ideals and raises its demands”<sup>1</sup> (ibid.) within the psyche of a person. In this understanding, the acculturated Over-I instance

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<sup>1</sup> Authors note: All German sources quoted in this article have been translated to the best of my knowledge.

within the psyche constitutes an internalised authority which cannot easily be ignored or contradicted. For people at the workplace, such an understanding explains how conscience-anxiety and internalised “stern ideals and demands” (ibid.) can lead to *inner tensions* within the person, if challenged.

Acculturated Over-I expectations, shaped by socialisation as a professional, can appear as internalised quality standards, a specific order of events or processes, anticipations of how things are done or connoted, as well as a feeling who is allowed to act in a certain manner, or not. Organisational *changes can affect such acculturations* drastically, even if given unintended and perceived unconsciously.

With the passage of time, people at the work place tend to identify themselves with their work. The specific ways of thinking, doing, and understanding which are to be found in their profession and organisation are internalised. Changing attributions, routines and cooperation structures within an organisation therefore will have side-effects as *unintended impacts on the psyche of people*. In addition, the way of coping with changes may vary from person to person. As a rule, it can be stated that organisational changes are bound to *affect the human well-being since they require adapting necessities and thereby cause some degree of psychological stress*, even if not always consciously perceived.

According to the European industrial relations observatory (Euroline, 2001), stress in the context of work can be defined as “a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological reactions to adverse and harmful aspects of work content, work organisation and work environment” (ibid.). Organisational changes may be welcomed or be experienced as extremely annoying. However, it will always be accompanied by the need to re-adjust, to reconfigure, not only in the outer world of objectives and strategies, but also *on an unconscious level with regard to a persons inner condition*. Therefore, such stress has to be addressed as a result of challenges of psychological adjustments. In a handbook about business psychology and organisational behaviour McKenna points out:

“It should be noted that change is potentially stressful because people move from predictable environments where they feel secure. They may take one or two changes in their stride, but if too many things are changed at the same time they may become stressed and defensive.” (McKenna 2000, p. 607)

By understanding *change as a potential psychological stressor* for people (even if welcomed), the inclusion of a psychological point of view becomes self evident in discussing about re-organisational processes: The question then has to be how organisational change can meet the social and psychological demands as well as, for instance, economic considerations.

Before pursuing that question further, specific psychological implications of the structure of modern work itself should be deliberated as well. *The way how modern work itself is organised* (perpetual reorganisation, high responsibility and lean management, workforce seen as a cost factor, replaceability of employees, et cetera) creates a specific dynamism of reification and objectification which does not *remain external to people*. Even if work is oriented towards an individual employee as much as possible, in the end, it is only secondarily oriented at the individual in question. Individualisation and delimited working conditions tend to demand for a high level of psychological self management at the workplace (cf. Pongratz & Voß 2003). These structural conditions of modern work lead to a kind of *socialisation which transports contradictions into the individuals* themselves – antagonistic parts of the socialisation process become part of the human psyche, and such an *inner colonisation carries structural elements of inconsistency into the individual*. The psychological results are then additional tensions within the individual’s psyche, as well as between the individuals and their working environment.

In conclusion, it can be said that recurrent *changing conditions* at the workplace are *bound to heighten the amount of antagonistic elements within the psyche* of organisational members.

From a psychological perspective I therefore see people at the workplace today are desperately in need of ways of easing incorporated inner tensions particularly in a constantly changing environment. What measures can be taken? Psychologically



speaking, one may anticipate a need for orientation, security, planning reliability, comprehensibility, as well as human acceptance and some degree of social warmth, in order to perform their duty properly while remaining healthy, especially under a heavy workload and restricted resources. In this context, I would like to theorise that trust-building elements become most vital under the conditions of modern organisational changes.

Attentive and 'mindful' forms of reorganisation – like structurally demanded by Becke and colleagues (see Becke 2008; Becke, Behrens, Bleses & Schmidt 2010; Becke, Behrens, Bleses, Evers & Hafkesbrink 2011, and in this book) – can consequently be confirmed and accentuated from a psychological point of view: The question of *how organisational changes can take social and psychological needs into account* in order to achieve a better balance of economic and social needs becomes crucial in the modernity, especially in the light of recent work-related health records, which leads me to the next point of discussion.

## **1.2 Socially sustainable working conditions and change processes**

From the standpoint of occupational sciences Kjellström, Hakansta & Hogstedt (2007, 14) point out: „The workplace is the most important environment for most people's health, whether it is a home, office, factory or forest.” Under the working conditions of the modernity that seems to backfire in recent years, socially as well as economically speaking: Under delimited and subjectified working conditions (cf. Pongratz & Voß 2000, 2003), accompanied by ongoing change processes, *employee's health problems increase* dramatically (cf. Badura, Ducki Schröder, Klose & Macco 2011). The main issues are even publicly known and, for instance, described in a German news release of December 2011 as follows:

„Employees in Germany are more often on sick leave. From January to September 2011 the rate of sick leavers grew steadily, according to company health insurances, by 0,2 percent per month against last year. In the last five years the figures grow continuously, in particular psychological illnesses and respiratory diseases. Sick days caused by psychological illnesses increased – in comparison

with the year before – about 13,4 percent. The days of sick leave as a result of burnout syndrome increased from 4,6 percent per 1000 in 2004 to 63,2 per 1000 health insurance members in 2010.” (dpa 29.12.2011).<sup>2</sup>

A growth of psychological problems, an increasing vulnerability to infectious diseases, rising figures for musculoskeletal disorders, allergies and cardiovascular problems as well as a drop in performance or incapacity to work are to be seen as a result of long working hours under delimited working conditions and an insecure social situation (cf. Zok 2008; cf. Meyer, Stallauke & Weihrauch 2011). On the account of the general demographic shift a large proportion of employees undergo such working conditions of the modernity over a long period of time, which leads to health problems after a while (cf. Zok 2008). In this light, such symptoms not only reflect *structural* but also severe *social* problems.

When reflecting on such issues in terms of socially more sustainable working conditions, in favour of employees and their long-term professional occupation, some normative orientation might be useful.

Mainly political frameworks and programmatic can to be taken into account, for this article appraised in advisement for the issue of social interactions in organisations. Such frameworks are provided, for instance, by the United Nation (UN) and its various organisations; three of them are to be mentioned exemplarily.

First, in the UN’s World Health Organisation (WHO)’s Ottawa-Charter 1986 the importance of social aspects at the workplace for a healthy life is expressed explicitly:

“Health promotion is the process of enabling people to exercise more control over their own health and over their environments, and making choices conducive to health. Full health potential cannot be achieve unless people are able to take control of those things which determine their health. The way society organises work should be a source of health for people and should help create a healthy society. Health promotion supports secure, motivating, gratifying and agreeable working- and living conditions.” (Ulich 2008, 8)

As an organisation of the United Nations, the WHO takes aim at only the political level of governments. Nevertheless, I believe the Charter provides a useful framework,

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<sup>2</sup> Translations of quotations from German into English in this text have been respectfully conducted by the author.

applicable to the macro-, meso- and micro-level of work as well. The holistic understanding of work and health emphasises on the employee's need for means of control over matters which have a bearing on their health – such as workload, use of time, respectful relationships, and participation in decision-making processes which may have an impact on them. These qualities become more questionable under delimited working conditions, as discussed above. Therefore, appreciative interactions with others and real participation as important health factors must be recognised by any actor in organisations, though particularly those in leadership positions. The necessity of trustworthy working relationships and social environments can be determined. Therefore, mindful organisational change and respectful possibilities for participation go hand in hand.

Second, the worldwide discussion about 'sustainability' may prove useful for work-related problems. Initiated by the United Nations through its World Commission on Environment and Development, for instance the Brundtland report 1987 (cf. Hauff 1987) and the UN convention in Rio de Janeiro 1992 are steps to the idea of "sustainable development as the normative guiding principle for the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (cf. UN 1992). Based on a concept of 'three pillars of sustainability', in this context sustainability is mostly discussed economically, ecologically and socially. While economic necessities in organisations of the modernity are quite well attended to, as well the ecological implications of organisational practises are being addressed increasingly (cf. Grunwald & Kopfmüller 2006). However, social repercussions on organisational interactions and changes are *still too rarely reflected and addressed under the perspective of sustainability*. The dynamism of perpetual reorganisation, often accompanied by a fracturing of social support and an endangering of social and psychological needs, is weakening people at the workplace and their ability to cope with the constant retransfiguring within their working environment, psychologically speaking. Therefore, putting an accentuating focus on the socially sustainable perspective of work related issues, applied to the meso- and micro-level of organisations, would provide a helpful guideline.

