Emergence, normativity and the social ontology of organizations

Abstract

This paper argues that organizations are structured social groups with emergent causal powers. It sets out a critical realist account of emergence and an account of the structure of organizations that, between them, justify this claim. In doing so, it builds up an account of the ontology of some simpler social forms, including interaction groups, associations, and norm circles, then uses these as building blocks to develop an ontology of organizations. A central feature of the argument is its analysis of the ontological relationship between organizations and normative social institutions, arguing that such institutions play a key role in structuring organizations.

Keywords: organizations, emergence, critical realism, associations, normative social institutions, interactionism.

It may have seemed obvious to earlier organization theorists that organizations were social entities with causal influence: March and Simon, for example, had no hesitation in claiming that organizations "shape the goals and loyalties of their participants" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 2). Yet such assumptions have come under fire, from two directions. Methodological individualists claim that the influence of all social entities can be reduced to the influence of the individuals who are their members, and that social entities as such have no causal significance over and above that of their aggregated members (e.g. