

**Occupational identities and their threat to moral agency:
the organisation as Umwelt and the Post Office-Horizon Scandal**

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Within the broad field of identity studies, the notion of *occupational* identity is arguably of central importance to the field of organisation and management scholarship, the focus being upon individual persons in varying structured relation to others, engaged jointly in activities that are themselves purportedly related to socially legitimated purposes. For many, such occupational identity is tied to their employment status within employing organisations; when asked about their work, they might tend to reply in the form ‘I work for X’, ‘X’ being the name of the company in which they are employed. For many others, their occupational identity is expressed in terms of a distinctive occupation, often one for which there has been a fairly lengthy period of vocational or professional education, credentialisation and experience, and one that a career trajectory through a number of different employing organisations. Moreover, many persons whose occupational identity is termed ‘professional’, engage in work for different organisations *at the same* time, eg lawyers, accountants, consultants and other providers of business services, under contracts for services rather than contracts of employment. The occupational identity of management, ie as a manager, is a particularly important one for the scholarly field of management and organisation studies (and academic associations such as BAM) as its jurisdictional claims encompass all employees (through ‘human resource management’) and various agencies seek to promote its social status as ‘professional’, through provision of education and credentialization, purportedly based on sound theoretical and research-based knowledge (expertise) claims (Abbott, 1988).

Recent events in the UK and elsewhere have drawn attention to the problematic nature of such identities with respect to activities that individual employees (including managers and senior executives) have persisted in undertaking, over lengthy periods, where such activity may be seen not only as dysfunctional but also as unlawful and/or unethical (see table 1). The most prominent of such cases in the UK is that of the Post Office-Horizon Scandal. However, as yet, the management and organisation scholarship community has played little-to-no part in examining its own claims on expertise and its relevance or otherwise in understanding and

explaining the Scandal¹ as a prequel to developing ways to prevent or ameliorate the effects of future possible cases.

This developmental paper seeks to present a novel mode of exploring cases such as that of the Post Office-Horizon, and by extension any and all organisational and occupational settings, within which the conceptualization and theorisation of identity plays a critical part. This analysis, it will be argued, may be seen as supportive of, and elaborating, the warning by MacIntyre of the threats that social structures pose to moral agency, the ability of human persons to act ethically. The title of this paper is adapted from that presented by MacIntyre as the 1999 Annual Lecture to the Royal Institute of Philosophy, '*Social Structures and their Threats to Moral Agency*' (MacIntyre, 1999b), and this paper seeks to develop further MacIntyre's argument such that the dominant mode of social structuring in contemporary society may be seen as that of the corporate form, and the manner in which this tends to constrain the moral agency of human actors by the nature of their occupational identities..

Outline of paper

The next section will clarify the approach to identity taken here, ie 'person-ist' rather than 'self-ist', and relate this to the concept of practices, both forming the background understanding on which socially meaningful behaviour is construed as behaviour-of-a-particular type.

This will be followed by a (very) brief discussion of the Post Office- Horizon case, in relation to the issues here. The theoretical framework will then be sketched, explaining how this

- draws upon theoretical biologist von Uexküll's (2010) concept of 'Umwelt', extended through Cassirer's argument that a qualitative change has taken place because of language, human culture and social structures (Cassirer, 1944), and further developments, particularly by Rom Harré (1990, 2019), as well as Gibson's 'ecological' approach to psychology, of direct perception and action-affordances (Gibson, 1979) (cf Fultot and Turvey, 2019)
- draws upon the 'third' Wittgenstein, in *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein, 1969) to understand how human actors engage in actions on the basis of what they take as *certainty* (different from 'knowledge'), arising in and through their positioning.

Key implications of the theoretical framework will be *exemplified* through selected aspects of the case.

From this it is proposed that

- we may view organisation, the now-dominant social structure, as the main form of the human Umwelt;
- the occupational identities of those employed within organisations, or working *for* organisations under contracts for services have a major determining effect on what

¹ The initial letter is capitalised where referring to the Post-Office Horizon case, to signify its importance

they perceive and take as knowledge, and how they act, to the detriment of their capability for moral agency.

