



# *trustworthy*

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ZHAW School of Management and Law

## **Call for Sub-themes**

### Trust-worthy: Building Bridges Across Institutions, Organizations, Politics, & Borders

Many grand challenges—such as those affecting societies, the environment, and global peace—have grown more pronounced amid the increasing complexity and dynamism of organizational contexts. In an era marked by geopolitical uncertainty, socio-political fragmentation, digital transformation, and shifting institutional landscapes, trust re-emerges as a foundational yet fragile element of organizational life and of organizations in flux. This situation reflects a world undergoing profound change along two dimensions: First, the technological context has been reshaped by the rise of digital platforms and social media, alongside developments in artificial intelligence (AI). Second, the socio-political context has shifted due to stronger stakeholder activism on grand challenges (e.g., climate change or economic/social inequality), increased societal polarization, heightened geopolitical tensions and risks, the politicization of business, and the abundance of information coupled with a rise in misinformation. At the same time, trust and *trustworthiness* are concepts that help us understand the dynamics of these relations and challenging topics. Trust is the willingness to become vulnerable to another individual or organization, based on the belief that this person or organization will act as expected and consistently, and not harm you. *Trustworthiness* is the extent to which trust is justified in light of an individual's or organization's behavior, traits, competencies, and actions. Organizations across different sectors (e.g., private, public, and non-profit) and interacting individuals must constantly navigate tensions between trust and

control, transparency and ambiguity, and resilience and vulnerability. *Trustworthiness* is relational; it is fallibly attributed rather than objectively verified and must be proven repeatedly over time. Once acquired, it must be nurtured and sustained through active communication, not passive silence.

Trust and *trustworthiness* are also dynamic and contested resource-built concepts, maintained and eroded across diverse organizational contexts from traditional hierarchies and fluid networks to algorithmic governance and crisis response. Trust is intrinsically connected to *trustworthiness*, the qualities of ability, benevolence, and integrity making an entity or an individual worthy of trust. By foregrounding both trust and *trustworthiness*, EGOS 2028 offers a lens through which to examine how organizations and people manage fragility, foster resilience, and imagine alternative ways of organizing. Such a lens might help us see and understand better how the challenges of today arise and why they keep emerging while other approaches make comprehension or solution-finding difficult or even impossible. The lens of trust and *trustworthiness* can help us better understand how people in organizations deal with diversity and inclusion, how they mobilize collectively, how they work innovatively, how governments function and adapt, and why some individuals or organizations betray trust by cheating and committing crimes. In short, this lens offers a wide range of novel possibilities for the EGOS community to discover fresh answers and approaches, as well as new outcomes and variables, when addressing today's grand challenges.

### **Timely concepts on multiple levels**

Trust and *trustworthiness* offer a timely, conceptually rich lens for rethinking how organizations function, adapt, and relate to their environments. As Aristotle reminds us, the primary reason for discussing trust is not to understand the concept philosophically but to put the issue of trust on the table and talk it through in specific, practical situations. By talking about trust, it can be created, and distrust mitigated. In contrast, not talking about trust can lead to ongoing distrust. This perspective is particularly relevant today, since trust has not been a central topic in recent organizational scholarship, despite repeated calls for its examination in the face of new technologies, organizational forms, and institutional settings. Trust comes into play whenever coordination must be achieved under conditions of uncertainty, interdependence, and incomplete

knowledge. In contemporary organizational contexts, shifting dynamics unfold simultaneously at the micro, meso, and macro levels. At the micro level, trust is embodied in everyday interaction through leadership practices and intercultural communication. As Václav Havel emphasized, trust does not arise from unilateral declarations but from shared commitments expressed as “we must trust one another.” At the meso level, trust plays a coordinating role in organizations and interorganizational relationships, supporting collaboration when formal contracts cannot anticipate every contingency.

*Trustworthiness* is demonstrated through consistent performance, care for partner interests, and adherence to shared values. At the macro level, collective action depends on shared expectations and legitimacy, with trust varying from highly particularized trust in specific actors to generalized trust in institutions and systems. Understanding how these levels remain intertwined becomes essential as boundaries between interpersonal dynamics, organizational coordination, and institutional legitimacy become increasingly blurred.

### **The Swiss and SML/ZHAW context and EGOS 2028**

Switzerland provides a fitting context for this exploration. Home to the UN’s European headquarters, the WTO, and countless international NGOs, Switzerland embodies a living laboratory of trust in practice, balancing neutrality with engagement, tradition with innovation, and local identity with global connectivity. The EGOS 2028 conference will serve as a platform to explore how trust in its many forms can be leveraged to address contemporary challenges, strengthen organizational resilience, and foster sustainable cooperation in an increasingly interlinked and complex world.