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**THE LOSS OF  
TRUST:  
CHANGING  
SOCIAL  
RELATIONS IN THE  
WORKPLACE IN  
EASTERN  
GERMANY**

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# The Loss of Trust: changing social relations in the workplace in eastern Germany<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Starting from the observation that many East Germans perceive a loss of trust in interpersonal relations since unification, I argue that as anthropologists we have to take these perceptions seriously and examine their validity. Working relations in the socialist past had specific traits, including their multi-functionality and the large amount of time colleagues spent together, that were different from working relations in Western capitalist countries. Both features influenced the character of communication and allowed for a mutual familiarity to develop, which was a prerequisite for the trust many placed in their colleagues. With the political changes, people of the former GDR not only lost familiarity with the workings of the system, but the nature of social relations in the workplace changed as well. This development contributes to the experience of loss, but closer exploration reveals that it is also due to a shift of risks. Thus, to understand the local interpretation we have to take into account structural circumstances. In addition, the theory of trust in interpersonal relations has to involve the largely dismissed dimension of work mate relations. Furthermore, there are hints that the political and economic transformation has led to narrower personal networks in which trust is placed almost exclusively in members of the core family. If this proves to be more than a transitional phenomenon, it would indicate that the post-socialist transformation in East Germany has led to a certain degree of 're-traditionalisation' of social relations.

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<sup>1</sup> This working paper is based on fieldwork I did as part of my research project on 'Changing Social Security Relations in eastern Germany' at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. An earlier version was presented at the joint colloquium with the Institute for Social Anthropology at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in Halle. I would like to thank the participants of this colloquium and especially John Eidson, Julia Eckert and Brian Donahoe for their helpful comments and language corrections.

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## Introduction

In 2003 during my fieldwork in eastern Germany, many people complained about what they perceived to be deteriorating social relations. Over and over they talked about ‘the loss of social cohesion’<sup>3</sup> and explained that ‘you cannot talk to anybody anymore’. Both statements suggest a felt loss of trust in interpersonal relations and imply the existence of different relations in the past. Although these remarks applied to various realms of life, the experience of loss was especially central in the workplace.

Given the frequency of such statements, the experience seemed to be central and widely shared. Thus, I began to wonder about the sources of this perception. Since statements relating to the past often tell us more about a present situation, it might have been possible that people who lost their social standing due to transformation express such feelings more often. However, many actors in different occupations with different educational backgrounds made similar remarks. They were made by people whose status remained the same as well as by people who actually gained in social status, for example a former teacher who was at the time of our conversation the head of a public agency. Therefore the experience is not bound to social status. In addition, these remarks were not only made by people who used to live more or less in agreement with the socialist system. Instead people with a more critical point of view or potentially conflicting life styles, such as a religiously active housewife or a gay man engaged in a sub-cultural music group, expressed themselves similarly. This indicates that the experience is shared by a wide range of different social groups.<sup>4</sup>

The ethnographic evidence of a widely shared experience reduces the possibility of analysing it, as often done, simply as a false nostalgia for the past.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to approaches that view these interpretations of the current nature of social relations as mere fantasy, I approach them as structured by specific social conditions and in this sense as real. In fact, especially the people who stood in more or less open opposition to the socialist system had no or almost no feelings of nostalgia for the socialist past as they remember their suffering well. Nevertheless, these experiences do not extinguish the feeling of loss of a special quality of social relations between work mates. To specify the conditions that frame the experience of loss, I will first introduce the scientific concept of trust. This is followed by a reconstruction

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<sup>3</sup> The German word *Zusammenhalt* can also be translated as solidarity, but I would argue that ‘social cohesion’ comes nearer to what people talk about.

<sup>4</sup> Although there is still a lack of ethnographic studies on trust in post-socialist literature, there are some hints that people in other countries perceive a loss of trust as well, see for example Torsello (2003).

<sup>5</sup> In German the phenomenon of nostalgia for the socialist past, that is, remembering ‘what was good in the GDR’; is often labeled *Ostalgie* (*Ost* means East in German) and is mostly negatively laden.

of the conditions of trust in the workplace under socialism. The last section describes interpretations of social relations today in the light of that past.

The aim of the paper is twofold. First, it proposes to explore workplace relations that have been largely neglected in the studies on trust, yet can be as important as friendship, patronage or kinship. The second aim is to show that the loss that people express is not an arbitrary interpretation of the past in order to deal with the present, but based partly in the structure of post-socialist political and economic transformation and the entailed changes in the sphere of risk. At the same time, trust has not vanished, but shifted from work-related relationships to other realms. This is accompanied by shifts in the conception of the private and the public.

### **The Concept of Trust in Interpersonal Relations**

Human beings have to deal with uncertainty and risk. To do this they build expectations about the future and about the actions of others. In the absence of perfect knowledge, human action often requires trust. As a scientific concept trust is highly ambiguous and its usefulness is contested in the social sciences. One of its inherent difficulties is that it is also widely used in everyday speech; so, first as an analytical concept it must be distinguished from its vernacular use. Trust often appears as being positive in itself, which is not necessarily the case in scientific discourse. Although trust may have an stabilising influence on political systems, people may trust ‘good’ as well as ‘bad’ people or ‘good’ as well as ‘bad’ systems.<sup>6</sup> Basing my analysis largely on the work of Luhmann (1988) and Seligman (1997), I concentrate on interpersonal trust and the different forms it can take, and seek to avoid any normative implications. I seek to include working relations among the potential trusting relations and try to specify the shift of risks and role expectations entailed in post-socialist transformation.

Trust as a solution to uncertainty and risk is distinguished in scientific discourse from confidence or faith. Sztompka sees the difference between confidence and trust as one between passive contemplation and active participation (1999: 24-25). More convincingly, Luhmann (1988), in his influential essay identifies the difference between confidence and trust mainly as based in the *perception* of one’s own agency. In his view, a relation is characterised by trust if people consciously “choose one action in preference to others in spite of the possibility of being disappointed by the actions of others” (Luhmann 1988: 97). Thus, if trust is disappointed, actors blame themselves for their false decision, or in the words of Luhmann react with “internal attribution” (ibid.). By contrast, in a state of confidence, people

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<sup>6</sup> On the relation between trust and the stability of political systems see for example Luhmann (1988: 104); on the morals of trusting relations see Baier (1986: 232).

do not believe that their action changes the outcome of a situation. Instead results lie in the decision of higher powers like God or nature, which they are not able to influence. Disappointment, then, is not dependent on one's decision to trust but externally attributed (1988: 96). Confidence in this approach is not inevitably passive, but it does not entail agency either, as the result of action is decided by other powers. For Luhmann the distinction between trust and confidence is linked to the difference between situations of risk and situations of danger respectively. He names it risk if people perceive that their decisions influence the outcome of the situation. If, in contrast, people do not consider alternative action, then the situation is one of danger, which individual action cannot influence.<sup>7</sup>

Leaving aside natural catastrophes, car accidents and the like, what distinguishes everyday social interaction characterised by trust from that characterised by confidence? As clear as it might seem theoretically, in 'real' life it is hard to differentiate between a situation of risk and a situation of danger. Seligman proposes the firmness of role expectations on which action is based as the distinctive feature (Seligman 1997: 24, see also Sztompka 1999: 24, FN 7). In his view, pre-modern role expectations were more binding and therefore, most human interaction needed confidence, not trust (1997: 37, 54). As modernity is characterised by growing differentiation of roles and, thus, a growing potential of conflicting role expectations, trust is needed more than in non-modern forms of society to fill the gap. The implied agency of the other constitutes trust as a central feature of modernity (1997: 67, 81).

