

## **Kutsyuruba, B. & Walker, K. (2021). The lifecycle of trust in education: Leaders as moral agents**

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**Kutsyuruba, B. & Walker, K. (2021).**  
*The lifecycle of trust in education: Leaders as moral agents.*  
**Edward Elgar Publishing. 226 pages. ISBN 13: 978 1800371316**

Reviewed by: Derek Stovin, University of Winnipeg

Kutsyuruba and Walker's *The Lifecycle of Trust in Education: Leaders as Moral Agents* is a very timely, useful, and thought-provoking book that consolidates the authors' research and offers a synthesis of their writing over the past 15 years. It consists of a total of 16 chapters over an easy-to-read 232 pages organized into three parts: understanding trust; trust lifecycle; trust brokering and moral agency. Within each part, the authors embed an excellent review of the literature while drawing directly upon their own research so readers can hear authentic voices of active and engaged school leaders. I found that their style allowed me to feel like I was participating in the various conversations about trust and encouraged me to reflect upon my own related experiences of trust in various organizational, professional, and personal contexts.

Part I provides a grounding for the remainder of the book. It helps readers gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of trust and some insights into its importance. A key concept, or perhaps philosophy, underpinning the entire book is the authors' belief in the ecology of trust: "We view schools as living systems – inherently unstable, interdependent networks that cannot be understood through mechanical analytical processes, but through a holistic interpretation of how a school's social systems, created by the people within it, interconnect, develop, and progress" (p. 2). This concept is explored in Chapter 1, as is the idea that trust is "vital to the well-being of the living system ... [and] acts as an anti-toxin, a health-giving ingredient for the fostering of goodwill, excellent working conditions, and enhanced learning experiences" (pp. 2-3). The remaining chapters in Part I invite readers to consider: the nature of trust; dimensions of trust; the trust imperative in relationships; the usefulness of trust; fragility of trust; and distrust and mistrust. Chapter 2 provides definitions of trust and foundational concepts for studying trust. Chapter 3 moves on to various dimensions of trust, including inter-personal, socio-cultural, and organizational dimensions, which is built upon in Chapter 4 by discussing the importance of inter-personal trust for decision-making and the pervasiveness of trust in schools. Chapter 5 takes a whole-part perspective and analyzes both the universality and particularity of trust. Chapters 6 and 7 investigate some of the problems associated with trust or, rather, the absence or loss of trust due to its fragility and the vulnerability that it induces or requires.

Part II, "Trust Lifecycle," is considered by the authors to be "the centerpiece" (p. 13) of their book. It houses their "most important word picture ... [that] of a living system or ecosystem: the fragile cycle of life, death, building up and then crashing, then being restored and sustained – only to experience regress" (p. 211). In Chapters 8 through 12, the various stages of the lifecycle are presented and examined: establishing trust; maintaining trust; sustaining trust; breaking trust; and restoring trust. Chapter 8 focuses on school principals and how they can establish and develop trust in and through relationships. Chapter 9 continues examining the role of the principal and, in particular, various approaches for developing long-lasting trust – rather than the initial trust many are willing to grant at the outset of a relationship. Chapter 10 moves to the consideration of how this deepening of trust that is required for maintaining trusting relationships interacts, or goes hand-in-hand, with the school culture that is

developed over time through the many everyday interactions among school faculty and the ongoing interactions with other community members. Chapter 11 provides an analysis of how trust breaks down within a school culture and in relationships. It also looks at the conditions of mistrust and the negative outcomes that result from a breakdown in trust, including the possibility of a self-perpetuating negative cycle that is difficult to interrupt and reverse. Nonetheless, Chapter 12 offers trust-rebuilding strategies and approaches that school leaders may use to initiate the reparation of broken trust where possible.

Part III, “Trust Brokering and Moral Agency,” explores how the moral agency of leadership depends upon trust and relates to individual and group ethics. Chapter 13 begins by reminding readers that “teaching and leading in schools are essentially moral endeavors” (p. 141), with relationships among people as the crux of the “work.” The moral agency that arises for educational leaders from the intertwined nature of trust and personal-professional relationships is placed by the authors within a multidimensional ethical perspective. This includes, but is not limited to, the ethics of care, justice, and critique (Starratt, 1994) as well as the adoption of an ethic of community (Furman, 2004) related to the processes that group members develop and engage in together (pp. 146-147). Chapters 14 and 15 build upon this by considering how educational leaders’ moral agency is affected by their actions as trust brokers, which can lead to the building of social capital over time if a virtuous cycle displaying hope and compassion is generated and maintained. Approaches or strategies that might help educational leaders exercise their moral agency in these positive ways are also offered here. Chapter 16, the last chapter, provides a conclusion that synthesizes the authors’ understandings of and approaches to the topic of trustworthy leadership. Part III held great meaning for me because it “emphasized the importance of ... [educational leaders’] work with others, together with their diligent living and mature leading according to responsibilities, commitments, and courage” (p. 211). These ideas bear a strong resemblance to the themes I found from my recent research that explored the experiences of academic administrative leaders in higher education: the facilitation of positive individual relationships; the stewardship of communities; and commitment to personal-professional ideals and ideas (Stovin, 2021). I think, and hope, that Part III will hold meaning for other readers too, who will be able to similarly see themselves and their own experiences through this lens offered by Kutsyuruba and Walker based upon a career’s worth of innovative and desperately needed research.

At the end of each chapter, the authors provide an excellent and concise summary of the complex ideas explored within. A minor quibble I had with the structure of the book was that no summary was provided for each of the three major parts of the book. This would have been helpful as, at times, the bigger picture of the book’s purposes was difficult to keep in mind while engrossed in a particular chapter or moving from one chapter or part to another. Perhaps the next edition could include such summaries that would act as a guide or as a way to help internalize the new perspectives and concepts as they are building upon the ones introduced earlier. Without these summaries, the repetition necessary in reaching back to earlier findings, ideas, and elaborations meant I found myself sometimes wondering if I had already read a particular passage or how it differed from what was established earlier. An introduction to each of the three parts might also have been worthwhile so that each could stand alone as an independent resource.

The authors’ use of the concept of an ecosystem is, for me, crucial to the potential positive impact this book will have. This concept allayed my initial concern, stemming from the focus on trust in the title, that the book was simply identifying and elaborating upon a single characteristic that “good” leaders share and thereby relying upon an older trait theory of leadership. Thankfully, the book is anything but that. In my own research on academic administrative leadership in higher education, I have found it useful to think about organizational theories as falling into either cultural or bureaucratic categories and, similarly, about leadership theories as falling into either cultural or positivistic categories (Stovin, 2021). Kutsyuruba and Walker’s ecological approach clearly falls into the cultural theoretical perspectives on educational organization and leadership, which I believe is itself essential for developing and sustaining trust in both individual leaders and the broader educational system.

Given the unrelenting push of neoliberal and new public management movements in education and the not yet fully felt societal effects of the nearly unprecedented recent pandemic, this book is a must-read for both scholars and practitioners of educational policy and educational leadership. These forces and shared social experiences have eroded trust in educational spaces, placed personal-professional re-

relationships under great strain, and divided communities both large and small. Kutsyuruba and Walker's book will help policymakers, professionals, academics, and other educational leaders better understand and critically examine the phenomenon of trust – and hopefully help some to begin healing the fractures recently made more readily apparent in our educational and social systems.

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