The research project is ongoing, as the empirical material regarding the case is voluminous. It is proposed to use text mining software (Orange) to aid the analysis. Word count restrictions here prevent more detailed discussion, but the paper will conclude with current plans for further development and invite other suggestions.

Identity, role, self, person, position ...

For the purposes here, the terminology of ‘identity’ will be used (albeit that ‘role’ may be used in citations). The individualist, ‘*self-ist*’ orientation of much of mainstream cognitive social psychology (eg Tajfel and Turner, 1986, Turner et al., 1994) will be eschewed in favour of the relational, ‘*person-ist*’ orientation of more philosophically and sociologically influenced scholarship (Costall and Still, 1987, Rorty, 1976, Martin and Bickhard, 2013, Sugarman and Martin, 2024, Smythe, 1998, Harré, 1983, Harré and van Langenhove, 1999, Harré and Moghaddam, 2012). Broadly, person-ist approaches reject the Cartesian dichotomy of the ‘inner’ self (mind-substance) and ‘outer’ body (matter-substance), the latter ‘receiving’ perceptions from the external world, *including the social*, which are ‘cognitively processed’, then causally determining behaviour. Rather, human persons are *both* physically (physiologically) embodied *and* socially embedded, *both* biological *and* social beings, or *bio-social* beings (Gowler, 1972). Communication is central to human personhood and such communication can only be by shared (ie social) forms of language (Wittgenstein, 1953) (cf Vygotsky, 1978). As social beings, human persons emerge within interaction, within a ‘negotiated order’ (Strauss et al., 1973).

A key problem with the term ‘identity’ is that its form as a substantive lend the appearance of referring to an ontologically real (and ‘measurable’) entity. We tend to talk of ‘my identity’, ‘having’ and identity, etc. This is misleading, and falls into the Cartesian mode of reasoning that characterises much mainstream cognitive social psychology (Harré and Secord, 1972, Harré and Moghaddam, 2012, Christensen, 2019). Rather, we should constantly keep in mind that the concept of identity, in relation to persons in social contexts, should be understood as *identification* (or, better, *identifying*), ie identifying of self by self to others (self-presentation Goffman, 1959b), *and* identifying of the focal person by significant others (Goffman, 1959a).

That is, human persons make warrantable claims (or disclaims) on particular identities, and such claims/ disclaims being subject to affirmation of disaffirmation by others (interactionally emergent identity) (Holmes, 2000, 2001a, 2015). These two ‘dimensions’ of identifying are in constant ‘play’, as Jenkins puts it an ‘internal-external dialectic of identification’ (Jenkins, 1996, 20). Put as identity claim by the individual person, and identity ascription by others, a framework of ‘modalities of (interactionally) emergent identity’ may be constructed for the purpose of analysis, especially of identity trajectories (Holmes, 2001b, 2015).

Identities carry normative value, of honour and respect or their opposite, of contempt and disrespect, affecting positioning within social groupings. To achieve or maintain social positioning, human persons will seek to gain recognition, acceptance, affirmation of their claims on valued identifications. A key aspect of warranting such claims is that of engaging

in the practices socially deemed appropriate to the identity in question. Thus to be a particular kind of person is to engage in (and be seen to engage in) the practices normatively appropriate to being identified as that kind of person.

The Post Office-Horizon Scandal

The Scandal, described as “the most widespread miscarriage of justice the CCRC [Criminal Cases Review Commission] has ever seen and represents the biggest single series of wrongful convictions in British legal history” (Criminal Cases Review Commission, 2024), now has international notoriety, especially after ITV aired a four-part drama (Clough, 2024) in January 2024, depicting many of the persons and events involved. It is now well-covered in mainstream and social media, particularly in respect of the impact of the false prosecutions on the lives and well-being of the victims of the Scandal. It has also been covered in scholarly literature relating to IT (see eg Halper, 2024, Margetts and Dunleavy, 2024, Thimbleby, 2023) and to the legal system (McGuire and Renaud, 2023, Christie, 2020, Moorhead et al., 2023, Christie, 2022), but less so in organisation and management literature. In brief, it concerns:

