# Trust in Expertise – Mini - MsoG Lab

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The diagram below reflects our understanding of the combined outputs of the workshop held during the "2018 Melbourne School of Government Conference: A Crisis of Expertise?".

The workshop attracted 20 participants from a wide range of organisations and disciplines interested in the question, *what are the drivers and barriers to public trust in expertise?* and to the participatory experience of collaborative conceptual modelling. The workshop was a truncated version of the 'MSoG labs' which generally takes at least a full day and in this case, was completed in less than 2 hours.
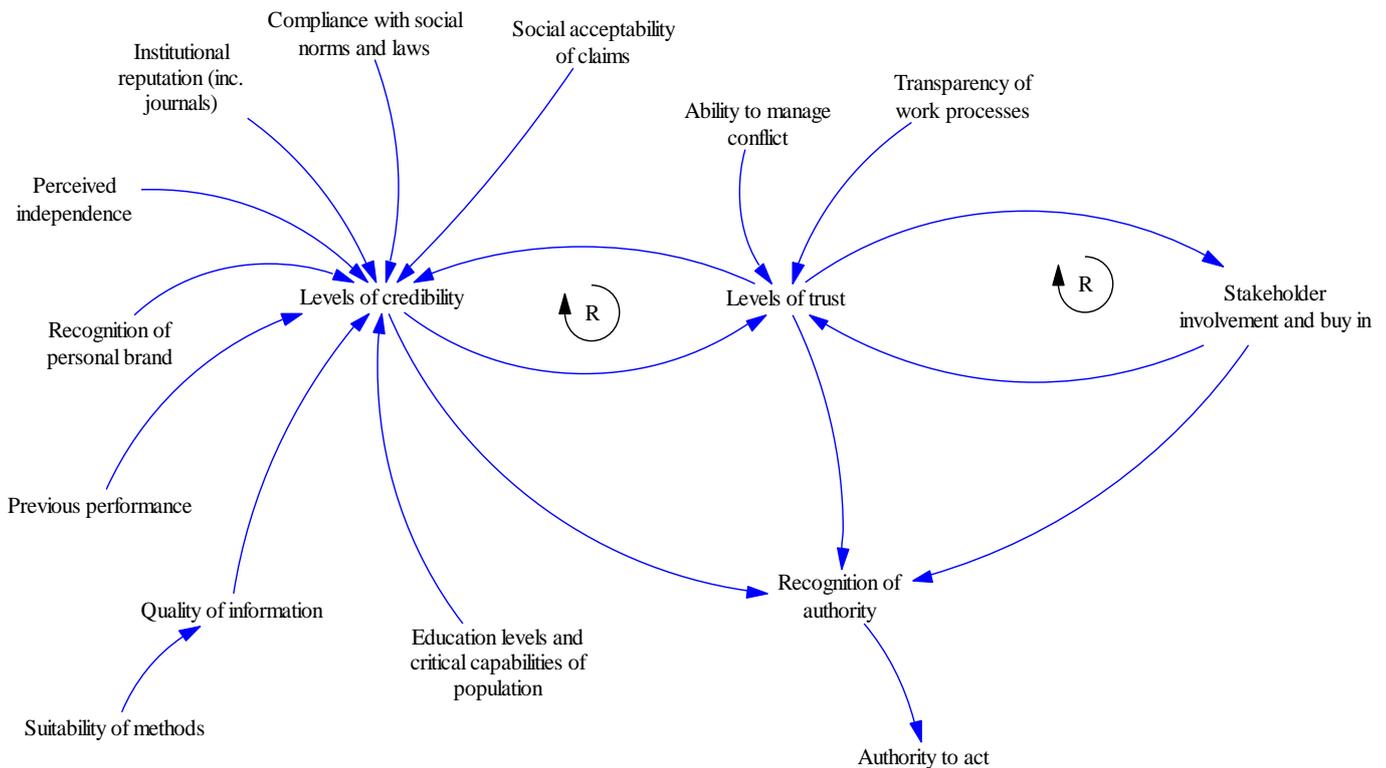
During the workshop participants should have developed a familiarity with the 'language' of system dynamics and come to understand the rationale for group model building as a transdisciplinary activity. The process for collaborative conceptual modelling in the workshop was:

1. Defining the question of interest
2. Brainstorming factors that affect that area
3. Drawing an individual causal loop diagram
4. Working in pairs to create a 'blended' causal loop diagram based on individual diagrams

After the workshop we:

1. Took the pair blended causal loop diagrams and contracted the overall number of factors by ensuring that the same ideas were written as a single factor.