In addition seen from a political viewpoint, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) of the United Nations emphasises by its “*Decent Work Agenda*” 1999 on the well-being of employees, as for instance Sociologist Senghaas-Knoblauch (cf. 2010, 2011) describes it. ILO addresses the policies of states with regard to the legislative regulation of labour. Main components of the agenda are “human rights” at the workplace, “productive work in a sensible occupation”, “social protection” and “social dialogue” (ibid. 2010, pp. 20-27). I think that these political imperatives can as well be applied to the organisational level. Thusly, one may read the Agenda’s demands as aspects of any corporate responsibility; or at least as guidelines to a socially sustainable working environment. Senghaas-Knobloch argues most strongly in favour of organising work ‘decently’ and reminds explicitly of the indivisible character of human rights:

“Manpower is interconnected with the person and his or her dignity. Therefore, the labour market cannot be seen as a market like all the other markets. Since 1999 ILO tries by the ‘Decent Work Agenda’ to oppose negative developments of globalisation at the workplace. ... Thereby, the agenda can be called a program for mindfulness in societies and companies. (...) Beside these societal approaches organisations need to introduce routines of mindfulness, for example by guarantying times for protected dialogue about health preventive issues and problematic organisational processes. (...) An innovative knowledge- and service society is not sustainable without humane working conditions.” (Senghaas-Knobloch 2011, 24ff)

So, the Agenda highlights humane principles at the workplace as important to protect. As far as I see it, Senghaas-Knobloch’s linking of political and organisational considerations for a realisation of its demands is leading the way; for instance with regard to and the need of sensitive dealings for a careful handling of health-preventive issues in the context of organisational processes. In this light, in an organisation *structurally* guaranteed time for dialogue must be ensured, as well as the actual conduct of constructive dialogues on the *interpersonal* level. Structural and interpersonal prerequisites both have to work reasonably together in order to provide a socially sustainable framework. As well, it might be highlighted that such considerations become especially crucial in times of change.

Additionally, such considerations include an ethical component, which is at risk of being endangered through the unilateral logic of marketisation in the modernity. In organisations a *decrease of respect towards employees and their human right of the protection of their dignity* can be identified. For instance, on the *political level* employment policy is based on making work more flexible, on unstable work and on wage restraints. On the *interactional level* within organisations, studies show that most of the mobbing cases are committed by the victim's immediate superior (cf. Maschkutat, Stackelbeck & Langendorf 2002). Both examples can be counted as indicators of this view. Dialogue, social protection, acknowledgement of another person's dignity, as well as the appreciation of their performance in the social context *are in danger of being ignored more and more under the delimited and primarily economically focused working conditions*. 'Mindful' change can therefore, as far as I understand it, not only address change on a structural level – its *psycho-social impacts have to be considered and carefully monitored* as well. Otherwise, people's trust in their organisation and in their superior and colleagues will be jeopardised, i.e.; they become emotionally tired, and ill.

But, what can be done about it? The above mentioned international political objectives (Ottawa-Charter 1987; UN-resolution in Rio 1992 for guiding principles of a sustainable development; Decent Work Agenda of ILO 1999) underline a *global necessity for the protection of the workforce*. As far as I see it, the political imperatives can as well be applied to the meso- and micro-level of an organisation. Reading the quoted programmatic topics as guidelines concerning people's well-being physically, emotionally and socially, an organisation's responsibility would embrace human rights, social protection and social dialogue as integral parts. But therefore, such principles have to be put into practice; *by taking concrete measures, and through the actions of actual people*. Addressees of such considerations are *particularly executives*. For trustworthy interactions, especially the aspect of dialogue to ensure a social footing has to be considered of paramount importance for their roles.

The way work is organised and perceived always plays an important role on employee's well-being, as Norwegian working life researcher Gustavsen (1996, 18) found in various action research projects. Such studies also show that *good communication is the key to real development* of the work environment (ibid. 1996, 19). But discourses on work and health depend, according to the author (ibid.), on how the communication processes are structured and focussed; they have to meet the needs within the specific organisation. The question of how communication is conducted productively, for instance as means of support of a health-securing working environment, must therefore be considered a most vital question. Additionally, thinking of it *in terms of dialogue instead of just communication* might be prudent, in order to underline that the social *quality of understanding and appreciation* must be guaranteed so that a climate of trust can be realised.

The importance of such a climate at the workplace cannot be overstated. In the yearly German "Fehlzeiten-Report"<sup>3</sup> from 2011 which focuses on "Leadership and Health", Badura, Ducki, Schröder, Klose & Macco point out that, under modern working conditions, *middle management nowadays holds the most important key to the well-being of their subordinates*, acting at best as a "failsafe" guarantee and as an important protective factor, if committed to participation, respectful dialogue and social protection:

"In this context middle management has a central role. On the one hand they bear responsibility for their employees, not only with respect to their performance but also with respect to their health, since only healthy and motivated employees are productive employees as well. (...) On the other hand, executives are exposed to higher stresses and strains themselves. Therefore, they are to be expected to play a dualistic role: Taking greater responsibility for the productivity and health of employees as well as of themselves." (Badura, Ducki, Schröder, Klose & Macco, 2011, S. V)

Recent studies support this assessment: An incriminating social climate and a hardly supportive behaviour from a superior seem to multiply the risk of exhaustive depression of employees (cf. Klemens, Wieland & Krajewski, 2004). On the other hand, sub-

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<sup>3</sup> This is a yearly "Absence-Report", dedicated to a specific topic each year, always edited by Prof. Badura, together with changing co-authors, and produced on behalf of the Scientific Institute of the AOK (WIdO).

stantial social support is considered one of the most important protective factors in dealing with stress, illness and demotivation at work (Oettinger 2008, 57). What does such a support for subordinates look like? Burnout-researcher Müller (1995, 40) indicates what is amiss:

“An incriminating interpersonal atmosphere is responsible for burnout at the workplace. Autocratic and disinterested superiors as well as a lack of communication are the factors which count most. (...) A decreasing social climate within the organisation, accompanied by a loss of the stabilising power of mutual confirmation is also dangerous. People are burning out gradually while becoming disappointed and even highly identified employees are severely endangered when the return flow of recognition and success becomes insufficient.”

Social support thereby can be identified as a *confirming dialogue* which can be *experienced as satisfying and supportive*, conveyed by an interested and cooperative attitude of superiors who must be perceived as trustworthy. Conclusion can be drawn that, under stressful working conditions, especially the *supportive behaviour of a direct superior* becomes the drop that tips the scale or, at its worst, the ‘straw that breaks the camels back’. The responsibility of intermediates as protective agents against psychological and physiological collapse has therefore to be realised – *mindfulness on an interactional level must include an according acceptance and acknowledgement of this aspect of leadership responsibility* at the modern workplace. This becomes particularly important when a superior has to deal carefully with boundaries instead of achievements; for instance when resources are limited and health is impaired. Furthermore, a careful self-management of such middle managers has to be recommended. How these two aspects of the role of intermediates can be fulfilled in good balance is a most pressing question, especially in the light of change dynamism, delimited working conditions and demographic considerations.

Summarising so far from a psychological perspective, trustworthiness between superiors and subordinates can be seen as an important issue for the health of people at the workplace, as well as for a health-sustaining working environment and the success of the organisation undergoing change. Besides, the social climate and social resilience are influenced in a most positive manner by trustworthy relationships at

work. Trust, build up through satisfying dialogue in hierarchical relations of the organisation, can hereby be understood as a vital aspect for not only an economic but also a socially sustainable working environment.

Particularly under the conditions of continuous change processes *these social values may easily escape the intermediates' attention*. Therefore, for an organisation undergoing changes, the mechanisms and values of trust are now to be discussed more closely for a 'mindful' understanding.

## **2 Trust theory in the light of organisational change (N. Luhmann and H. Rosa)**

### **2.1 Trust in times of organisational change**

If trustworthy relationships at the workplace are understood as a very important cornerstone for the health of most people as well as for a worthwhile working environment, supporting the success of the organisation, then trust and its mechanisms and values are to be looked at more closely in order to work for a socially sustainable organisation. What impact could restructurings have on trust, which *kind* of trust is meant, and what conclusions for trust-building as an intermediate could be drawn? Such questions are well worth further deliberating.