According to Seligman the development of trust in modernity is connected to the emergence of the private and public realm with the private being the realm of trust. The connected social relation is modern friendship that is not reinvented as kinship and as such a peculiar modern solution to the problem of trust. This position regarding modernity and friendship could be criticised in several ways. For my purposes here, his description of friendship seems to be most crucial as it entails the features of trust in interpersonal relations. He stresses voluntariness and emotionality in friendship relations and more or less denies the exchange of goods within friendship. Friends are chosen independent of other social criteria such as kinship. Being aware of the long discussion about the existence of friendship in what he would call pre-modern societies, Seligman does not deny the existence of such bonds, but argues that they always have to be built into the existing kinship system (1997: 34-35).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Luhmann seems to indicate that confidence is the expectation of the proper functioning of an institution, while trust relates to expectations about interpersonal relations. Therefore, confidence seems to be the same as what Luhmann called "system trust" in his earlier writings (Seligman 1997: 19, Misztal 1996: 75).

<sup>8</sup> This view has been criticised as placing too much emphasis on kinship in these societies, where people also choose specific relatives for more intimate relations not entailed in their role expectations (Grätz, Meier, Pelican 2003: 24).

However, the basis of trust is not only the acceptance of the agency of the other, but at the same time an underlying assumption about a person's good will, the belief that he or she will not harm me.<sup>9</sup> But how are these expectations about the other's motivation constructed? Answering this question requires looking for conditions of trust in different societies. Luhmann (1988: 96) names familiarity as a precondition for both trust and confidence to emerge. Seligman (1997) raises the question more specifically and argues that familiarity is based on what he calls shared strong evaluations. The conditions for assuming shared evaluations are different in different societies and generate different trusting relationships. Therefore trust may be built into kinship ties, patronage networks or friendship. Friendship relations have been most often defined as grounded in the voluntary choice of individuals on the basis of mutual sympathy and therefore as symmetrical. By contrast, kinship relations are often characterised as asymmetrical and involuntary, while patron-client relations always entail an asymmetry.<sup>10</sup>

Working ties share many of the named characteristics. They can but do not necessarily entail kinship relations; they can but do not always include friendship. However, the literature neglects working relations as another possible trusting relation. I argue that this is due to a very narrow view of trusting relations in modern societies that dismisses other forms that may be equally important.

In addition, we do not know, as mentioned before, what precisely a risky situation is (respectively role conflicts in Seligman's wording) in which people rely on friendship in practice. I argue that different forms of modernity establish different risks that are to be overcome by different kinds of relations, depending on the wider social organisation.<sup>11</sup> One such relation may be friendship, another the relation between colleagues. Trust therefore shifts with the shifts of risks and the conditions of familiarity. In addition, even if filling a gap that was formerly filled by role expectations, relations between friends and, as I argue, between colleagues do not remain without prescribed role expectations. What changes then is the role expectations towards different possible social relations and the expectations concerning the private and the public. In the case to be described here, it is exactly these

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<sup>9</sup> Dasgupta (1988: 52, FN 3) also points to the assumption about the other's motivation.

<sup>10</sup> There has been some critique of the sharp distinction between these different types of social relations, proposing more fluidity. For example, patron-client relations neither exclude kinship (Boissevain 1966: 21-22) nor friendship (Mühlmann and Llaroya 1968: 7-8), while friendship relations may contain a considerable amount of inequality as well as instrumentality. Similarly, kinship may turn into friendship and vice versa (Grätz, Meier, Pelican 2003). Additionally, all these relations may entail instrumental as well as emotional bonds.

<sup>11</sup> There has been a debate whether socialism as it existed in Central Europe and the Soviet Union was a modern form of society (see for example Srubar 1991). I would argue that in the description given here by Seligman, that is growing differentiation of roles, declining importance of social origin and kinship, the GDR was modern. At times social origin and, as I would add, gender, were less decisive for the individual life course than in Western countries.

expectations that have changed with the transformation in East Germany, and with them, assumptions about other people's motivation.

Seligman (1997) names dense social networks as one possibility building up familiarity. The question is whether the density of social networks indicates anything other than the fact that in such networks, relations tend to be multi-functional, meaning that people relate to each other for example as kinsmen and at the same time as neighbour or buyer and seller<sup>12</sup> and whether or not density requires a certain amount of time spent together as a crucial factor for the possibility of building experience. Mutual shared experience increases the possibility of subjective anticipation about the probability of the other's trustworthiness.

Although time spent together is taken as an indicator of a strong social tie (Granovetter 1973: 1361), it seems to be taken for granted that this is confined only to voluntary relationships, otherwise why would workplace relations be dismissed as strong ties? I suspect that this is because it confirms the experience of Western countries, where work mate relations tend to be loose. For example, Granovetter states: "For work related ties, respondents almost invariably said that they never saw the person in a non-work context" (1973: 1372). Although such ties may be helpful in overcoming specific risks, they seemingly do not fulfill the conditions for trust. As we will see in the next section, this was different during socialism in the GDR.

### **Conditions of Interpersonal Trust during Socialism**

In light of the literature, proposing loss of trust after socialisms' demise seems to be rather paradox. In fact, most of the literature concerning the economic and political organisation of socialist societies affirms a systematically in-built distrust. Extensive control and economic shortfalls are interpreted as having led to widespread distrust in the proper functioning of the state and its institutions, as well as in interpersonal relations. Verdery (1996: 24) for example describes the situation as follows:

"The work of producing files (and thereby political subjects) created an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion dividing people from one another. One never knew whom one could trust, who might be informing on one to the police about one's attitudes toward the regime or one's having an American to dinner."