2. Combined the diagrams to form a larger causal loop diagram reflective of the groups vision (figure above)
3. Conducted a brief analysis of the diagram and what it might mean in terms of trust in expertise. Discussion of the analysis follows.

*In the discussion below, all factors from the diagram are printed in **bold** for ease of recognition.*

Looking at the diagram above there are some clear ideas that arise and there are some questions that also arise. The first thing to note in the diagram is that there are only two feedback loops – both are reinforcing loops so that the connection between **credibility** – **trust** – **stakeholder involvement** can drive exponentially up or down until halted by another factor.

more stakeholder involvement = more trust

less stakeholder involvement = less trust

There is a little nuance in the difference between credibility and trust but they are such closely connected ideas that we shan't explore it here.

Looking at **levels of credibility** we can see that there are a lot of factors that contribute to/ drive credibility, bunching these factors together they include reputational factors in terms of being independent and providing quality knowledge at same time as being constrained by the social acceptability of the knowledge.

One point that didn't arise in the workshop but which we feel could be included is that **stakeholder involvement** could drive **social acceptability of claims**. If we add that into the diagram we see a new feedback loop:
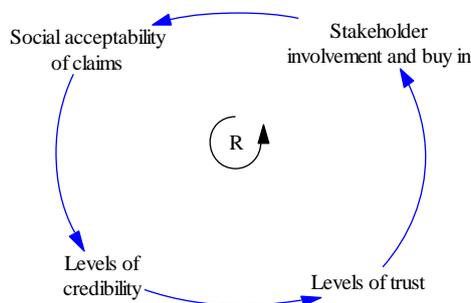
This reinforcing loop indicates the likelihood that including stakeholders in the processes of "expertise" whether they are governance or research processes, or other processes, is likely to create higher levels of trust in individuals and the associated practises. Involving stakeholders in governance is achieved in a variety of ways from consultative committees to deliberative democracy and citizen juries. In research, stakeholder involvement can be through co-creation, participatory action research techniques or citizen science. In any of these cases, part of the point is **transparency of work process** which also drives **levels of trust**. If **transparency of work process** is a driver of **trust** then we also need to consider how ethically we engage with communities – a citizen jury is a waste of everyone's time if there is no commitment to the outcomes, and research participants always deserve to be informed of research findings. Since reinforcing loops create exponential change, and we are not seeing this, it is worth looking for factors that might be acting against, or balancing, exponential change in **social acceptability, trust and stakeholder involvement.**

There are some other connections in the diagram that are worth noting and asking questions about. The connection between **education levels** and **levels of credibility** is one that interests me. When we look at this we ask what the relationship really is… is there *evidence* for a correlation between a population's average education level and the trust that it places in it's government and other experts? What would a graph of this look like? At what level of education are we most/least trusting? Or is trust based on the size of the gap between education level of the population and education level of the experts?

A note on process

In a longer collaborative conceptual modelling process we would now go on to look at each linear connection and ask – do we have evidence for this? For example: What is the evidence that **compliance with social norms and laws** affects **levels of credibility**? And so on through each set of factors. For a more quantitative analysis a group may work towards consensus on rating the impact of each factor. The results of that process can then be analysed to understand the leverage points in a system.

Further reading:

Newell and Proust, Introduction to Collaborative Conceptual Modelling

   https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/9386

   - A really good starting point for CCM processes

Meadows, D "Thinking in Systems"

   - A great book to get started on systems thinking

Newell and Dyball "Understanding Human Ecology"

   - A really good step by step introduction to model building using system dynamics and including quantitative data.

VENSIM PLE - http://vensim.com/ software for drawing causal loop diagrams