Different theories on trust in organisations have been developed. Sociologist Georg Simmel, one of the early authors, understands "... trust as a hypothesis about future behaviour, somewhat founded in evidence." For him, trust as a hypothesis is something between knowing and not-knowing. He states: "The completely sapient *needs* no trust, the completely ignorant *cannot* reasonably trust" (Simmel 1992, 393). After all, trust always depends on the context, situation, and the parties involved, therefore one may not be able to generalise trust in itself (Meyer 1995, 717). In practice, the question will always come down to 'trustworthiness' in a specific situation and constellation, with regard to specific people, or more precisely to 'socially relevant others', such as direct superiors or hierarchy's representatives above.



Several authors provide the scientific community with approaches about trust, or even trust in organisations (Simmel 1908/1992; Luhmann 1968; Gambetta 1988, Giddens 1992; Schweer 1997, Cook, Russell & Levi 2005; Deetz & Gillespie 2012). However, in the following analysis of trust-related considerations I am mainly inclined to the understanding of trust developed by German sociologist Niklas Luhmann. Even if the approach he presents was set in 1968, it is one of the most profound and elaborated theories of trust I know, and it embraces sociological as well as psychological considerations, which I find quite useful.

According to Luhmann (1989, 23), trust “reduces the problem of complexity by risking confidence in another”. In this view, *it is always a risky preparatory effort and can therefore be disappointed as well*. So, trust is, to Luhmann (ibid., 5), a connecting principle of the psyche and the social; a conciliatory quality in interaction and in processing. Trust as a *means of reduction of social complexity in order to remain capable of acting* is a necessary answer to an otherwise too complex environment.

Luhmann analyses trust as something not blindly given without proof, as hope. He argues: “The hopeful is confident despite uncertainty. Trust reflects contingency, hope eliminates contingency (ibid., 25). Although trust can be given inconsiderately, carelessly, or routinely (ibid., 25), normally specific rules regulate a hedging of trust. Usually it is not unreasonably given and it is also tested in specific situations.

Luhmann accordingly describes terms and conditions which secure and enable trust on different levels. He mentions acquaintance, even familiarity, learning, symbolic representation, preservation of vagueness, control through evidence, and control by thresholds, supported by sustaining structures of the system environment. These terms work specifically in favour of personal trust – the trust in people: *Personal trust*, to Luhmann (ibid., 40ff), needs a direct partner, it develops by face-to-face communication, uses the principle of small steps, is based on the human need for orientation through persons and socially relevant roles. At the workplace, it is necessary to feel trust in the people one works with directly, and particularly towards their immediate superiors. One could say, personal trust is what gives employees a secure

social footing. As described before, in changing conditions this ought to become particularly important.

Luhman (ibid., 56f) *understands the function of an authority as always based on trust in it self*. This is worth a moment of consideration: At the workplace an authority may be a person in the top management, a team leader or an expert one trusts implicitly. Any 'relevant other' who has influence on others through a given dependency because of roles and functions in the hierarchy of the social system is such a potential authority with respect to trust. To Luhmann (ibid., 57) "... an *authority is always representative of complexity* which is not explained explicitly. (...) Therefore authority is not a question of exceptional knowledge but part of the division of labour, a trained and specific competence. But, even in this form authority needs trust to convey truth." So, on the level of personal trust one can, in the first place, lean on *a role-implicit basis of trust* – building on it or going on ruining it from there.

Another moment which is well worth consideration is concerned with the *necessity of time*. Trust builds, continuing with Luhmann, on experiences and communication, accumulating and being confirmed in small steps. This includes a *need for deceleration through social processes* by taking the small steps needed for the building and reassuring of personal trust. It is something which develops over time and cannot be rushed. That is why the aspect of time will be further discussed later.

But first, back to Luhmann's main differentiations on trust. The author (ibid., 50ff) distinguishes between personal trust and trust into systems. For instance, an organisation as a whole may be defined as such a system. If an enterprise is perceived as an institution, trust is put into its routines, supported by a generalised perception of an outlasting stability. *System trust* builds on personal trust in the first place, but then develops into a much more generalised kind of trust, secured by symbolic selection codes and through media of communication. *Authorities act here as representatives of the system*. Small steps of information and control are relinquished. Instead, there are system imminent expectation structures at work which support an assumed genuine truth; aided by communications in case of an emergency.

Therefore, with Luhmann, a most *distinct difference* between trust in people and trust in systems can be assumed. Both of them are closely interlinked: system trust builds on personal trust but will be, if in question, spontaneously rooted back and questioned on the personal level. Authorities function in that case, according to Luhmann (ibid., 68f), as *informed trust carriers who should perform decentralised reductions of complexity* within their part of the social system by means of communication. Hence top management as well as intermediates are to be expected to become addressees of such dynamism.

How does this apply to times of change? Trust in the system, in the organisation, may waver because routines and structures are in motion through the change process; they are perceived as less reliable, they may become less transparent, incomprehensible or even untrustworthy to people. Especially today, where re-organisation is to be expected a continuous process and experiences give people an impression that their own workplace, department or branch of expertise may be subjected to the next reduction, *system trust is in danger of being decreased*. Societal attributions and political decisions may foster such a pessimistic view further. Handling issues behind closed doors will not make it any better, either.

As highlighted by Luhmann, *authorities are perceived as representatives of the system*. As an authority in this respect I would like to think of every person who is a superior or of similar relevance to another person. Additionally, the more employees one is responsible for, the more social impact could be expected. Consequently, *if system trust becomes doubtful, members in leadership positions become a target of these doubts*. Employees need to feel assured particularly by their direct superiors that they can feel safe. Through motions of trust reassurance in an actual person as well as in a process can be given. By raising questions, doubts or even accusations, and by finding them heard, understood and answered. Even if not all the answers can be provided satisfactorily by a superior: Intermediates respectful and understanding acknowledgement of such questions et cetera are valuable to the protection and the growth of trust with respect to the person as well as to the system.

Furthermore, in key situations this is rightly to be expected from the top level of an enterprise. For instance, in important key situations of a change process when a Chief Executive Director (CEO) has to explain processes and to answer questions on a broader scale. Under the perspective of trust-building such situations can be understood as *motions to secure system trust by reassuring people on a personal level*. If the reaction to trust-related questions (in whatever form they may occur) is rejection or irritation, such an *insensitive answer might burden the perception of trust further – on both levels*. Building and securing personal trust can therefore be understood as a fundamental task of executives in any change process.

Consequently, superiors on all levels would have to consider reorganisation 'mindfully' for the achievement of the goal of a socially sustainable working environment, especially in times of change. This goal may be substantiated as a motivating and employees' health supporting process. As one important aspect of such a sensitive approach the need of fostering a trustworthy climate is evident. Intermediate's sensitive attendance can even help to stabilise trust on the system level – if social dialogue succeeds under the perspective of trust. I would think, *it matters specifically that top management as well as middle management knows about these effects and that they accept their responsibilities* in this field of organisational, acting accordingly. Top Management has to provide orientation and clarity, as well as to give answers and listen to its next level of operatives. Besides, middle management has to communicate with the same courtesy to their subordinates. But, even if top management is not good in doing so, intermediates would definitely help their subordinates *and* the change process by acting nevertheless mindfully – trustworthy and dialogue orientated. How intermediates can be supported in balancing such external demands with own needs in a good manner remains open. From a psychological point of view and with regard to a socially sustainable work environment all managerial members are *responsible for a socially cohesive climate, especially under conditions of perpetual change*. Therefore, 'mindful change' has to be aspired not only on a structural level, but on all personnel levels with respect to the social atmosphere as well, in order to *maintain a general social basis* for change. Losing the people's trust may result in los-

ing the strength of the organisation because distrusting costs employees energy, motivation, loyalty, interest, respect, nerves, and last but not least their health.

## 2.2 Trust and time with respect to organisational change

My next consideration concerns *a reflection on trust and time, as indicated above*. It appears to be an aspect of the globalised dynamism itself that organisational changes are made increasingly fast and repetitively. Therefore, an *accelerating* moment which occurs not only structurally but also socially is part of the ongoing reorganisation processes. In addition to the pace of events, outcomes of a process often cannot be predicted, and undesired side-effects of a taken measure cannot be foreseen. For employees – who are still human beings and thusly beings of habitualness, alignment and a need for orientation – this mixture turns often out to be stressful.