- the continued prosecution, over a decade and a half from 1999, for fraud and/or false accounting of over 900 subpostmasters (SPMs), on the basis of *flawed* accounting data (we now know), produced by the accounting software system (Horizon, designed, supplied and operated by Fujitsu, on behalf of the Post Office);
- senior Post Office executives persisted in the claim that the system was ‘robust’ and that all convictions of SPMs prosecuted were ‘safe’, to courts, to Parliament, and to news media;
- throughout that period, as now revealed by copious evidence, key Post Office staff at various levels (investigators, managers, lawyers, senior executives), and Fujitsu personnel, were or arguably should have been aware of, but failed to admit and deal with flaws (‘bugs, errors and defects’) in the system.

The claims by Post Office Ltd and Fujitsu were thoroughly debunked by the judgement by Justice Fraser following a lengthy group litigation (‘class action’) case brought by a group of 555 SPMs against the Post Office Limited (Bates and Others v the Post Office Limited) in late 2019 (2019). Justice Fraser concluded that Legacy Horizon (the version until 2010) “was not remotely robust” (para. 975), and that the replacement Horizon Online was “slightly more robust than Legacy Horizon, but still had a significant number of bugs, errors and defects” (para. 976).

This was followed by a slew of appeals by SPMs who had been convicted on the basis of the (now admittedly flawed) Horizon data and, in order to avoid the courts being swamped with appeal cases, legislation in 2024 by the UK Government to exonerate others. In 2020 the Government established a public inquiry, later (2021) turned into a Statutory Public Inquiry (with powers to compel witness testimony and disclosure of evidence). The Inquiry concluded taking evidence in 2025, and the Chair, Sir Wyn Williams, a retired high court judge published the first part of his report in July 2025.

In January 2024, the television channel ITV broadcast a four-part drama of the Scandal up to Justice Fraser’s judgement. Seen by over 13 million viewers, the TV drama evoked what may

safely be called *moral outrage* among the public, and Post Office investigators, managers, lawyers, senior executives (particularly Paula Vennells, CEO from 2012 to 2019) have been vilified, with calls for their prosecution and punishment.

Yet a simple approach, seeking to explain the Scandal in terms of ‘rogue actors’ or of a ‘toxic culture’ cannot, arguably, be sufficient to gain analytical purchase on the complex nature of the case, nor provide the basis for examining other scandals (see Appendix 1 for examples of other recent cases). This paper starts from the initial assumption that those who carried out the actions that led to and perpetuated the Scandal are ‘ordinary’ people, no different from any others, but who were caught up in the sequence of events and persistence of claims, because of their occupational identities. This is not to exonerate them of any blame, but rather to place issues of blameworthiness on one side, for consideration in other arenas (eg courts of law, ‘the court of public opinion’). The aim here is to develop a mode of understanding *how* the awful events took place in a large well-established organisation in modern society. Unless and until that is done, it would be impossible to develop modes of intervention to prevent recurrence and/or ameliorate the consequences of such recurrence. This would clearly have implications for management education and development and other areas of human resource development.

Developing a theoretical framework

MacIntyre on moral agency

MacIntyre argues that social structures pose threats to moral agency (1999b, 1992, 1979, 1999a), challenging the idea that modern organisations are intrinsically forces for good, or even neutral in that respect. Two key phenomena act to limit the scope for individual persons to engage in moral agency: *compartmentalization* and *insulation*. Both phenomena may be seen at work in the Scandal. However, we may extend this analysis by inquiring as to how these become key aspects of social structure and, in particular, the organisation form as the now-dominant social structure of modern society.

