Exercise: Explaining "Swift Trust"

Imagine that you join a product development project group. It consists of experts/specialists from various departments of your organization as well as representatives from suppliers and customers. This is the first time you work together. Nevertheless, it appears that trust is present in your group right from the start. **How is such "swift" trust possible?** Consider the following:

1. What are the incentives for you and for the other group members?

2. Which rules and roles are followed routinely?

3. What kind of learning takes place in the initial phase?

4. Why are leaps of faith involved? Or are they not?

Readings before/after exercise:

> Meyerson et al. (1996) Swift trust and temporary groups. In: Kramer & Tyler (eds.) *Trust in Organizations*. Sage, pp. 166–195.
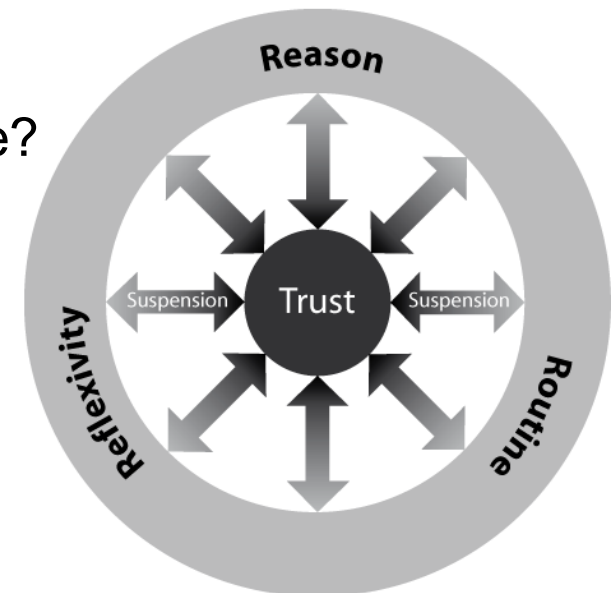> Möllering (2006) *Trust: Reason, Routine, Reflexivity.* Elsevier, pp. 105–111.

Figure: Trust Wheel (Möllering 2006: 110)

Instructor Notes

You may want to discuss before (or after) the exercise how realistic the scenario seems to be to the participants. Have they experienced swift trust themselves?

As for the timing of the exercise, this could vary from a few minutes (spontaneous brainstorming) to an hour or more, e.g. when you give participants a bit of time to think of initial ideas on their own or in pairs, then develop the ideas in small groups (each group tackling a different question 1-4), groups presenting their thoughts, followed by a general discussion and linking back to the readings.

When participants are supposed to read the texts beforehand, the exercise gives opportunities to check and apply concepts from the readings.

When doing the exercise without prior reading, it is important to refer the participants to the texts so they can extend their intuitive insights with more systematic concepts afterwards.

The Meyerson text is the main source on the concept of "swift trust"; the Möllering source refers to Meyerson and it describes the "Trust Wheel" figure at the bottom right. The four questions in the exercise follow the components of the Trust Wheel, i.e. Q1. Reason, Q2. Routine, Q3. Reflexivity, Q4. Suspension.

Follow up, advanced discussion topics could be, for example, if "swift" trust is "proper" trust (or is it just a shallow, fragile precursor to deeper, resilient trust)? And how deep does trust have to become for a project to be successful? A more practical question to participants could be, if they think that project groups should just rely on "swift" trust and skip any "kick-off" activities at the start of a project. What makes it possible for a group to set off rather swiftly?

Feel free to get in touch if you have questions or comments on this exercise: guido.moellering@uni-wh.de