Other authors focus on the consequences of economic shortfalls on social networks that led to a wide range of instrumental relations.<sup>13</sup> The insufficiency of the economy was to be

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<sup>12</sup> This nature of relations has been called multiplexity in research on personal networks or "multi-stranded" by Gellner (1988: 44).

<sup>13</sup> For an overview on informal relations during socialism see Sampson (1985/86).

compensated for by modes of acquiring goods and services in ways alternative to official modes of distribution. The importance of kinship and ethnic networks for access to goods and services, it has also been argued, led to a re-traditionalisation of social relations. Personal networks are thus understood as having developed *despite* the policies or as a *necessary* supplement to the malfunctioning of the economy, but as basically being unwanted by the authorities.<sup>14</sup>

The GDR shared many structural features with other socialist countries. These included extensive political control by the *Stasi*<sup>15</sup>, similar to Romania, the country where Verdery (quoted above) did her research. However, the idea of a ‘re-traditionalisation’ of the family does not seem to apply to the GDR, as marriage was more unstable than in western democracies, including West Germany, and female participation in the labour market was extremely high. Similarly, the need for ‘useful’ relations is contested in the case of the GDR, because of the country’s comparatively good economic situation (Diewald 1995: 228). Without totally denying the instrumental impact of relations in the workplace, I argue that the non-instrumental side of personal relations in the workplace was decisive in facilitating trust. This specificity of working relations in the GDR was based on the multi-functionality of relations and the high amount of time spent together. Together these conditions eased communication and created familiarity, both prerequisites for trust. Communication in the workplace entered into many different realms, some of which are considered private in capitalist countries. The multi-functionality of relations, I argue, was not only the outcome of economic constraints, but also part of official policy, while the trust that developed was rather a by-product.

Although my fieldwork experiences concerned other social groups as well, in the following I will mainly refer to my fieldwork in the successor firm of a former large socialist enterprise in the port of Rostock. The enterprise today is mainly concerned with the administration and supply of infrastructure for the harbours’ vast territory and many buildings. Most of the work today is office work, but there are some labourers and craftsmen left, mainly in general services and operation of the ferries across the Baltic Sea. As a consequence of the so-called social plans that guided layoffs in the beginning of the 1990s and that took into consideration seniority, marital status and dependent children, the average age of employees today is over 40. This means that most employees started their professional life in the GDR, and this working experience shapes many of their social relations and their perception of them. As elsewhere in eastern Germany, there are only a very few employees from the territory of the

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<sup>14</sup> See for example, Rottenburg 1991 or Pollack 1999.

<sup>15</sup> An abbreviation of *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (Ministry of State Security; Security Services).

western federal states. I know of five persons personally, all in more or less leading positions, including the managing director and one department head.<sup>16</sup>

*Multi-functional Relations to and in the Workplace in the GDR*

Enterprises stood at the heart of socialist redistribution. This role might have been even stronger in the GDR than in other socialist countries, because of the explicit official ‘unity of economic and social policy’ that furthered the role of enterprises in redistribution even more than before.<sup>17</sup> Besides being a workplace, enterprises fulfilled a wide range of other functions for their work force. They provided meals, housing, childcare and holiday facilities, but also a wide variety of leisure activities such as hobby groups, sports and so forth. Similar to others, the enterprise in question also built shopping facilities, including a butcher’s shop and a hairdresser. These facilities were often used during the breaks and also during working hours. This means many everyday actions and private matters were dealt with not in the neighbourhood but in the workplace. This type of organisation induced multi-functional relations where a work mate could at the same time be my neighbour in the enterprise-owned house, my teammate, or the one I would go shopping with. One might argue that this multi-functionality of work mate relations resembles the multi-strandedness of ties Gellner describes for pre-modern societies. However, it needed the creation of a new type of social relation, including new role expectations, in Seligman’s terms, that are not given by birth as kinship. In the following I describe the conditions for familiarity and trust in similar and different positions in a hierarchy as they are indicated by legal norms, economic conditions and in the memory of former employees. The multi-functionality of relations was characteristic of the interaction between superiors and their subordinates, as well as between work mates on the same hierarchical level. The conditions enabled trust to develop, but the relations cannot be called friendship, nor do they seem to be classical patron-client relations.

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<sup>16</sup> During the 8-month period of fieldwork in 2003 and subsequent shorter visits until June 2005, different research methods were applied. Apart from participant observation, a sample of 23 people was approached with a questionnaire and additional biographical and expert interviews were taped. In the following, quotations from the research diary are marked with DN, quotations that were noted during the questionnaire are marked with interview number, and taped interviews are indicated with tl.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed analysis of the socialist economy of shortage see Kornai (2000). Scarcity in the GDR was not as bad as in some other socialist countries, but it was nevertheless felt in comparison to West Germany, which constituted the point of reference. The so-called unity of economic and social policy was coined after a speech by Honecker at the VIII Party congress in 1971. During his rule the redistributive social functions of the enterprises were widened. Jaraus (1999) coined the term “welfare dictatorship” to grasp the special arrangement in the GDR.

*Conditions of Familiarity and Trust between Hierarchical Levels*

Besides the official facilities provided by the workplace, other legal norms furthered the multi-functionality of relations within hierarchies. For example, the director had the legal duty of helping his workers and employees.<sup>18</sup> In the enterprise in question, the director had special consulting hours. Another official way to seek support in individual problems was to write a petition to the director or other superiors. And indeed, as the archive material shows, people wrote to the director for a variety of problems, including housing or education. Telling one's supervisor about supposedly private problems was the official mode of problem solving. As a consequence, some people in leading positions experienced being approached with all kinds of personal matters as a burden (No. 3, 09/08/2003). The socialist policy delineated responsibilities for individual problems differently than in capitalism.

Despite the relatively good economic situation in the GDR in comparison to other socialist countries, some shortages of goods and services furthered the tendency of dealing with personal problems in the workplace. In addition to the facilities that were the legal rights of the workers, the enterprise offered a broad scope of 'informal' help that ranged from semi-legal to illegal services. Assessing the scope of such services retrospectively is difficult, because present verbal accounts already reflect an interpretation of the past in the light of the present. However, the comments and stories that I gathered in the field fit well with what we know from earlier studies in socialist countries. Among them are individual solutions to specific problems, such as the case of a female employee who, when she was a young mother, was driven home after work from the bus station in an enterprise limousine because she was the only mother with a small child living in that quarter of the city. More informal examples included the chauffeur of the director, who once approached the director with the complaint that the toilets in a kindergarten were in poor shape. His complaint resulted in arrangements for their repair.