Von Uexküll’s concept of Umwelt and Gibson’s ecological approach to psychology

Taking seriously the fact that human beings are embodied, biological (as well as social) beings requires that we consider their/ our place in the world of creatures, living beings having shared features with others, one of which is the ability to act within the environment, not merely be subject to environmental forces acting upon it (ie they can be efficient causes). Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944) deployed concept of *Umwelt* (pl. *Umwelten*), the German word for environment, to refer to the environment-as-experienced-and-acted-upon (von Uexküll, 1926) (von Uexküll, 2010). Each species of creature has, he argues, its own *Umwelt*, an ecological ‘bubble’ as it were, on the basis of its *perceptual capacities* and its *capabilities for actions* that enable it to continue to exist. He argues that the *anatomical structure* of a creature have two basic systems, a receptor system and an effector system. The former enables the creature to receive outward stimuli, the latter to react and respond, both systems acting in cooperation and equilibrium, and are linked together in the *functional cycle* (see figure 1). Every creature exists within its own Umwelt, such that its receptor and effector systems are in harmony with the environment, the ecological ‘bubble’ in which it exists. The receptor system is perfectly adapted for the signals the environment provides as stimuli, the effector system perfectly adapted for reacting and responding within that environment.

The notion of *Umwelt* clearly has resonance with the later work by J J Gibson, whose *ecological approach* to psychology (Gibson, 1979), albeit that there is no clear documentary evidence that Gibson was familiar with von Uexküll's writings. For Gibson, every species of creature exists within its particular environmental *niche*, such a niche being a set of *affordances for action* for that creature. Whilst space limitations prevent detailed discussion here, we may note that whilst the latter's framework permits a reading that allows for an intermediate *processing* of perceptions, leading to action, Gibson regards perception as direct, in relation to the affordances that what is perceived offers (affords) the creature.

Cassirer's extension of Umwelt to human beings

Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), philosopher both of mathematics and science and also of the 'human sciences', was a contemporary of von Uexküll at the University of Hamburg before resigning and leaving Germany when the Nazi Party came to power, later working in the UK, Sweden, and USA where he died. A neo-Kantian, Cassirer sought through his philosophical works to address the question: what is it to be a human being? In one of his last books, *An Essay on Man* (Cassirer, 1944), he takes up von Uexküll's work, referring to it as "an ingenious and original scheme of the biological world" (p. 41). He then asks: "Is it possible to make use of the scheme proposed by Uexküll for description and characterization of the human world?" (p. 42).

Cassirer is emphatic that the human world forms "no exception" to the biological rules governing all living organisms, but with human beings there is a "new characteristic [...] the distinctive mark of human life". Not only is the functional circle of human beings *quantitatively* enlarged it has also changed *qualitatively*. This comes about because of a 'third link' in the functional circle, between receptor and effector system: that of the *symbolic system*. The symbolic system certainly includes that of language, as used in rational conceptual and scientific thinking, but also in emotional expression, myth, religion: the whole of human culture. So, he suggests, the human being may be defined not so much as animal rationale but rather as *animal symbolicum*.

Harré: science as exploring the human Umwelt

Philosopher of science Rom Harré extends von Uexküll's use of the concept of *Umwelt*, and draws upon Gibson's notion of affordances, to argue that science is a human social practice within the *human Umwelt*, augmenting the limited perceptual capabilities of human beings (eg with telescopes, microscopes, particle accelerators) (Harré, 1990, Harré and Llored, 2019, Rothbart, 2004). This, he argues "encourages us to think of the physical world we share as human beings, as an Umwelt" (Harré, 1990, 301). Although discussing what are termed the 'physical' sciences, Harré consistently argued that the 'social' or 'human' sciences are essentially no different from the former, turning in the 1970s to the project of rebuilding social psychology as a valid science (Harré and Secord, 1972, Harré, 1983, Harré, 1993) and was a key figure in the development of discursive psychology and positioning theory. We therefore believe it to be in line with Harré's position to extend the concept of Umwelt to the human social world.

Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* and hinge epistemology

Written in the months before his death and published after his death, from his notes and drafts., *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein, 1969) is regarded by many as constituting a significant change in Wittgenstein's thinking from that presented in *Philosophical Investigations*, so much so that they warrant attribution to the 'Third Wittgenstein' (Moyal-Sharrock, 2004). In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein argues that Moore's claim (1925) that there were propositions that must be accepted as true knowledge without evidence argument, 'truisms', fails because there is a problem with calling those 'truisms' *knowledge*. Rather, there are, says Wittgenstein, certain propositions that are 'beyond' doubt. He uses the analogy of the part played by the hinge in the working of a door:

The *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were hinges on which those turn.

