

Trust in Higher Education: Conceptualisations

Several studies document dissolution of trust and primacy of accountability in higher education (Massy, 2003; Enders, 2005; Amaral, 2007; Harvey, Newton, 2007; Harvey, Williams, 2010). However, it can be argued that although many accountability schemes have been launched to (formally) promote trust, they hardly refer to the different theoretical perspectives as to how trust may be achieved (Stensaker, Harvey, 2011).

To fill this gap, Stensaker and Gornitzka (2009) distinguish two theoretical perspectives on trust. These are: *the rationalist-instrumental perspective* and *the normative/cognitive perspective*. *The rationalist-instrumental perspective* is based on the assumption that individuals follow the logic of consequentiality. If not induced to do otherwise, individuals pursue their self-interest and maximise their own utility. Others can be trusted to the extent that there are effective mechanisms of control. From this perspective, trust is established through the existence of independent actors and auditors, assigned to check the quality. Trust will develop as an effect of control. Procedures, standards and norms, established by the auditors, function as proxies of trust. *The normative/cognitive perspective* starts from the assumption that relative stable sets of norms, values and rules underpin social relations of actors involved. Such norms are internalised by all actors because it is socially unacceptable not to follow them. Trust is then established on the basis of the existence of norms and social obligations to act appropriately in order to account for ones' behaviour. With regard to higher education, from this perspective, trust is achieved when higher education institutions, over time, demonstrate accountability through the results and outcomes produced. The reputation of a given institution then becomes a proxy for trust.

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