Similarly well-known in other socialist countries is the use of the enterprise as a source for all sorts of materials, one very prominent case being building materials. These could also be acquired with permission of the superior. One worker told how he got the tiles for his house with the permission of the director by driving to another city where another enterprise had recently received a forklift from his enterprise. Mentioning this fact, he received as many tiles as he could transport with his private car. In sum, many problems that are seen as private matters in capitalist societies were solved in the workplace.

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<sup>18</sup> For the legal rights of the workers see especially § 223-239 of the labour law (*Arbeitsgesetzbuch der DDR 1975*) that laid down the duty of the enterprises to provide for sports and cultural facilities, meals, child care and holiday facilities. For the responsibility of the director of the socialist enterprise, see § 18 of the labour law.

Familiarity between hierarchical levels was further enabled by the 'time factor', meaning that people in higher positions often started their career within the same enterprise and then slowly rose to the top. Due to this fact they knew parts of the work force for long and were themselves known in lower positions by others too. For example, a usual comment made to me when mentioning former leading cadre was: 'We sent him to study'. The multi-functionality of relations and knowledge about one another created familiarity as a prerequisite of trust.<sup>19</sup> In addition, envy interfered in relations only slightly as the income gap was almost insignificant and sometimes even reversed. Although there may have been some resources to which higher cadres had better access, there were other resources one had better access to in lower levels of the professional hierarchy. For example, higher cadres, due to their position, often could not travel to the West or had to deny existing kin relationships in the West. The fact that lower ranks often had better access to Western goods as well as the very small income differences due to professional positions made the prestige to be won in higher position questionable.<sup>20</sup> Other aspects of the labour organisation also made the position of a director rather delicate. Rottenburg (1991: 318) observes that responsibility 'was never located at the right position', meaning that in cases of shortfalls, the wrong people were always made responsible for them. Thus, a leading cadre may have tried to establish solidarity in cases of accusations from above.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the low degree of social differentiation based on professional position also eased the expression of critique towards superiors. All in all, this indicates that although the scarcity of goods certainly may have facilitated the development of patronage networks, the degree of dependency of the 'client' on the 'patron' was comparatively low. It remains the question of what kind of risk could be entailed in such relations and how to define the form of trusting relationship.

Superiors officially had the task of helping their employees; often they did so on the basis of personal responsibility. At first glance, these diffuse responsibilities combined with shortages in supply facilitated the spread of patronage relations. But, most kinds of help did not involve a stable relationship and they did not need much trust, at least not from the lower side. Even the unofficial forms of 'getting' things entailed only more or less calculable risks. Sanctions existed in the form of public accusations, but in a state of constant labour shortages and the

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<sup>19</sup> Granovetter in his article on the strength of weak ties explicitly states that multiplex relations from the top down enhance the possibility for trust (1973).

<sup>20</sup> One indication that relations between hierarchical levels were rather open is a code of behaviour cited by Engler (1999: 242). The authors of the code apparently wanted to stop workers from behaving impolitely towards the higher ranks, which Engler interprets as a proof of the frequency of such incidents. In contrast to the contested quality of social relations in the workplace, the high degree of passive power of workers during socialism is hardly contested (Kohli 1994: 49).

<sup>21</sup> This may have been another organisational feature that enabled the establishment of trust between hierarchical levels in a socialist enterprise.

political commitment to full employment, one could virtually not lose one's livelihood because paid work was always guaranteed.

Thus, the typical risk in the GDR was not entailed in acquiring resources in the workplace. Instead political criticism meant a risk. As mentioned initially, the GDR had an extensive system of political control and even if people did not know exactly how thorough it was, they knew what they could say in public and what they should avoid mentioning. The risk of political critique was also more or less calculable, that means familiar, but could have serious consequences. In contrast to other behaviour, it could easily mean the loss of one's social existence. In severe cases it could mean imprisonment or in less extreme cases the loss of one's profession and position. Therefore mutual support in the workplace entailed a risk if a potential political problem was involved and needed trust. And, in fact, even in cases that entailed political risks, it seems that trustful relations between hierarchical levels were build up to a certain degree, as it becomes visible in instances of help. For example, a former male worker, who was excluded from the SED in the 1950s, described the relationship towards the director of the former VEB:

Dieter was a nice guy (...) I often went to him personally. When I had problems, he always helped me. Yes, because I was not a comrade [Party member], I often had [problems] with the Party. Well, then he always stood by me. (tI 09/29/2003)

The worker evaluated the situation as one of risk, e.g. as a situation which he might influence by his action and the person to contact was his director. This indicates that he trusted his superior even in cases of potential political problems. In this case his trust seems to have been well placed as the director has protected him despite the potential risk for himself. One might suspect a friendship or patron-client relation to be at work here that would make it more likely that the director would conform to the trust placed in him. But the worker did not mention any other personal contact outside the work sphere nor did he characterise this relation as friendship. Similarly he did not recall any favours the other way around, so that the advantage for the director is hard to estimate. This seems to confirm the view of Eisenstadt and Roninger (1984: 158), who discuss clientilism in the former socialist countries as being a systemic characteristic, as a functional equivalent to law or market, but as not enduring and, paradoxically, more within the cliques of the powerful than between these and the lower ranks of society. This is confirmed by network interviews, in which colleagues were most often seen as 'useful' by higher ranking persons and, interestingly enough, more men had useful colleagues than women (Diewald 1995: 246-247). While delineating the nature of relations between superiors and subordinates in terms of trust is rather complicated, socialist work

organisation clearly facilitated trust through multi-functional relations and time spent together by work mates on one hierarchical level.

*Conditions for Familiarity and Trust on the Same Hierarchical Level*

In addition to the already described features, the socialist work organisation in brigades most often comprised the whole work group or collective, furthering the multi-functionality of ties and the amount of time spent together even more. The socialist brigade was officially formed by the signing of a contract in which members confirmed their participation in the so-called competition for the title of a socialist brigade. This contract was then renewed every year. To get the title and the accompanying small amount of money, members had not only to dedicate themselves to fulfilling the plan, but also to upgrading the educational and cultural standards within their group.<sup>22</sup> As a result, brigades were not only occupied with the organisation of work among their members, but also with a variety of social events. All such activities were officially desirable, formally recognised in the competition and reported in the brigade's diary.