We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumptions. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay in place.

(Wittgenstein, 1969, 341, 343)

This has given rise to the development of into what is termed 'Hinge Epistemology' (Coliva and Moyal-Sharrock, 2016), which cannot be elaborated or discussed here.

Moyal-Sharrock notion of hinges as expressed in proposition-procedure pairs, as 'doppelgänger' of one another. Hinges may be seen as *implicit* in activities, unquestioned, beyond doubt: that is, doubting does not arise. The activity aspect of the hinge is carried out, for the most part without the proposition aspect even being considered. If it is considered, it is taken as a matter of certainty.

Summing up the theoretical framing

The above sketch indicates the key ideas that are being formed into a chain of reasoning that may constitute a novel theoretical frame for (re)considering people 'doing things together' (Becker, 1986) in organisational settings, in particular, people doing 'bad' things together (not the same as 'bad' people doing things together!). People are persons, or more properly for social analysis purposes, kinds of persons, identified (by self and others) as such, within human Umwelten.

Because human beings are tool-making and language-using, social beings, they are no longer limited to the Umwelt presented by the physical world, but are capable of altering their Umwelten. The knowledge that human beings have is no longer limited to the immediate and repeated perceptions of the physical world, but amenable to construction, reproduction and communication, through symbolic forms, particularly language.

Empirical sketches from the Post Office Horizon case

Initial examination of empirical material from the Inquiry clearly indicate the way that occupational identity, and the positioned knowledge/ belief available to them in that identity, played a key part in the scandal.

'What they knew'

Post Office Ltd (POL) investigator GT (witness WITN0916)², like other investigators called to make statements and give evidence to the Public Inquiry, stated that he believed that Horizon data was correct, showed real shortages saying

“It was my belief and that of my colleagues I would guess that shortfalls could not actually be attributed to Horizon as there was no knowledge or evidence to suggest there was anything wrong with the system. We even had and used expert witnesses with statements from Fujitsu to corroborate this”.

Witness evidence to and testimony at the Inquiry confirms that his ‘guess’ that his colleagues (sharing identity) is correct, with their repeated statements of their belief or assumption that Horizon produced accurate information. For example, SW (witness WITN1040) repeatedly referred to being told that Horizon was ‘reliable’. In her initial training as an investigator, she was not given any guidance on the circumstances in which she should seek audit data from Fujitsu:

“You were not told how to get any information from Fujitsu, because you were told that the system was 100 per cent reliable.”

In her witness statement submitted to the Inquiry she stated that

"With regard to Fujitsu, I cannot recall if data would be requested in all cases of cash shortfalls as we had been assured by Fujitsu that the Horizon system was completely reliable. These assurances were given from Senior Managers at meetings and during Horizon training."

Referring to the investigation of one SPM, Alan McLaughlin, she says that

"He had also stated he had had counter losses and staff dishonesty but as I had always been assured there wasn't any problem with the Horizon system with regard to cash discrepancies I did not consider the counter losses to be attributed to the Horizon system."

The case was conducted in Northern Ireland, so prosecution was carried out by the Public Prosecution Service on the basis of the case being presented by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). She stated that PSNI required evidence from ‘the people who own the computer system (Horizon) that it was reliable. Then

“The decision to get expert reports was not made by me and I cannot recall who first advised me that I should get a report. I recall there were protocols to follow should you require their assistance and Horizon data would not always be requested if admissions had been made. I found the Fujitsu evidence statements hard to follow as they often had a lot of technical detail in them."

Other witnesses also referred to their limited familiarity with Horizon, and IT generally.

These examples may be seen as suggestive of the hinge proposition-practice pairing at work. The propositional form of the investigator’s belief, understanding, assumed knowledge may be expressed as:

² The individual’s name is redacted here, although in the public domain, in keeping with the assumption that those implicated as ‘perpetrators’ in the scandal were ‘ordinary’ persons caught up in and acting problematically in the events, not singularly ‘evil’ as much social media presents them

Horizon is reliable, so any reports from the system showing monies missing may be taken as indicative of either malfeasance on the part of the SPM, or of incompetence

The practice form is expressed in terms of a vigorous, assertive (many SPMs may say ‘aggressive’) investigation to ascertain if any criminal acts had been committed and to regain the assumed shortfalls.

‘Who they were’

Perhaps the most startling item of evidence is that presented by the Inquiry lawyer, questioning GT (WITN0916) with copy an email GT had sent to a colleague (GW, former Post Office Security Team Casework Manager and Financial Investigator). In the email, in response to a question about why he had retained casework documents (in breach of data protection rules), GT replied that he wanted:

“... to prove that there is FFFFiiiiinnn no "Case for the Justice Of Thieving Sub Postmasters" and that we were the best Investigators they ever had and they were all crooks !!”

We can understand this in terms of (a) GT presenting himself as a member of a group (‘we’, Investigators’, who were (b) worthy of respect (‘the best [the PO] ever had), (c) contrasted with other [SPMs] who were not worthy of respect (“they were all crooks”), not worthy of being believed’.

At the end of his email to GW, GT says

“Hence why Scott had to get rid of us cos we is right and spoke out !!! Power To The People Wolfie Smith !!

Alright my old Gunner Mate ? lol”

The reference to Wolfie Smith is the lead character of a popular comedy programme on BBC1, ‘Citizen Smith’, a wannabe Marxist revolutionary, leader of the self-styled Tooting Popular Front. ‘Gunner Mate’ refers to GT and GW being supported of Arsenal football club. The use of these allusions may be seen as an attempt to bring GW into the same ‘identity circle’ as himself.

What we should note in this example is that the emails in the chain were sent in April 2015, long before the Group Litigation hearings and Justice Fraser’s judgement. It is inconceivable that GT would have written this *pretending* to believe that SPMs were guilty, in anticipation that (a) that there would be a public inquiry and that (b) the email would be obtained under disclosure rules. Rather, we may conclude that GT really believed in the guilt of the SPMs that he, and colleagues, had been involved in investigating.

Claims on being a moral person

The outcome of the Group Litigation case, and subsequent media coverage, clearly challenged the identity and status of key organisational actors as moral persons. Here we can note how, in some cases, the individuals concerned sought to restore their moral status, for themselves and for (selected) colleagues.

For example, in an email sent on 9th May 2021 by GT to Nick Read, CEO of the Post Office from 2019, saying that he wished to raise with the new Board

“the actual effect this whole situation has had on myself and other Investigators at that time employed by Post Office Ltd”.

It was clear now, he says, that he and other investigators had presented evidence for prosecutions, that was incorrect. He wanted Nick Read to

“realise the effect this has had on not just the Postmasters affected but also on the employees directed and instructed by ... Post Office Ltd to perform the Security / Investigation role at this time.”

He refers to “some instances of these Postmasters committing [sic!] suicide, which now sits somewhat on my conscious”. We can see how GT still holds to a self-presentation of being someone unfairly wronged, turning now against those in other positions (senior managers in Post Office) with whom he formerly identified with but who now do not deserve honour and respect.

As a number of persons, particularly investigators, have been required to make witness statements to the Inquiry and called to attend and give testimony under examination by Inquiry counsel, their self-presentation as being persons ‘worthy of respect’ came under challenge. Here we can see how a number sought to self-present, to claim an identity, as ‘victim’, either blameless (the fault lies with more senior people in the Post Office) and/ or now are ‘horrified’ at what the (now exonerated) SPMs. When challenged by Inquiry Counsel why his witness statement was less than 3 pages long, RG {WITN01540100}, investigator in the case of William Quarm, 2010, responded with a fairly lengthy statement about his current role as programme manager in a homeless centre for a Christian organisation, with 30 residents in it. His job now, he said, was “to ensure that these residents get the level of respect and dignity that they deserve”, then talked of the busy set of activities at that time of the year (December) in the Christian calendar. At the end of giving evidence he asked and was permitted by the Inquiry Chair if he (RG) could make a ‘personal statement’, in which he said the Post Office

“let the postmasters down, they let the staff who they employed down, by being less than open and honest with information that should have been shared, wasn't shared, and the ultimate results have led to significant upset, significant difficulties, for people who were left behind. [...] they [The Post Office] deceived me and they deceived an awful lot more people. For my part in it, I am humbly sorry.”

