



# **‘Being part of VAX-TRUST: Risk, trust and reflexivity in the doing of international collaborative research on vaccine hesitancy’**

**Professor Pru Hobson-West**  
**University of Nottingham, UK**



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# Background



University of Nottingham, UK



Taking a bird's eye view



Valuing vaccine research



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# Risk, trust, reflexivity and vaccination



Ever since vaccines have been developed, individuals have questioned the value and importance of vaccines for their health, and expressed distrust towards proponents of vaccines. These individuals doubt the benefits of vaccines, raise concerns about their safety and efficacy, and question the need for them. We will give vaccine hesitant parents the time and space to discuss this complex issue in our interviews (VAX-TRUST website, 2023)



# Risk, trust, reflexivity and vaccination



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Ever since vaccines have been developed, individuals have questioned the value and importance of vaccines for their health, and expressed **distrust** towards proponents of vaccines. These individuals doubt the benefits of vaccines, raise concerns about their **safety and efficacy**, and question the need for them. We will give vaccine hesitant parents the **time and space to discuss** this complex issue in our interviews (VAX TRUST website, 2023)

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# Risk, trust, reflexivity and vaccination



What if we applied these 3 core concepts from vaccine hesitancy research to **our** own practice as researchers?



# 1. Risk



- Research on vaccine hesitancy has focused on how risk (of disease, of vaccines) is constructed, or on the best research methodologies to study risk: But, how do **WE** as vaccine researchers construct the risks involved in international collaborative research?
- Grant writing is a risky business (Yousoubova and McAlpine; Tardy, 2003), and the risks of collaboration are not equally distributed.
- For example, for early career scholars, very short-term contracts and EU deliverable deadlines can create risks for career support and decasualisation agendas. Personally, these risks created 'dilemmas of complicity' (Heney and Poleykett, 2022).



# 2. Trust



- Research on vaccine hesitancy has focused on how trust (in HCPs, in governments) is constructed, or on the best methodologies to study trust: But, how do **WE** as vaccine researchers construct the trust involved in international collaborative research?
- International collaborative research relies on trust between researchers and participants (Hilario et al, 2023), but also between partners and within teams. This is not guaranteed by the grant agreement; it is done ‘in the making’ and in ‘real time’.
- For example, VAX-TRUST required a (sometimes difficult) move from trusting each other as experts on vaccine hesitancy in each region, to trusting each other as research managers, writers, ethical review applicants, network maintainers....





# 3. Reflexivity



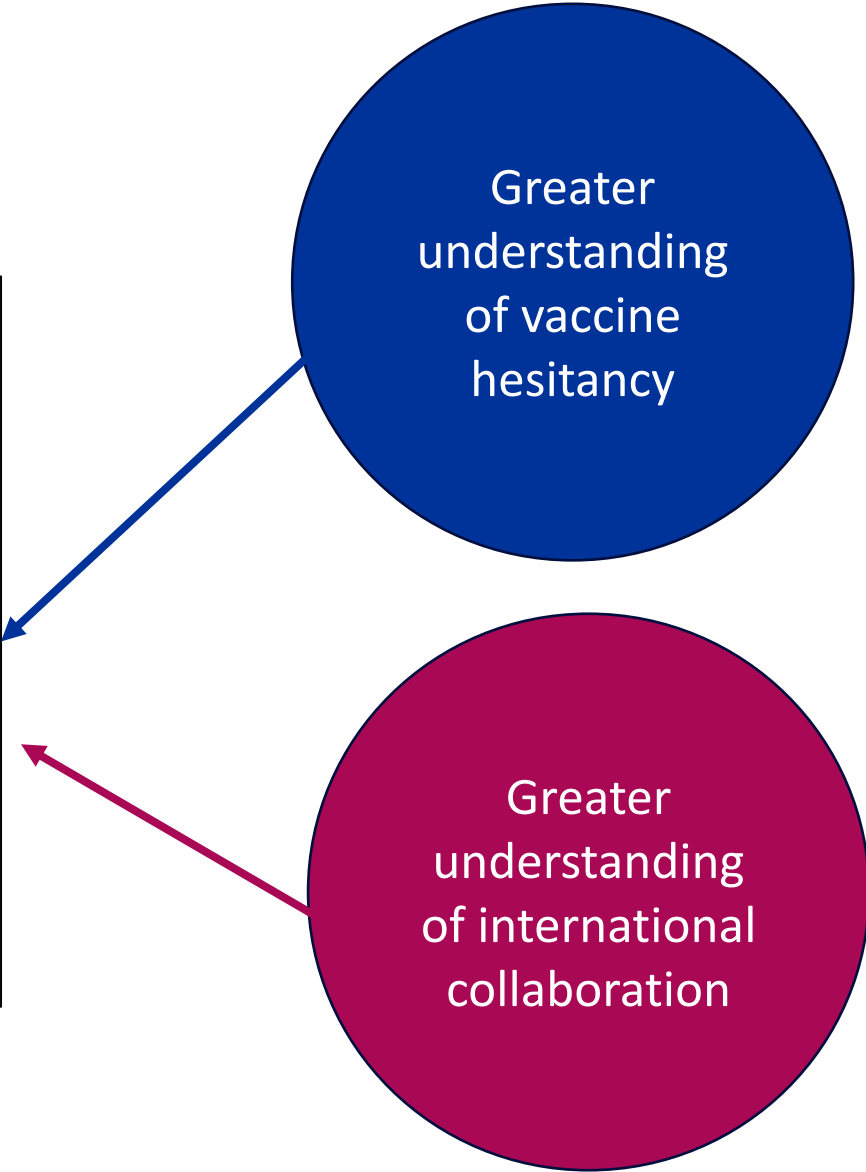
- Research on vaccine hesitancy expects participants to be reflexive about their own past, present or future engagement with vaccination: But, what methodologies should **WE** as vaccine researchers use to encourage our own reflexivity?
- Reflexivity is ‘increasingly encouraged as a characteristic of good methodological and ethical research practice’ (McGlacken, 2023), and is also seen as a necessity for Responsible Research and Innovation (Stilgoe et al, 2013).
- However, VAX-TRUST had ‘different levels of commitment to reflexivity across teams’ (McGlacken 2023), and different understandings of what ‘ethics’ means (Mickel et al 2023). Given this, dedicated time for team reflection (Rankl et al 2021) was important.





# Conclusion

‘By coupling research and innovation, Horizon 2020 is helping to achieve this with its emphasis on excellent science, industrial leadership and tackling societal challenges. **The goal is to ensure Europe produces world-class science, removes barriers to innovation** and makes it easier for the public and private sectors to work together in delivering innovation’ (Horizon 2020).



Greater understanding of vaccine hesitancy

Greater understanding of international collaboration

# Conclusion



**‘Embracing the cultural diversity and shared learning within the consortium** is particularly important when studying a topic as sensitive as vaccine hesitancy, and it is a prerequisite for producing research outputs that can achieve wide applicability and sustainable impact’ (Vuolanto et al, forthcoming).



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