In the 25 diaries left in the enterprise' archive, employees filed for example certificates in the annual sports competition of the enterprise as well as greeting cards sent for marriages and child-births. Many joint activities such as barbecue parties and visits to exhibitions or movies were illustrated not only photographically but also through hand drawn pictures. Such events often included wives and husbands or already retired colleagues, too. Seemingly unpleasant tasks such as extra work done jointly on weekends<sup>23</sup> or political tasks such as the creation of a wall poster about the German-Soviet friendship or participation in demonstration on May 1, were also reported. In some cases the school also informed the brigade if children of members were extraordinarily good pupils, in other cases the brigade could organise assistance in math or other subjects, if a child of a member failed to achieve good results. Thus, most members knew each other's family situation quite well. As with these official events more informal activities, such as helping a former colleague (a so-called veteran) to move or renovate his or her flat were also noted in the diary. Surely not everybody joined uniformly, nor did everybody like the common events; but for most people the informal meetings became the focus of the brigade's inner life, or as Engler (1999: 284) phrases it: the brigades gradually changed their activities from "foreign to domestic politics". However these activities are evaluated today (and this differed greatly among informants), they created multi-functional

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<sup>22</sup> The first brigades in the GDR were founded in the late 1940s, but membership rose only significantly after 1973 under Honecker. In 1988, the latest official statistics counted 5.5 million members in 310,000 brigades, which accounted for 63% of the working population. With time the title became more and more inflationary. In 1988, 85% of all brigades received it together with the rather negligible reward (Roesler 1994: 145).

<sup>23</sup> Such 'voluntary' work, organised by the *Nationales Aufbauwerk* (NAW), was done mostly on Saturdays and called *subbotnik* after the Russian model.

relations among colleagues.<sup>24</sup> In addition, such activities of work teams added to the already long working hours. Weekly, yearly and lifetime working time was on average higher in the GDR than in other European (socialist and non-socialist) countries (Winkler 1990: 202-203). The large amount of time spent together on multiple occasions were a precondition for mutual trust in these groups.

One result of the large amount of time spent together on different occasion was that communication between work mates intensified and concerned different realms of life. Many personal matters were discussed with colleagues, and they were often asked for advice.<sup>25</sup> This “talking about all kinds of shit in the brigade” as one East German acquaintance once put it, or the development of brigades into “communication centres” as Roesler (1994: 162)<sup>26</sup> phrased it, may be one reason, why they did not vanish as a form of organisation during the GDR era as many other forms of socialist competition did. The question remains whether the described multi-functionality and intense communication led colleagues to trust each other in risky situations.

I argue that the described prerequisites of trust helped to create the expectation that even in cases of conflict about ideological questions, one could have counted on colleagues (see also Rottenburg 1991: 318). Of course, such trust could also be disappointed. For example in the case of a former teacher who wanted to visit her dying sister in West Germany for one day but did not get permission. She tried it over and over again and finally refused to work as a teacher anymore. Recalling these dramatic events in her life, she did not mention expectations for help from her family or friends, but from her colleagues. She recalled the disappointment she felt in her colleagues, for whom she “had done everything before” and who did not support her. That caused her to “lose trust”, as she literally said (DN 03/30/2004). There are two reasons why her remark seems to be interesting. First, it was not the rejection of the authorities that caused her reaction. Second, she expected help in a politically sensitive matter from her colleagues and not from family or friends. To phrase it in Seligman’s terms, in a

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<sup>24</sup> The quality of social relations in the working sphere of the GDR is contested in the literature. While Gensior (1992) and Rueschemeyer (1988), for example, describe them rather positively, Rottenburg (1991, 1992) stresses the instrumental character of relationships between work mates against expectations ‘from above’ or as exchange relations. In a milder version of the latter, most often put forward by East German scholars, the double character of such relations is emphasised (Engler 1992, Marz 1992). Similar to literature about other socialist countries the authors stress different roles that had to be played in the private and the public realm. I argue that this analysis tends to overstress political thinking and thereby overstates how the same division became less strict than in capitalist countries in other realms.

<sup>25</sup> In network interviews, 52% of the informants said retrospectively that they talked with colleagues about problems in the workplace and 22% even asked work mates for advice in difficult personal problems. For western sociologists, who anticipate that work mates have little importance, such results are surprising (Diewald 1995: 237-238).

<sup>26</sup> According to sociological research the high communicative importance of the workplace did not differ much between different professional position or income groups and was confirmed for different branches of the economy (Diewald 1995: 245).

situation where the role of a colleague could not prescribe behaviour, trust filled the gap, but was disappointed.

To summarise, interpersonal trust in an enterprise in the GDR was not only facilitated by the constraints of the economic system (shortages in goods and services), but also by the official requirements of the system (responsibility of directors for the personal problems of their staff, support for private activities among employees). Although their implementation was partly ritualised in the form of a yearly contract, no kinship-like ties were implied, nor were these relations called friendship. Despite their lack of voluntariness and symmetry, workplace relations facilitated not only problem solving, but emotional exchange as well. It was mainly this verbal communication that fostered trust among work mates. The multi-functionality of relations was officially encouraged by the system. Even mutual aid was officially acknowledged as a positively valued feature of the 'new socialist man' and not understood as a 'bypassing' of the system. Thus, in opposition to the literature cited above, this paper argues that these relations were not only developed *in contrast to* but also *in accordance* with the official system. Thus, it was not only the non-contractual relations that supplemented the contractual ones in compensation for the malfunctioning of the economy (Rottenburg 1991). Moreover, it were precisely the contractual relations (brigades) that initiated (unintentionally) trust between individuals on the micro level and which perhaps thereby compensated for the lack of confidence in the proper functioning of economic institutions. Regarding what was said in the beginning about role prescriptions, I would argue, that the conditions of socialism in the GDR encouraged the development of the new role expectation of the 'trustworthy work mate'. However the following question arises: what happened to interpersonal trust when the political and economic conditions changed?

### **New Conditions of Trust after 1989**

When the political and economic system changed after 1989, enterprises and their staff changed fundamentally, too. The main responsibility of a capitalist manager is ensuring the financial well being of the enterprise, whereas the sponsoring of social services and the well being of his employees is of minor importance. Personal problems such as housing or the illness of employees' family members do not fall into a manager's responsibilities and should ideally be solved outside the workplace. This requires a new set of relations at the workplace and therefore entails implicitly a loss of familiarity with role expectations.

Not only have the responsibilities changed, but the risks entailed in action have as well. The risk of political misbehaviour vanished almost entirely, together with the fear of the secret

service, while unemployment became a new risk. While the risk of losing one's livelihood was of minor importance during socialism, it is experienced as the most encompassing risk today. For most people, especially the first waves of dismissals came quite suddenly. A much greater percentage of people than in West Germany lost their job at least once and an even greater percentage know of such cases in their immediate families or in their circle of friends.<sup>27</sup> But not only those who lost their jobs, made the experience of loss. Given the earlier situation of intense contacts at the workplace, those who continued to work in their former environment experienced a decisive loss of social relations due to the dismissal of colleagues. These experiences reinforce an even greater degree of unfamiliarity with the system. This situation was aggravated by the fact that the former West Germany is undergoing a transformation itself, leading to more unemployment and constant public discourse about the loss of security.