His comments appear to position him as on a par with the SPMs who were the victims of the Scandal (who suffered ‘significant upset’, ‘significant difficulties’).

However, the potential success, or lack of it, of his attempt to regain moral status by being ‘humbly sorry’ seems to fit more with the analysis of corporate apologies by O'Meara and Cooper {, 2020 #1620} than a sincere expression, especially as his manner in the witness box may be described as ‘truculent’.

Conclusions

The foregoing argument, within the confines of a developmental paper, has sketched a novel theoretical framework for exploring and understanding problems within organisations where social actors carry out, over an extended period, actions that are later regarded as problematic. The concept of Umwelt, extended from von Uexküll's originating conceptualisation, enables us to view organisation (without definite or indefinite article) as the main form of the human Umwelt in contemporary society. The occupational identities of those implicated have a major determining effect on what they (are able to) perceive and take as knowledge, and how they act, to the detriment of their capability for moral agency. Initial examination of the case of the Post Office-Horizon Scandal yields indications of the utility of such an analysis, and some examples shown.

We should, however, be careful not to rush to exonerate the organisational actors in the Post Office-Horizon case. We have not, for reasons of space and project timescale, examined the actions of senior executives and others in powerful positions, who may be deemed to have been in positions to question the 'robustness' of Horizon and the prosecution/ persecution of SPMs. Moreover, as Harré elaborates on the notion that hinge-practices "cluster into forms of life", as *quasi-imperatives*; "if you want to live a life like this, you have to act in such and such a way. *But you do not have to live like this*" (Harré and Llored, 2019, p. 31, emphasis added). And as MacIntyre (1999b) argues, moral agency is always possible, albeit at a cost. Referring to his vented) example of J', a railway worker, and others like him, in Germany in the early 1940s, "their guilt is not merely individual guilts, but, in a sense [...] the guilt of a whole social and cultural order". (MacIntyre, 1999b, 329). And that social and cultural order is that of an organisational society, in which managers have considerable power, for better or worse

Future Development

The project now is to:

- develop the theoretical framework, particularly relating it to other approaches that may be seen to cover similar territory, eg *eco-systems* (Mars et al., 2012), *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977), *assemblage theory* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, DeLanda, 2006), *actor-network theory* (Law, 1994, Latour, 2005);
- undertake more systematic analysis of empirical data from the available sources, eg by adopting a text mining approach (Ignatow and Mihalcea, 2017, Grimmer et al., 2022);
- engage with other scandals etc, and other areas of management and organisation research (eg business ethics, corporate social responsibility, management education and development, organisational and societal-level learning

In terms of outputs, the volume of material covered, both theoretical and empirical analysis will clearly exceed the normal length of journal articles. This will require consideration of developing a number of different perspectives on the framework and issues, and/or as publication as a monograph.

Table 1

Examples of recent and on-going Inquiries

The rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer (Angiolini Inquiry) (<https://www.angiolini.independent-inquiry.uk/>) (2022 – ongoing)

Grenfell Tower Inquiry (<https://www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/>) (2017-2024)

COVID-19 (<https://covid19.public-inquiry.uk/>) (2022-ongoing)

Manchester Arena Bombing Inquiry - (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/manchester-arena-inquiry-reports>) (2019-2023)

Hillsborough Independent Panel – re-investigation of fatal crowd crush a football, stadium in Sheffield, resulting in 97 deaths; problematic police crowd control now adjudged to be major cause (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hillsborough-independent-panel/about>) (2009-2012) and Hillsborough Investigation by Independent Office for Police Conduct (<https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/our-work/investigations/hillsborough>) (2012-2021)