The first impressions of Luhmann's thoughts suggest that under the perspective of time itself this modern dynamism within organisations runs contrary to everything trust needs: On the systemic level trust demands time, experiences, and a good reputation. And on the level of personal trust the author emphasises similar needs: time, experience, and hedging by proof even under difficult conditions. Bearing this in mind, it can be concluded that accelerated processes might seem practical and prudent in the light of economic reasoning or for technical concerns but should be reconsidered mindfully with respect to social needs at the workplace. Social acceleration supports neither the goal of mindful change nor trust.

Luhmann' reflection on trust and time is based on his interest in a *functional analysis concerning the preservation of assets of action systems*. Assets<sup>4</sup> are described as relations between system and environment, defined through the conditions of their substitutability (Luhmann, 1968, 2). An organisation may be seen as such a system. As for substitutability of conditions, for instance trust can be replaced by means of control.

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<sup>4</sup> Luhmann 1968 speaks in the German original about „Bestände“ (here: “assets”) and “Ereignisse” (“events”).

The author (ibid., 4) argues that *trust is generally concerned with a social relationship*. This explains why it is *based on a specific legitimacy*. He describes one of its regularities as follows: “Those who give trust anticipate the future. Through that a problematic relationship to time becomes evident. They *act as if they were sure* of the future. They seem to overcome time itself” (ibid., 8). That is why a theory of trust must include a theory of time (ibid.). And there is the crux of the matter:

“All human endurance of time immanent is an experience of duration despite a change of impressions. By this, objective time as a shared human experience *includes a continuum of moments*, while something can sustain or change, which in itself is neutral against this differences” (ibid., 9).

By understanding this durational aspect of time, Luhmann concludes something fundamental with respect to trust:

“Either something can be identified as an *event/operation*, which happens in a specific moment. Or something can be identified as an *asset/stock*, which continues to be, independent of the change of time. Assets can be identified as presently. Both perspectives are negate each other, and thereby illuminate each other complementarily” (ibid., 10).

With this logical operation, Luhmann gains a *schema of reflection* on assets and events which allows corrections through a counter perspective on time (ibid., 11). This is helpful because, with the author, *trust can only be constituted and secured in the present* (ibid.). Trust is not an overcoming of time – instead *it is based on the creation of a present as an ongoing continuum*. Therefore, while events may change, the continuum of assets in which events may happen circumvents the pressure of insecure futures by strengthening the ongoing present.

For socially sustainable interactions and mindfulness in re-organisation processes this understanding has severe implications: *If trust is only strengthened and secured in the ongoing continuum of the present, trust building interactions, communication, examples of proof, et cetera become crucial*. Any conception that trust has already been built and can therefore be neglected later must be put aside. Instead, a careful reflection on the *nurturing of trust related issues* by executives responsible should be put in its place. This includes staying in contact, organising not only communication but real

dialogue, to give acknowledgement through listening and to secure other forms of respectful interactions, particularly important in times of change when system trust might waver and personal trust becomes more existential.

In addition, the following idea of Luhmann is worth deliberating with respect to organisational members and their actions:

“The problem of trust lies in the fact that *future includes much more possibilities as actualised in the present* ... Uncertainty of what may happen is only a consequence of the much more elemental fact that not all future can become present and therefore past. The *future overstrains the potential of human beings to envision*. (...) So, he must continuously cut back the future to the measures of his present in order to reduce complexity.” (ibid., 12)

Next to the task of reducing complexity contained in possible futures, *with the opportunity for conscious selection the potential for insecurity increases*. That is why the necessity for securing the connections between present and future presents – which seem to be threatened by present futures – becomes more vital (ibid.). Therefore, reflection does not make it any better for our assumed organisational members, but *it might help to feel positive that it is prudent to strengthen the present and a desired future by trust building behaviour*.

This idea may be structurally as well as socially valuable for mindful change processes, since not only system environment tends to accelerate by globalised dynamism, but people as well: Social acceleration increases within the dynamic of the system environment. Consequently, people seem to give less consideration to the effects of their social interactions and act less mindfully as a result. Decelerating social procedures are sometimes even perceived as inconvenient and devaluated as insignificant to tasks. Middle managers may find themselves lured to think of social motions as a means to reach a task, if not as a task in itself. But, the danger of such technicalities lays in the ability of most employees to disguise purely strategic interaction as unethical exploitation of the social in order to reach structural goals. Thus may easily turn out to be a trust killer. Nevertheless, the more a person has to do, the less time seems to be left to invest in working on trustworthy social dialogue in regular relations. Therefore, intermediates *awareness of the fact that social processes continu-*

*ously need time* – which cannot be shortened or accelerated by choice, as far as social psychology and Luhmann can predict – *may justify and encourage more mindful interactions*.

Additionally, it can be said that working life in the modernity becomes more disruptive on a structural as well as on an interactional level. *'Experiences of discontinuity'* are, according to social researcher Mutz (cf. 1997), therefore *part of postmodern normality*. In context of similar considerations, Hradil (cf. 1995) even speaks of the need of a *'competence for coping with chaos,'* as an artefact of our times. As mentioned in the first part of this article, such competence is not given to everyone; most people are stressed by too many opaque and confusing events surrounding them. In this light, Luhmann's thoughts about time and trust can be taken as particularly valuable: If perpetual changes within the organisational environment are a characteristic of modernity, then *personal trust become especially important as a stability anchor*.

According to Luhmann (1989, 13), all *planning needs to be anchored in the present*. People need to feel that, as far as present knowledge and procedures go, their planning does make sense on the level of content as well as with regard to involved partners. On the other hand, the growing complexity of planning in organisations makes it necessary, as the author sees it (ibid.), to *postpone decisions and gratifications in order to gain space and time*, to stay flexible and to let time unfold itself. Developments (that means: futures) can become thereby clearer before actually acting. In this light, forms of delay are to be understood as specific time-related strategies instead of ways of personal carelessness or laziness. Especially growing complexity needs confirmation based on the present and can be rooted in control, or in trust, or in delay, or in a mixture of all. But control requires a lot of capacity and safeguarding steps, while trust releases from the full task of such procedures. Instead, trust is based on face-to-face-contact, communication and proof by experiences. It builds a carrying link, bridging the uncertain until events unfold themselves. Therefore, such encounters have to be assured to happen.



Summarising so far, trust in organisations can be understood more precisely in its *function to strengthen the present in its potential to contain complexity by supporting assets against events, and thereby consolidate tolerance against ambiguity*. But, this should not be confused with an instrumental control of results. Luhmann (ibid., 16) emphasises: “Where control is sure, trust is null and void. Trust is only needed in respect to a future of more or less nondescript lasting complexity.” Instruments of domination, like controlling, quality management and its ISO-Norms, thusly do not need or support trust, they substitute it. But even if installed, *unintended side effects may fire back on the personnel level by frustrating employees*. What is a perfect control system in the organisation worth if it demotivates and discourages the workforce? From a psychological und socially sustainable perspective *not everything that could be done should be done*. Sometimes it is more prudent to restrain technicalities in order to not lose a good balance between economic and social considerations.

What else can be gained from Luhmann about trust? The author underlines that *within planned forms of complexity*, as in modern change processes

“... possibilities for different outcomes [that is: futures] are increasing. For the individual from this planned complexity a new form of uncertainty arises. It may be prudent to postpone a decision until the passage of time actualises more events, reduces more of the complexity” (ibid., 16).

In addition to these thoughts, the author suggests that ‘*control of events*’ and ‘*trust*’ are not only functional equivalents. Instead, as he sees it (ibid.), in a very complex environment *both mechanisms should be strengthened and used additionally and complementarily*. Continuous re-organisation creates undeniably a lot of uncertainty on the structural and personnel level. Even with the best intentions in mind, undesired side-effects possibly cannot be avoided during perpetual re-organisations; different information as well as a different understanding of mentioned events has a tendency of causing confusion and even irritations occasionally.

Luhmann predicted 1968 (ibid., 17) that *with a growing technical complexity* in organisations *trust based mechanisms would become more important*. He thought that especially the relevance of trust and solidarity within smaller groups – such as a de-

partment, division, team, project group or the direct superior – would increase in accordance to a growing and more complicated system environment. The trust building reference to the ongoing present could, so the author thought, only be contained in direct contact, based on *personal trust*. *While personal trust bridges uncertainty and can as well develop into system trust*, it allows for a lack of information and control. It can be concluded that superiors who were able to gain and secure trust toward employees become *as representatives of the system as well pillars of system trust*, of the organisation as a whole. Luhmann explains accordingly:

“System trust can be applied not only to social systems but to human beings as personal systems as well. This change can be understood as a transition from *primarily emotional to a primarily representation-bound basis of trust*” (ibid., 23).