The initially stated experience of loss is framed by the overall unfamiliarity with the new conditions as well as a shift of risks. While the preceding section was based largely on literature and archival data, this section draws more on ethnographic data. Describing their interpretation of the present, East Germans often take the time before unification as their point of reference. Their descriptions of this past may sometimes not be 'historically correct', but are nevertheless shaped by the past and tell us about how the present is experienced.

#### *Trust and Communication between Hierarchical Levels*

Although most people refer mainly to a loss of trust between work mates on the same hierarchical level, the relation between different levels is also perceived as having changed. The situation today combines 'surviving' and 'new' elements, the interpretation of which partly depends on the individuals position in the hierarchy. Concerning the change of relations between hierarchical levels, two questions seem to be interesting: First, how did the relation between former high cadres and their former employees change; and, second, how is the relation between new supervisors and staff understood?

On the first question, it seems as if only a few things have changed. For example, the former director of the VEB, who is retired today, reported that one weekend a former worker approached him in his garden. This already indicates some familiarity of the worker with the habits of his former superior, whose way of life has seemingly not change much despite the fact that he is comparatively well off today. Although he receives a state pension and an additional enterprise pension, he has neither moved from his simple flat in one of the so-

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<sup>27</sup> For details on East German unemployment since 1990 see for example Vogel (2000) and Frick and Müller (1996).

called *Neubauggebiete*, nor has he given up his hobby garden since the political transformation.<sup>28</sup> The worker with whom he had no other relation than the former work relation wanted to talk to him about his personal problems in coping with the new times. According to the former director, the now retired worker's problem was not that he had too little money, but that in his view "all the people had changed" (DN 09/09/03). Although the former worker approached him with rather personal affairs, the director did not indicate any further relation or contact between them. Aside from the expressed unfamiliarity with today's social relations, this case demonstrates that despite the changes, the former superior is still a person to talk to about personal matters.

In another case a younger man in his forties, who had been in a lower leadership position in the GDR and had managed to get a new job in administration, reported that 'his' former workers approach him trying to get information about "what is going on" at the management level (DN 09/08/2003). This already indicates a change in the content of this relationship. The workers approach him today in the same way but with different questions than before. 'What is going on at the management level' refers to the fear of restructuring, which may entail a new wave of dismissals. Both cases point to the fact that not all former relations dissolved and indicate that the former boss is still a person one can talk to. But these 'links' to the past do not entail any risk; they reflect confidence in the ability of that person to help rather than reflecting trust in the face of risk. On the other hand, both stories already reflect the loss of familiarity in the new situation, which becomes even clearer if we examine relations to the new superiors in the hierarchy.

In contrast to relations with the former higher ranks, relations with the new supervisors entails for the lower ranks the constant risk of being the next to be dismissed. The awareness of the risk of becoming unemployed may seem exaggerated but is understandable if seen in connection to the above-mentioned experience of the unexpected first waves of firing in the beginning of the 1990s. The people still employed at the enterprise recall these events as a tragedy. This perception is fostered by the knowledge, often stated by the management, that there are still too many employees in the enterprise. The reaction to this risk is described by employees as a change in trust, expressed in changes in the flow of information, the possibility to express critique and the content of personal communication at the enterprise. Interestingly, besides the application of 'old' socialist practices, new practices of problem

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<sup>28</sup> This seems to be a typical pattern among former leading figures of the enterprise. Spatial segregation as part of the new social differentiation took place instead among the younger generation. Some of them also perceived social pressure to move, as one personal assistant in the public relation department said, who used to live in one of the socialist apartment block complexes: "I liked it there, but when everybody said; are you still living *there?*, we moved" (emphasis in speech, DN 03/13/2003).

solving develop, which indicate a shift from work relations towards greater importance of close kin.

### *Content of Personal Communication*

As I have shown above, the content of personal communication in the workplace was rich during socialism. Personal problems of housing, transportation, illness in the family and so forth were all dealt with formally and informally in the workplace. These characteristics of working relations changed decisively with the political transformation.

Managers and other leading staff are officially no longer responsible for the personal problems of their employees. Consequently, people would not approach them anymore with such problems. However, reflecting the change in risks, they would still approach the manager or head of department in the event that a member of their family was looking for a job. For example, when in summer 2003 I entered the personnel office, the office clerk taking some papers from her table, said:

Look, here is an application for an apprenticeship from the daughter of one of our employees again. I can't take her, because our manager does not want to have family members here.

In September, when professional schooling in Germany starts, I was surprised to see that the young woman in question was present. I was then told that her mother had a personal conversation with the manager, and that this was not the first case in which a personal talk with him 'helped'. Thus, although the official politics and the problems have changed, personal relations remain an important resource for problem solving.

Personal relations are known to be an important source for information about vacancies in capitalist countries too (Granovetter 1973). However in the perception of most of my informants (including the mother in this example) this is something new and morally negative, and also something one personally refrained from during socialism. Similarly, every time I asked people how they got their job, they seemed to be almost offended and replied that they applied for it normally. The instrumentality of personal relations is morally rejected. Getting a job through personal ties implies that a person is not chosen because of his or her qualifications, and seems to imply a kind of corruption. However in those rare cases of people who got a new contract after unification, most had close kinship contacts within the enterprise. This applies especially to low qualification jobs. For example, a group of 'new' employees was hired for a service at the ferries that the enterprise took over in January 2003. Besides some experienced workers who were taken over from the enterprise that formerly provided this service, all of the newcomers have kinship ties to someone in the firm. In this case most

often sons, sons-in-law or husbands were employed. As in the case of the girl cited above, this happened against the official policy. People, who did not succeed in helping a family member to get a job attribute their failure to their weak ties to the responsible persons. For our purpose here, it seems to be interesting that the importance of kinship and not friendship for solving problems seems to be increasing.

### *Flow of Information*

Lacks in flow of information is a complaint that is made in all hierarchical positions and which concerns both the relations on one hierarchical level as well as between different levels. It relates partly to general information 'about what is going on' in the enterprise and partly to specialist knowledge. On the side of the employees, there exists the impression that they are not as well informed about the different parts of the enterprise as in socialist times. For example, one female employee who is in charge of future planning complained that in the past she knew the vast territory of the enterprise better, because they had sometimes visited ongoing construction: "Then we told our boss, we will go to, let's say Pier 2 and then he would perhaps even go with us. If we would try such a thing today (...)." (DN 05/19/2003). She left it open, what would happen if she would try today, indicating that they would not be allowed to do so. In this and other conversations, employees interpret their lack of information as a policy consciously implemented by the management that they 'should not to know too much' and should only concentrate on their own work.

The heads of departments as well as colleagues among themselves complain about others having specialist knowledge and not wanting to share it with them. In some cases this special knowledge may stem from socialist times. For example, there was a lot of construction during socialism and in some cases only some older employees know where to find the various pipes etc. In other cases, it is new knowledge acquired by schooling after the *Wende* that is not shared with colleagues. Knowledge in these cases is seen as a scarce resource that may prevent one from being dismissed. The lower levels fear betrayal and their superiors evaluate the situation similarly. That means both experience that trust in the 'good' intentions of the other is lost.

### *Voicing of Critique*

A very similar complaint made again in both directions (top down as well as bottom up) concerns the voicing of criticism.<sup>29</sup> One indication of change within hierarchies is that people recall how many complaints were made by the workers during socialism and that no one would care today. For example, one woman stated: “If a worker complained [during socialism], today that does no longer interests anyone, with that I do not mean that it was all good, about what they complained”.

Still, the quantity of complaint does not express the content. As mentioned above, in the GDR, expressing open political criticism constituted a risk. With unification this situation has changed fundamentally, in that expressing verbal political critique is no longer perceived as a risk. Instead voicing critique about ones supervisor seems to be risky as it may be followed by losing one’s workplace and with it the economic and social basis of existence. This shift was expressed in similar words more than once from people in different hierarchical positions. A male employee in a high position said: “In the past I was not allowed to say something against the government, today nothing against the boss” (DN 09/30/2003). Listening to his remark, his personal assistant nodded in agreement. Similarly, a former female employee in administration stated:

In the past, one could say to the boss: ‘you are stupid’ and nothing happened. But, if I would have said Erich Honecker is nuts, then they would have put me in jail, to tell it crudely now. Today I can say Helmut Kohl is crazy, but I am not allowed to speak in such a way about my boss. I am not allowed to do so.

Asked further about how to express criticism she stated: “Yes, one is silent, well on no account [criticise] without being asked, and if asked, only in small doses, well, one really has to have the feeling” (tI 09/17/2003).

A younger man, still working in the enterprise also referred more than once to the fear of being fired as being responsible for the bad quality of social relations. In his mind the employees are guided by “hate and jealousy”. He saw this fear as also applying to unions and the workers council<sup>30</sup> and said: “They are afraid in the enterprise. They fear that if they say something against the employer that this may come back against them” (tI 03/31/2004).

Communication is also perceived as having changed due to new social differentiation within the enterprise. This mainly concerns the rising of lower ranks to middle leading positions. They are often accused of being arrogant since they have taken on their new position, but their behaviour is also interpreted as based on their fear of losing their job.

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<sup>29</sup> For similar results on this topic see Wieschiolek (1999).

<sup>30</sup> In German *Betriebsrat*.

The lack of criticism is also felt by the management, but interpreted fundamentally differently, especially by West German superiors. They are convinced that ‘people talk behind their backs’. Their interpretation, however, reflects the hegemonic public discourse about the older former GDR citizens, who cannot be taught open communication, because of their socialist past. The West German managing director, for example, stated very explicitly that he only trusts the younger generation that has not been educated during the socialist period. He explained that they are the only ones who are open to him, who criticise him, while the others do

what they learned over forty years. They were not allowed to make their own decisions about anything, so they only learned how to sabotage a decision. If I do anything they don’t want, they are very effective in blocking it. (DN 02/19/2003)

One other of the four West Germans in the enterprise recalled the following:

Once a new carpet was laid and then it smelled odd in my office. I asked a worker if this was normal. He said that this was due to the glue and that they had the same problem in another building too. (...) The next morning Mrs. X came running to me in the corridor and said that Mrs. Y [responsible for renovating activities] wanted to talk to me, because she had heard that I had complained. [Pause, look full of expectation on me] Do you understand? I only posed a totally normal question. I am used to it and probably you, too, that one talks about such things. If a problem arises, one gets together and talks about it. (DN 02/18/2003)

Here he stopped, implying that East Germans do not get together and talk about problems. Thus, there is not much trust on either side and it seems that in face of the risk of being dismissed, employees refrain from expressing critique or communicating their knowledge. This refraining from action is, in fact, the classical consequence of lack of trust as described by Luhmann. It may seem in some cases as being an overstatement, but it still expresses how people experience their situation and it indicates again the lack of familiarity with the new system. The latter becomes even more obvious, if we have a look at communication about personal matters between colleagues on more or less equal professional levels.

#### *Trust and Communication on the Same Hierarchical Level*

The new risk of unemployment influences not only the relationship between hierarchical levels; it also has its effects on the relations between work mates on the same level. As described above, in the GDR a lot of different matters and activities were dealt with in the workplace. The brigades, which had important functions as centres of personal communication and were one of the few stable organisational features in the GDR, dissolved surprisingly quickly and silently after the *Wende*. Roesler (1994: 163) argues that people did so believing that the giving up of the brigades was the price they had to pay for the expected

higher West German living standards. In 2003, more than ten years after unification, a lot of people seem to miss the collective, or more precisely the quality of working relations. People keep saying that today they ‘could not talk to one another anymore’. Asked why, several people stated that it was, because ‘today, everyone has their own problems’. Assuming that people during socialism had problems too, this perception points to a shift in the range of problems and in communication partners. People reported that they spoke more to colleagues in the past, trusting that they would not use personal information against them. In this respect one woman, who used to be a teacher and is today in a leading position in the city administration, stated that although she did not like the organised events in the GDR, she appreciated the possibility of communication:

Just that one can also *talk* to someone and to know, ok, that is my colleague and he does not want to harm me. One can still do so today, but one thinks more about whom to tell what and behind that is the thought: if I tell him too much, this could be bad for my image, for example. (emphasis in speech, tI 03/17/2003)

Thus, in her perception a work mate used to be someone who does not want to harm others, but today a colleague may want to harm others. This shows how the expectations about the motivation of other persons have changed. Similarly in an interview with two former employees, one of them already retired and the other still working, but in another enterprise, the younger one said the following:

Well, now it is different, I would say. Before, one had the cohesion (...). I would say one could exchange all the frustration with each other. One could pour out ones’ heart and nothing happened. Now, everyone stands alone with his misery and those who do not have support in their family, well, at work one could not do that anymore. Perhaps one still has an intimate, but one would not like to reveal everything anymore. One does not know how that is going to be used against oneself. (tI 09/17/2003)

Interestingly, both women were very clear that they do not share a political standpoint and did not in the past. The older woman, who is retired now, stated that she used to be “a red one”, while the younger woman was more critical of the former socialist system. Still, both believed that they could tell everything among colleagues without it being used against them during socialism. In the conversation the younger woman then named the themes she thinks she cannot talk anymore about at work: illness of family members, marriage problems or moving. For the last, she recalls how one of her new colleagues had moved without anybody in the workplace knowing about it. Moving, like all the other topics she listed could indicate that perhaps “one has the head full with other things than work”, and which could entail in her view the risk of being the next one to be sent home.