Chilcott Inquiry into the Iraq War (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry>)

Windrush scandal – Government mishandling of immigration status of migrants from the West Indies in the 1950s, and of children born of them in the UK

(<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/3153/windrush-children-inquiry/>)

Infected blood products scandal – contaminated blood products, bought in from USA, taken from donors with HIV and Hepatitis C, given to many patients, especially those with haemophilia (<https://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/>)

Metropolitan Police Service investigation of the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-inquiry>)

Thirlwall inquiry into deaths of babies in the neonatal ward of the Countess of Cheshire Hospital, inquiring into "the circumstances surrounding the deaths and incidents, including how concerns raised by clinicians were dealt with." (<https://thirlwall.public-inquiry.uk/>)
Nurse Lucy Letby was convicted of the murder of seven babies and attempted murder of seven others. However, the safety of the convictions has been brought into question, particularly in relation to problems with investigation and expert witness testimony.

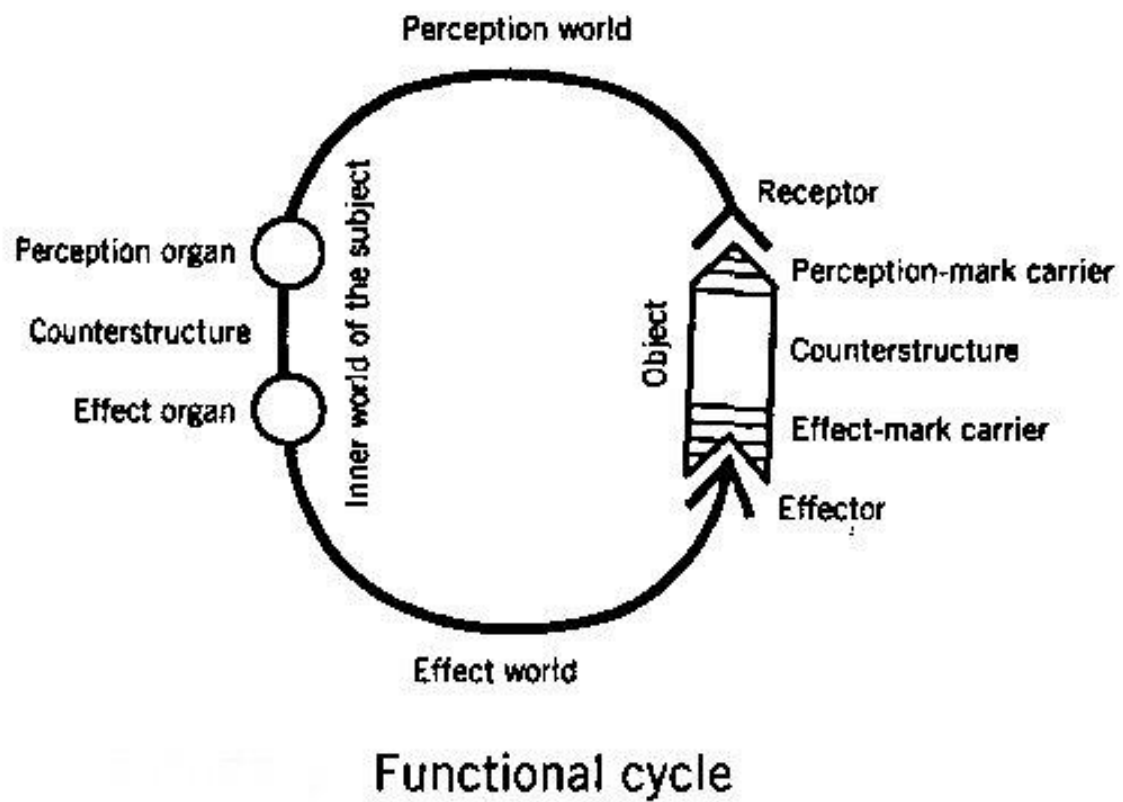


Figure 1: The Functional Cycle (Von Uexküll, 2010, p.49)

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