In any leadership position both layers of trust are incorporated and addressed frequently by others, especially in times of insecurity. By means of a trustworthy social climate personal trust and system trust need appropriate support from executives. Reflecting on this fact and ones double-roles with respect to trust, management and intermediates might answer trust-related issues with more understanding and care. They may also reflect on what enables themselves to meet the tasks as social change managers without being overburdened.

With this, my line of argument about trust and time based on Luhmann alone comes to an end. But, one might wonder if Luhmann’s approach is still timely. Changes in the last decades driven by globalised acceleration dynamism within the field of work and organisation are unprecedented in many respects. Therefore, as a last theoretical consideration, a current approach about time- and trust-related issues should help to enlighten this question.

### **2.3 Trust as a selective social erosion inhibitor in the organisations of modernity**

Hartmut Rosa, German sociologist and social philosopher, in his work provides such a modern approach on “Acceleration. Change of Time Structures in the Modernity” (2005). Therein he analyses the *cultural and structural causes of the dynamical acceleration of societal conditions*, as well as its effects on the collective and on the indi-

vidual. The author develops the thesis that the – at first sight deliberating and enabling – effect of social acceleration, resulting from a *technical speed increase* of transport, communication and production in times of globalisation, in the late-modernity threatens to reverse in itself.

In this context, the author undertakes a thorough and interesting analysis of modern phenomena, which can be well applied to the so far developed understanding of trust-and-time. An evaluation of Rosa's work for aspects that link the trust-and-time-debate with modernity and its issues will help answering the question whether Luhmann's approach is still timely. In particular it will be demonstrated that, according to Rosa, the following theses can be supported: *The strengthening of the asset of trust enables and supports the event of change in modernity.*

Rosa (2005) analyses the form, function, and status of processes and phenomena concerning acceleration and inertia as means of the dynamic of modernity. He concludes in agreement with Lübbe (1998, 288; see Rosa 2005, 151) that "... stability and guarantee of assets [like trust] functioning as *fixed points* and as a *prerequisite for change* within a culture [like organisational culture]." Permanence and validity are, according to Rosa, important assets in the very support of change processes. He describes this as a *complementary quality*, as two sides of the same coin (ibid., 153) and explains: "*Selective social deceleration* in order to *prevent erosion of asset-securing institutions* [like trust] could become *cultural as well as structural a functional necessity* of modern acceleration society" (ibid., 152). Emphasising on *social deceleration* the author is hereby focusing on people and their interactions.

Trust is generally concerned with social relationships, based on interactional steps, as shown by Luhmann. Thereby, trust and its *decelerating motions* can be understood even better as an important *institution* within the accelerating culture of modern work and organisation. They are, *if* in existence, functioning as a *selective social erosion inhibitor* and a structural necessity, according to Rosa. If well developed, they are in themselves an asset that provides a social containment in which organisational changes can occur. From this point of view, the allegation can be substantiated that

not only 'trust' as a result, but even more the paths that lead to it are of vital importance within change processes. Social orientation and stability, achieved through trustworthy dialogue and acting, experienced with superiors as well as colleagues, function as *social fixed points and provide a securing framework*, understood with Rosa. The dialectic of change and sociality is reciprocal: The human need for social reassurance grows in times of change, and the structural need for a secure social footing grows with it.

This is the reason why, according to Rosa, some values have to be systematically "excluded from change" and can only thereby "provide reassurance of expectations, predictability, and stability of planning" (ibid., 150) in the modernity. He affirms the interpretation that *only* the modern history of "acceleration became a success story based on and modelled by institutional standstill and guarantee of assets, through the means of continuity of framework conditions" (Rosa 2005, 150). It can be concluded that in the accelerating modernity institutional assets – like trust – become indispensable: Trust is not just a nice social plus but important because of its psychological container function. So, when structures themselves undergo changes, as it is often the case in organisational reorganisation processes, assets have to be even more *secured on the social level*, for it is crucial that the members of an organisation are enabled to do it together, psychologically. Trust in people and, building it up from there, system trust, can (if positively developed and interlinked) be understood, as Rosa sees it, not as antagonistic but as *stock-preserving social and cultural means* of enabling members of organisations to realise mindful change. Both, management and intermediates, will find themselves well-advised taking this into consideration while promoting their manifold tasks on the structural, social and operational level.

Beside a structural necessity, Rosa's thoughts fit well into considerations about the well-being of employees at the workplace and in favour of social sustainability (see part 1). On behalf of individuals he explains: "Where time patterns are not in accordance, severe ramifications for the individuals become inevitable" (ibid., 66). Social interaction has its own logic, way, and time. Accordingly, Rosa argues that one has to

acknowledge *natural borders of acceleration* particularly with respect to social processes (ibid. 139), like physical and psychological limitations of people. In addition, he points out that the price of any *individualised* strategy of deceleration has to be seen as socially extremely *risky*, because it often leads to social exclusion (as discussed in the first part of this article). Rosa therefore argues in favour of *institutionally intended staging and protected areas* that provide *slower experiences of time* (ibid., 148) for organisational members.

Institutionalised times for dialogue and trust-building communication can be hereby accentuated as ways of securing *socially sustainable platforms* for the individual's need of partial deceleration, besides positive structural effects as assets. Therefore, considering physical and psychological limits of employees by institutionalised dialogue proceedings support positive health promoting effects for organisational members. Top management and middle management may *bear in mind that individualised strategies of deceleration endanger a subject* of exclusion. In protection of valuable members of a division or team this cannot be tolerated. On the other hand, an individualised strategy might indicate a need shared with others, but expressed explicitly through the single individual. From a systemic viewpoint, such an understanding should instigate a superior to facilitate attentive cooperation and slower time experiences by integration and mindful dialogue for all members.

Summarising, in compliance with Rosa thoughts I conclude that especially in the modernity, under the late-capitalistic acceleration logic within organisations, the earlier developed insights by Luhmann (1968) about the *relation between assets and events must be given deep consideration* for the goal of mindful change in times of perpetual reorganisation. Trust and its decelerating motions must, in the light of Rosa (2005, 153), be regarded as an important institution and *as inherent complementarities* for any organisational development, instead of being rejected as too time-consuming to invest in.

### **3 The relationship between theory and empirical insights**

While *theoretical concepts* in the sense of ‘ideal type concepts’ (Weber 1922/1968) are useful for orientation, understanding and discussion (without necessarily being just mirrors of reality), practical *examples from specific realities* provide insights of a quite different quality. Everyday life in an organisation is experienced as much more multi-layered, context-specific, ambivalent and vague. Empirical insights are as important as a good theory, illuminating a socially complex practice. Norwegian working-life and action-researcher Gustavsen describes the connection between these two levels of scientific reflection as follows:

“The relationship between these two discourses cannot be defined in terms of the kind of logic which brings each piece of knowledge into its place in a larger, coherent, whole. They [empirical insights] are much more open and must be developed discursively, rather than settled logically. Since they are discontinuities between the local and the general, between descriptions of specific realities and general concepts, it follows that concrete ... experience does not automatically relate to general theory.”

Taking this idea into consideration, the focus in the next part of this article will be shifted to the *subjective perspective* on organisational changes and the question how middle managers themselves may experience their perpetually changing working environment as well as their various roles in it. While the theory unfolded above provides a positive target-orientated perspective in an ‘ideal typical’ sense, the individual’s everyday life experiences will show a much more heterogeneous mixture of ambiguity and struggle. In the light of theoretical deliberations up to now several questions could be raised empirically, such as: How do intermediates perform their tasks as agents of change? Are they as important to the process and to their subordinates as theoretically assumed far? Is trust even an issue for them at all? Does the aspect of deceleration become evident in their leadership tasks? What do intermediates need from their superiors in times of change? How do they meet the needs of their subordinates, and how do they cope alone for themselves?

In order to shed light on some facets of these questions, exemplarily empirical material will be presented and interpreted. In a qualitative interview transcript I have been looking for experiences that illuminate the perception of change, trust, mindfulness

and social sustainability from an intermediates subjective perspective during an organisational change process.