But with whom would one communicate about problems today? The quotation above entails a hint to ‘support in the family’. The indicated shift to the family was made even more

explicit by a male employee who stated: “Before, I spent more time with my colleagues than with my wife; we talked about all sorts of things then.” As “one does not dare to complain as in the past” he does not talk to his colleagues anymore, but discusses even work related problems with his wife (DN 08/15/2003). His statement points to a growing importance of the nuclear family for solving all sorts of everyday problems. As in the case of unemployment, people, rather than turning to friends seem to turn to their immediate family for communication about personal matters.

Some of the quotations may seem exaggerated and participant observation revealed indeed that work mates still talk about personal matters in the workplace and do spend part of their leisure time together. Still, it seems that the circle of colleagues that entails such communication and action has become smaller and more specialised. Leisure activities seldom comprise more than one or two colleagues, and most often they have known each other for ages. That indicates that former ‘work mates’ may turn into ‘friends’ with a more intense personal exchange.

For some, a working relationship in general should not contain private communication or activity anymore. One woman was very explicit in this regard: “If one works together, one should not have any private contact”. But she also stated:

The work, the whole circle of colleagues, well, the distance is, I believe, greater today. One had after all then [during socialism], also invited a colleague to one’s home. I would never do that today. (No. 14, 09/22/2003)

This again indicates a change in the delineation of the public and the private sphere, in which the workplace is becoming more public and should be strictly separated from the private.

However some employees try to uphold old work relations by meeting with a circle of former colleagues once or twice a year for bowling, for example. These are cases where employees, who used to work together, e.g. from work teams that were formed before or shortly after the *Wende*. Interestingly, there are even less attempts to organise shared activities within the actual group of colleagues within departments. Most people state that work relations today are too unstable to initiate such activities. The enterprise has undergone a lot of restructuring since the *Wende* and every time working groups and departments have changed too. Thus, employees hardly work together in one department more than one year, and I met people who in the last three year changed departments several times. Although there was a constant restructuring during GDR times too, the time horizon for working together or forming a group has shortened since unification. People evaluate this as a conscious strategy employed by the management: “they don’t want us to develop a group solidarity” or as a

secretary put it after we looked at the photographs of her former brigade: “a feeling of community is not wanted from above” (DN 09/04/2003).

A similar example for maintaining old work relations are the two women who celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup>, respectively 35<sup>th</sup> work jubilees in the enterprise together. Because such events are no longer celebrated officially, they planned a private party. Thus, reminiscences of the past do exist, but change in form and content. Often, like the celebration of work jubilees, they are organised privately, no longer ‘officially’ at the working place. The employees feel that these social events are no longer wanted ‘from above’. This suspicion is strengthened by an internal agreement<sup>31</sup> that forbids celebrations in the workplace, for example birthdays or any other occasions, without official permission of the managing director. Some people now take a day off on their birthday “because there is nothing going to take place in the workplace anyway”; others still wait with coffee and cake in their office for congratulators. The former express a kind of disappointment, while the others sometimes feel unsure in their actions. All in all most people experience a decrease in social contacts<sup>32</sup> and a narrowing of their sphere of ‘feeling safe’.

### **Conclusion: loss of trust?**

The paper started with the observation that the comments made by many people in the so-called New States express an experienced loss of trust in interpersonal relations. I argued that we have to take these expressions seriously and examine their validity. The reconstruction of working relations in the socialist past made it plausible that work mate relations in the GDR had specific traits that are different from working relations in western capitalist countries. These features contained the multi-functionality of relations to and in the workplace, and a large amount of time spent together. The relationship between work mates was also characterised by communication about personal matters and was much more intense than in capitalist models. Thus, they entailed features that in capitalist societies are more often to be found in friendship relations. This allowed for a mutual familiarity to develop, which was a prerequisite for the trust many placed in their colleagues. The dimension of work mate relations as trust relations have been largely dismissed by sociologists and anthropologists alike.

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<sup>31</sup> In German *Betriebsvereinbarung*.

<sup>32</sup> In 23 structured interviews (informants were randomly chosen from among the staff), more than half explicitly stated that their former personal group of friends and acquaintances had shrunk. Only one person, who is a department head, explained that his social network grew in terms of numbers as well as culturally and geographically.

However, the nature of this set of social relations has changed markedly since unification. People in East Germany have gone through large scale dismissals and consider unemployment to be the greatest risk in their life. Unemployment in this case is not a danger, because people think that they can influence it. They can influence it by withdrawing information from their colleagues, by not criticising their superiors and by not showing any personal matters in the workplace. In this situations trust is most often not placed in working relations but in kinship ties. The experience of loss of trust was caused by the change in risks entailed in individual action in different systems. Because risks have changed, the specific solutions to them are to be found in different social relations (see table 1).

Table 1: Twofold shift of trust (relation/theme)

	Socialism	Capitalism
<b>Communication</b>	Work mates	Nuclear family
<b>Trust needed for</b>	Politics	Private matters

People lost familiarity with the political and economic system but also with their colleagues. Relations are unstable as work teams rarely work together over longer periods. In addition, everybody is seen to have new problems. In this situation trust in the ‘good intentions’ of colleagues has changed since unification. Colleagues, formerly seen as not wanting to harm oneself, now are seen as potentially wanting to do so.

In the socialist past, politics were a risky field of communication; in the new market democracy, complaining about politicians in public as at the workplace is not a risky action anymore. Today political critique entails no risk and ‘only’ needs confidence in that the system works as it seemingly does. By contrast, unemployment that was not part of the socialist risk structure became the dominant risk. Fearing to be next to be dismissed, people do not dare to talk about family matters in the workplace anymore. Thus, I argue, what people really talk about, when speaking of the loss of cohesion is in fact the shift of trust from one sphere to another. The shift in the themes and categories of persons who are considered to be trustworthy also contains a shift in the concept of what is private and what is public (see table 1).

As friendship was not named a source for overcoming risks, it seems what has happened after unification is a basically a reduction of social relations, perhaps even a ‘re-traditionalisation’ as kinship ties are becoming more important for communication and for solving difficulties than other ties. If trust is placed mainly in relatives, and to be more precise

exclusively the core family, social origin will gain in importance rather than diminish as would be expected in a so-called modern society. However, this may be a transitional phenomenon that will change with the emergence of new forms of familiarity and trusting relations.

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