

Redefining trust, the citizen and the state

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Polis Summer School student Jocelyn Spottiswood (@spittswiggle) reports on the latest guest lecture by Robert Phillips (@Citizenrobert) of Jericho Chambers public relations and author of *'Citizen Renaissance'*.

My mum passed on two great pieces of advice about trust: 'Don't trust anyone with a mono-brow' and 'If they say 'trust me' don't!' Although personal grooming may be a somewhat questionable foundation on which to decide how trustworthy a person is it does highlight the innately human aspect of trust. In a world filled with global corporations, organisations, companies, and governments etc it is to the appointed or elected ambassador of these groups to whom we – the citizens – turn to for answers. As Robert Phillips said in his talk 'Trust is human. Leadership is human. The crisis of trust is a crisis of leadership.'

New technology, media and a better educated citizenship means that the old traditional notions of trust and power being questioned. We the citizens are also questioning the pre-conceived notions of citizenship and even *where* we are citizens. Phillips raised an interesting point: what do we mean by a state? If measured in terms of GDP then, as Phillips said, some media organisations such as Facebook and some big businesses are probably 'states'. As consumers of media and businesses we are citizens of these states and as such expect and demand a level of trust from their respective leaders. We want the humanity of leadership to be present and visible.



Justin King, Sainsbury

During his presentation Phillips drew on many different examples of people in positions of power (heads of 'states') including some who are not necessarily trusted. Phillips highlighted the idea of transparency – which for me is the key concept of trust – with his examples of Vincent de Rivaz (CEO of EDF Energy) and Justin King (CEO of Sainsbury's). The two would appear to stand on opposite ends of the spectrum. Phillips described a speech he witnessed by Rivaz in which he abused the term 'trust' by not only using it but also by getting up on stage in the first place and giving a speech that 'he clearly hadn't read or written' and asked his citizens for their trust but without supplying any transparency in return. At the other end of the spectrum is King whom Phillips detailed as metaphorically baring himself and Sainsbury's by marking himself out of ten in different criteria and then

having the same criteria marked by those in attendance. Unsurprisingly the answers did not match. The key factor here is the transparency offered by King as well as an element of empowerment offered to the crowd (Empowerment and Democracy is third on Phillips' 'Five Tests of Trusted Leadership'). King was rewarded in statistics that showed that Sainsbury's was more trusted than Tesco's.

Even if the content was not fully present at King's conference the appearance of it was. Phillips argued that appearance, in relation to trust, has grown in importance due to the lack of content we the citizens receive. Perhaps the best analogy offered by Phillips was that of the Incredible Hulk where the T-Shirt represents those in power and the body is the citizens. In a state of peace and well being the t-shirt fits, however once the pressure is raised and a reaction provoked the body expands, and the t-shirt, no longer restrictive, rips apart at the seams.

My question would be when does appearance cease to become more important than content to the citizen when

considering notions of trust?

This article by Polis Summer School student Jocelyn Spottiswood (@spittswiggle)

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