## **4 Roles and feelings experienced by an intermediate in times of change**

### **4.1 Context of the empirical example**

As part of the 8iNNO research project about “Organisational Mindfulness in Times of Change”, three middle managers took part in a workshop with the research team in order to reflect on their experiences within the change process of their organisation. They were asked by the research team to describe their roles and feelings in these times of change with the help of a metaphor, a picture. A transcription of this interview allows a closer look. So, a documented *subjective symbolisation and visualisation of own experience* is the focal point of the following analysis, with respect to trust related considerations. For this paper, I selected one exemplary part from a lengthy passage of metaphorical reflections in the group.

The organisation the interviewed middle managers work for is a non-profit organisation involved in the social service sector, organised in different divisions, according to specific clients. The organisation has a new managing director who aims at more economic efficiency. This involves reforms in different areas, like including personnel, structure and setting of priorities regarding contents of work.

One of the three middle managers participating is the head of a department<sup>5</sup> and superior of the two others. The other two, a female and a male, are division managers<sup>6</sup> (responsible for houses in which clients live and are cared for by teams of employees). Recently these intermediates have started to manage not only one but more houses each, so that the complexity of their tasks, and the time they can actually spend with their teams, has changed already. Additionally, they got tasks in the reorganisation process such as merging previously separate work units.

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<sup>5</sup> In German his role / function is named „Bereichsleitung“.

<sup>6</sup> In German their role / function is called „Einrichtungsleitungen“.

The research team accompanied the process in which residential clients and teams had to move out of different houses into one bigger building, providing impulses for a 'mindful' change process during a period of three years. Thusly sensitised for such matters, it will be interesting to see which main issues will be highlighted by an experienced practitioner. The interview situation from which my example is selected took place in the second year of their process. The following metaphor-example, in answer to the question of how the intermediates so far have experienced their role, function and feelings in the change process, is described by the female middle manager, for this text anonymised as Mrs. Anderson.

#### **4.2 The metaphor: To feel "like Hercules with five arms or so"**

The following metaphor was described by a dedicated middle manager who has been working in the organisation for 15 years. Her division deals with psychiatric clients in three groups of residents, cared for by her three teams. Only recently, this three groups were moved in together under one roof, each group living on one floor of the newly build house. Mrs. Anderson describes how she sees herself with regard to tasks and employees in the change process<sup>7</sup>:

"I have a picture of myself now like Hercules with five arms or so. Somehow he also has such a protective shield in all directions, but also holes in it, in order to carry people in there ...."

Mrs. Anderson explains this picture of being a Hercules who has to cope with the challenges like relocating different teams into one building. This she describes further as moving into a construction site (bathrooms not ready, etc.), before she continues:

"Actually, it's going forward now, therefore I quickly pick someone up onto my arms, so that he also comes along. And then there are some services [in the duty roster] missing, well, one can do them, too. This is the feeling I have, how I felt in the change process."

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<sup>7</sup> The following sequence is based on an interview transcript. All quotations as well as the paraphrased parts are as neatly as possible derived and translated from the original material.



The Hercules's arms she then describes more closely as a bulwark "downward", "in order to ward off things" from the people under her protection. Mrs. Anderson further explains that the broad spectrum of her professional duties (in her managerial role as well as within her teams) would need protection and at least five arms to be handled properly. In addition, she describes how she performs in her role as a middle manager with respect to her team members in the change process:

"In any case, I feel like having a pioneering role, and also an aura of optimism ... Somehow we can do it together, always trying to cope as a team, together. Always saying: 'We are one and have to accomplish that together', and putting everybody on an equal footing. That has been valuable in the change process ... The accelerating change process led to a lot of insecurity within the body of employees because of causality of house moving, new rota, all of this ... [This] created a lot of pressure, the colleagues had a considerable need for dialogue ... to clarify again and again 'what is now' and 'how will it be' and 'tell once again' and 'how will it be in one year from now' ... To realise and address such fears over and over."

It now will be fruitful to reflect on this vivid exemplarily description of Mrs. Anderson's about how she feels and acts in here role as a middle manager during the change process.

#### **4.3 Interpretation with respect to trust and change**

Mrs. Anderson describes herself in the ongoing change process as a **Hercules: A mythical hero** from ancient Greek who was given twelve superhuman tasks by his king in order to prove his worthiness to Godhood. In analogy, one can *imagine what her big managing tasks might be*: organising her three different teams into one unit in a new building, moving in while it is still a construction site, managing a broad spectrum of duties for herself and for the teams, "picking people up" and taking them along while acknowledging their insecurities by answering questions over and over again, as well as filling in for a shift in a team by herself, and overall protecting her employees and the interests of her division as part of her leadership role.

As a Hercules, Mrs. Anderson pictures herself in the middle of the change process as someone with **“five arms at least”** to handle all the tasks properly. She obviously needs many arms to perform all the things she describes to be doing: to carry, to protect, to ward off, and to do shifts, all at the same time. With that she is suggesting a heavy workload. But, why five arms? This middle manager’s *fivefold focus of attention and initiative* might be on: The top management resp. the new CEO, the department manager as her superior, and her three teams (from three former houses) which only recently moved in together into the new building. She seems to work for all of them without letting one down. The picture of “five arms” may indicate that each of these five partners or action fields have to be simultaneously acknowledged. Coordinating five parallel arms – understood as branches of her role – can be imagined as sometimes not so easy. Nevertheless, the question which one is paramount will not occur with five arms, each one seems equally important and gets a hand.

The next consideration goes back to **where all her tasks come from**: While the mythical Hercules had to report to his king, Mrs. Anderson as a middle manager is accountable to her CEO, her department leader, her teams and clients, and probably also standards she sets to her work by herself. Even if not expressed particularly, it seems that she does not only receive tasks from her superiors, but she is also warding some of them off. As well, a tendency of putting more on her plate than her expected share, like occasionally performing additional duties in a team, can be recognised. These aspects have to be examined further.

First, specifics of the *corporate culture* may be considered. The non-profit organisation Mrs. Anderson is working for is a diaconical institution. The commandment of love, the caring for others, could also be related to the professional identity and attitude in this field of work. Being *respected for the burdens one takes* could be part of the social expectations. What does this female middle manager feel she has to give?

Second, especially under the perspective of trust-building in times of change, her strong personal dedication could also be understood as *a way of giving an impression of closeness to her teams* and their tasks, needs, concerns, and burdens. Through this,

this middle manager might be experienced by her employees as ‘one of them’ *and* as ‘their superior’ at the same time. Closing the hierarchical gap by sharing chores may favour employee’s perception of her supportiveness and trustworthiness. On this basis, she might reach her subordinates more easily when doubts or fears occur. Informal interactions and shared duties can also be a source of information with respect to the social atmosphere, as well as with to concrete issues. *So, from a managerial point of view one could say: doing these additional shifts is not only a helpful attitude of Mrs. Andersons, but provides probably valuable insights and social contact with her teams. Therefore her actions might not just be considered as a lack of the ability to delegate.*

Furthermore, under the assumption that the new CEO of the organisation as the bringer of the ‘accelerating changes’ might stir insecurities as the promoter of the ‘accelerating changes’, she mentions that it might become even more important to *let employees feel that their direct superior is close, understanding and caring towards them.* To say it with Luhmann: If system trust wavers personal trust should be strengthened by representatives of the system, particularly by the direct superior. In this light, the middle manager’s strategy makes a specific kind of sense.

One might asked **why the moving of three teams and their residential clients into a new bigger building provides such a managerial challenge** and what the Herculean tasks in it could be. Until quite recently, the teams cared for their clients in a normal house as part of an average neighbourhood. This concept of caring is based on community psychiatry, an achievement of the anti-psychiatry-movement of the 1960s and ‘70s. The fights of community psychiatry for human rights of psychiatric clients (to live like any other person as much as possible) led to employees in this field to whom these values became central. Therefore, an according professional self-understanding of (particularly the older) employees in this field of work can be expected. Moving residents from such a living project into a bigger building, together with other groups of clients and their carers, might be seen as a setback to the institutionalisation of residents, like in a nursing home. Such a change may be prudent in

the light of financial considerations. Professional self concepts and values, however, may be felt to be in question. I feel that the self concepts and professional opinions of employees are closely related to the actual setting of their work.

Mrs. Anderson speaks in her metaphor about **“a broad spectrum of professional duties, for herself as well as within her teams, which would need protection and five arms at least to be handled properly.”** Which kind of professional duties are in need of protection and have to be “handled properly”? For instance, it has to be handled properly in the sense of *professionally* –the clients are to be supported to adapt to the new situation – in the new building as well as in the perhaps unfamiliar living area of the town. The very *work with the residents* may be affected fundamentally by the new location (in this specific case). For example: On the one hand, the new building may provide more luxury, like bathrooms directly attached to the rooms of residents. On the other hand, this would make it more difficult to notice when a client needs assistance in the bathroom. If missed, this could lead to much more work, unpleasantly so. Moreover, when moving in the new building, these bathrooms were not yet finished. For a while the teams therefore had to care for their residents under such suboptimal conditions. As well, one can imagine that construction noises are not likely to lead to relaxed clients. A second example: Residents lived in a neighbourhood they were accustomed to. They have to be familiarised with new surroundings, until they feel secure using its shops, cafes, parks, visiting a doctor, and know the nearest bus stop and its name. But this may mean more than just inconveniences: Psychiatric clients *specifically need a reliable structure*; otherwise they tend to decompensate. This fact alone leads to the assumption of a more time-consuming support during the transition process (in two respects: teams support residents, and division manager supports teams). In conclusion, members of the three teams which before were working in separate houses and are now located in one new building may, for various reasons, feel quite burdened. They may not be spontaneously comfortable with the new situation and in dire need of reassurance (like their clients): the courtesy of patience and understanding is *needed in the teams as well as in the work with resi-*

*dents*.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Mrs. Anderson describes in her metaphor to provide as a division manager acknowledgement and reassurance for her employees “again and again” in her role as a division manager.

Continuing along the narration of the metaphor, Mrs. Anderson describes to **carry a shield** in one of the Hercules’s hands. She explains to use it for *warding off things*, especially *downward* in favour of her employees. What exactly she wards off remains vague in this passage, but it seems to concern demands from above. Therefore, it could be regarding further ideas, changes or expectations of the new CEO who conducts the changes, which could lead to even more insecurity for employees (or even the residents?), if not restricted. In the light of what has been said before, attempts of intermediates to limit and decelerate further new ideas and changes from the management can be understood better. Stressed caregivers might lead to stressed clients, which would endanger them on a fundamental level. Therefore, settling in the residents and their caregivers probably must be Mrs. Anderson’s primary professional concern. The example illustrates in which way specifics of a social situation determine professional actions of intermediates. “Warding things off” could be, if not set into context, be easily misinterpreted as defence against legitimate claims, as mistrust or obstinate refusal by Mrs. Anderson and her teams. In other parts of the organisation, with another kind of clients, the moving into such a new building might work out quite differently. By asking *what kind of sense a given behaviour does make* it becomes evident why in this constellation it might be prudent to prevent her team from further expectations in this phase of the change process.

The Hercules’s **shield has holes** because, as Mrs. Anderson explains her picture further, through them subordinates can enter safety: she describes to “carry people in there” behind her shield. Shielding others, especially the weaker people, is an integral part if not the very reason of a hero’s job. But, normally a hero’s shield does not have holes. These holes make our metaphorical Hercules vulnerable; she could get hurt

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<sup>8</sup> From a psychoanalytical point of view, one might think of the affects of “transference” (from the clients to the team), in order to understand the described pattern. The specific field of work is often mirrored in effects on the people who work in it: feelings and defence patterns in teams can, in this respect, be linked to what happens or is needed in the actual working environment.

through them. I feel that she is not so much protecting herself, but is thinking more about others and her tasks. This impression is supported by her symbolisation of “how she feels in the change process” – like using five arms instead of two on a regular basis, by doing shifts in the duty roster, and by describing herself as a pioneer in the change process who acts very patiently and provides explanations “again and again”. Furthermore, one may muse on why she pictures a shield but *no sword*: Does she feel to be a strictly defensive hero? She seems to need superhuman strength like Hercules to perform all her duties – one *may wonder about this humane middle manager who is but just human* and thereby physically and emotionally not without limitations. A danger of being overly burdened by the tasks of a change agent besides the ‘normal’ duties as an intermediate becomes clearer. Who cares for the middle manager? And how does she care for herself? These thoughts cannot be answered by the quoted metaphor alone.

Besides a heroic and never ending involvement as a middle manager in the change process of the non-profit organisation struggling for survival, in this metaphor a *demanding as well as carrying and nurturing notion* toward her subordinates is expressed: Mrs. Anderson describes herself in “a pioneering role” and surrounded by an “aura of optimism”.

**A pioneering role** indicates to be at the frontier; it is a zone of the unknown and of danger. Herein, some kind of fascination can be found. One does not become a pioneer by staying back; it is about daring to go and face the unknown, the unexpected, and to deal with it. A pioneer, I feel, is *a person who likes the challenge*. This might include a tendency to get bored if things are just the same for too long. Therefore, innovation and pioneering spirit may go hand in hand. A pioneer might even allow for a sacrifice in order to extend a frontier, but will also try to protect the ones under his or her might. The middle manager in our example seems to like her many different challenges. Mrs. Anderson does not complain and instead describes in her metaphor a constitution (five arms and an aura of optimism) which allows for her to meet all her tasks.

That leads to the **aura of optimism** Mrs. Anderson speaks of. According to her, everybody can feel safe in this aura: It seems to be something warm, a halo of inclusion. By “putting everybody on an equal footing” she levels off hierarchical differences, as proposed above. In the name of “we will cope together, as a team” she seems to *strengthen solidarity* and the feeling that nobody is left alone. Through this, she creates a slogan, an exhortation to hold out. This may help her employees to follow the ongoing process. In addition, Mrs. Anderson describes “picking someone up onto her arms, so that he also comes along”. Those who do not walk will be walked, it seems. Overall the middle manager expresses her intention to lead her employees in the right direction – in terms of the change process – by protecting them as well as pushing them.

Mrs. Anderson summarises the efficiency of her strategy: **“That has been valuable in the change process”**. The value she indicates could be substantiated as a seemingly successful combination of trust-building measures and change-supporting measures. Thereby, the *task of an intermediate of finding a balance between interpersonal and structure-related parts of her role* becomes more evident. She seems to act as an agent of the change as well as an agent of her employees, as the following passage illustrates once further.

Mrs. Anderson describes emotional tensions in her teams: **“The accelerating change process led to a lot of insecurity within the body of employees ... it created a lot of pressure ... and fears.”** In *answering and acknowledging expressed insecurities, pressures and fears* she explains how she addresses and acknowledges these emotions by dialogue. In recurring communication she describes to “realise and address” insecurities of her staff. This seems to be quite a repetitive task. “Again and again” telling the employees “what is now and how will it be and tell once again and how will it be in one year from now” requires probably a great deal of attentiveness, understanding and patience. It appears that *particularly by this attentive and caring attitude* of Mrs. Anderson as a middle manager she proves her trustworthiness to her subordinates – she patiently lends her ear to them “over and over”. This passage illustrates both the

*repetitive motions of personal trust* as well as it emphasises on the *decelerating aspect* this kind of trust demands. The passage “Again and again ...” gives, even by reading it, a distinct impression of slowing down, of being in a loop, or in slow motion. For Mrs. Anderson *dialogue seems to be her main answer to the fears inspired particularly by an acceleration of the change process*, as she puts it.

I also come to think that the middle manager in our example is *sympathetic to the fears* of her employees. That would explain why she can be that patient and understanding in the first place. And it could explain the necessity for “downward protection” even better. From what we know so far, there definitely are insecurities on the operative level, expressed and to be expected ones: The organisation is newly led by a CEO who might not yet be judgeable and is therefore not fully trusted to really know how to secure the future of the organisation. Due to political decisions and attitudes in the social service sector, the financial situation is tight and might not to be expected to improve. Through this, there is a rational need for *questioning of and reassurance from* well-informed representatives of the system, because some fears are well rooted in existential insecurities from the employee’s perspective. This also would explain the need for an “aura of optimism” from the middle manager – as a bulwark against a fear which, if spreading on a broader scale, could as well paralyse and endanger the whole endeavour. Insecurities therefore have probably different sources in reality (politics, new CEO, new work situation, disoriented residents), besides inner tensions due to a psychological coping with the changes.

**In conclusion**, reflecting on this passage about her experiences of leadership with respect to trust, it can be highlighted: *Social reassurance* – which can, as far as theory goes, neither be dismissed nor accelerated – is, according to the metaphor, provided repeatedly by the middle manager in our example. Employee’s recurring insecurities and fears in the “accelerating change process”, as Mrs. Anderson puts it, demand explicitly for *an answer which lets them trust in her* on different levels: As a person who understands *them*, as the representative of their part of the organisation *towards* the hierarchy, as a representative of the system *bringing its logic to* them, and thereby let



them feel trust in the system *through* her. With respect to personal trust and system trust, these four aspects have to be *balanced* by the middle manager in this reorganisation process. As well, it can be concluded as well that Mrs. Anderson's Herculean, perpetual, constant, attentive, patient and understanding qualities as a mindful superior seem actually to *gain her the trust of her employees*. In further parts of the interview, where the other two middle managers (her superior and her colleague) give feedback, this impression is supported, and it is indicated that her attentive strategy is perceived as quite effective. So, by *honouring the need for deceleration and by securing the asset of trust* she mindfully seems to enable her teams to accept and abide by the ongoing steps of the change process.

## **5 Conclusions from the empirical reflections and the theoretical framework**

The discussed example illustrates a little *how an intermediate actually performs* her duties as a mindful change agent and superior in practice. The short metaphorical description gives valuable insights in how roles and feelings of a middle manager and of employees might look like in times of change. As well, it vividly shows *how trust can be built and secured*. Additionally, it demonstrates how *deceleration* can be achieved in order *to provide social anchors and to prevent social erosion*, and thereby making changes possible.

In our example, the thesis of the *importance of the role of the direct superior* in a change process is confirmed, as indicated by the theoretical reflections before. Supposedly most often middle managers are the first to be addressed for reassurance when insecurities concerning change occur. Strengthening intermediates for such *social requirements* of their roles as well as acknowledging the *additional workload* related to these tasks in times of change would be prudent within every organisation of the modernity.

The *issue of time* has been highlighted in the example as well. Acceleration is mentioned by the middle manager as a particular problem she seemed to have answered by *decelerating motions of dialogue and repetition of acknowledgement, explanation*

*and reassurance*, explicitly addressing the needs, insecurities and fears of employees. According to the example, *through such motions trust became secured and change feasible*. Additionally, the example illuminates how a superior as *a representative of the system bridges the present to the future* by strengthening the asset of trust against the event of change. Also it shows how *repetitively demanding* such a task can be and how trust provides a social stability anchor people can carry on with: as a *social basis for the change*, based on acceptance, understanding, support of employees and on the promotion of the process.

*Feelings about superiors* who initiated changes from above have been indicated or implicitly expressed by the intermediate in the example. Such were related to finding oneself in a pioneering role as well as to an urgent requirement of downward protection, with respect to a proper professional handling of tasks concerning the own division. *Deceleration* has been discussed as a main issue in this respect; socially as well as probably in accordance with the clients. Top management may not always understand with which obstacles a certain workforce in a specific area of the organisation has to cope. Staying in good contact, *supporting intermediates in their mediating role* and providing reliable information and backup can be certainly of help.

Insecurities and *needs of employees* are addressed in the example explicitly; they have been to some extent discussed and understood. However, *own needs, fears or limits of strength of a middle manager* only implicitly became an issue in this particular example. On the one hand, the example illustrated most profoundly that in perpetual re-organisationing processes especially a middle manager is in a *most important position as a change agent* by being close enough to employees, addressing their needs and enabling them to come to terms with an ongoing process. Thereby, the intermediate's function as a 'protective factor' and a 'failsafe guarantee' by *means of dialogue and social protection* becomes more explicit. As well, a *high identification* with given tasks might be of help for such a role. On the other hand, mindfulness to the change process and to employees may easily correspond with an *over-use of own resources*. Changes often mean psychological stressors as well as addi-

tional work, simply through the need of new concepts, considerations, procedures and routines which have to be developed and hedged and coped with. Therefore, *balancing these sides of the middle management role wisely may be imperative* under a long-term perspective of a good role management – from the organisational as well as from a personal perspective. *How intermediates can be supported in this respect* has to be, from my point of view, an urgent subject of further research from my point of view.

Consequently, this leads to *considerations about the construct of ‘mindful change’ itself*. By the metaphor, it becomes more evident that in practice mindfulness of change is concerned with three levels: structures, interactions and persons. The middle manager in the quoted and construed metaphor illustrates what ‘mindfulness in times of change’ means to her in practice: only her *sensitivity in dealing with personnel’s anxieties as well as providing for orientation makes changes possible on the social level*. Such leadership builds on trust and cooperation, participation and dialogue. I presume the described attitude as well supports a socially sustainable working environment, as theoretically discussed before. Thereby, these empirical insights underline a further differentiation of the concept. The approach of Becke for “Organisational Mindfulness” (cf. Becke, Behrens, Bleses, Evers & Hafkesbrink 2011) targets the quality of work particularly on a structural level (by recurring communication through regulated dialogue spaces, routines of interaction, rules for reflection). Such structures provide an important framework and orientation for socially valuable interactions – and *can* be used, but not have to be used! Participatory structures are very important prerequisites but only as good as the organisational members are who are using them, allowing them to be used, and thereby *breathing life into them by a corresponding attitude*. Bringing such structures to life is what has to be added by persons, through an interactional and a personal level of mindfulness. Therefore, *people must be supported to be able to act accordingly*, particularly under stressful conditions (like in times of change). Aspects of what this can mean have been described by Mrs. Anderson for her specific situation. In other contexts, different means may be prudent, with respect to the actual field of work, its people and its issues. Neverthe-

less, from a psychological point of view all three of these layers of mindfulness have to work together. How exactly people can be strengthened on these social levels may very much depend on context, profession, personal qualification and attitude. But it seems to me, without its organisational members a change process becomes pointless. Therefore it can be concluded that *social prerequisites of change* ought to be taken into account more seriously.

Organisational change processes of the modernity tend to produce winners and losers within the workforce as an *unintended side effect*. The practice example showed how work-intensive and important a minimising of such effects can be. Social and emotional damage of employees (on all levels of an organisation) through restructuring may not be intended but costs a lot – the organisation, the person concerned, and the social system as a whole. Therefore it is particularly worthwhile to *take all reasonable measures to mitigate or prevent such damages* in the first place. The approach of ‘mindful change’ offers ways of taking this into account.

While through theory a dualistic role of intermediates – responsibility for themselves as well as for the performance and health of their employees – as been highlighted, with respect to trust and change additional coordinates of the role-making of middle managers can be designated. As shown by the metaphor, in the perception of their team members an intermediate can become *an important mediator of trust in several respects*:

- First, as a trustworthy person who hears and understands *subordinates* (by listening and acknowledging).
- Second, as a representative of an organisational division or team *in* the hierarchy (for instance, by negotiating needs of the division to executives above).
- Third, as a representative of the system *toward* the own division or team (by explaining and supporting changes of the system as a whole into the work unit).

- And fourth, supporting trust in the system itself *through* the intermediate (the system, represented by a trustworthy person, becomes perceived as transparent and reliable; instead of distant and unpredictable).

Such simultaneity and many-sidedness of the intermediate's role with respect to trust, time and change demand a differentiated *acknowledgement of the multifaceted functions of middle managers* in the modernity.

*Furthermore, socially sustainable working conditions*, understood as conditions fit to support human needs and well-being, may be found endangered by change processes. Taking the so far outlined considerations under advisement, important focal points for counter-actions are obviously the *structural, social and psychological prerequisites* of an organisation. Dialogue and social protection have to be secured foremost under difficult conditions. But, social skilfulness and empathy are not equally given to everybody. As well, even good people find it hard to act accordingly if under stress. Therefore, *in particular top management is strongly advised to support such issues on all levels* to strengthen the organisation and its members for the demands of modernity. For instance, *assistance for middle managers* can be given by leadership principles and internal programs of social schooling, training and coaching. Underlining the importance of social skills in the accelerating modernity, on the one hand it may be prudent to support middle managers to emphasise on the social side of their role. On the other hand their confidence in doing so might, socially sustainable speaking, need backup as well.

Further research of the psychological side of perpetual change processes is of interest with respect to trust and its decelerating motions: As far as I see it, *intermediates will play an increasingly important mediating role in organisations of the modernity*. Their mindful and skilful performance as agents of change as well as of people makes them a focus of interest, socially as well as structurally.

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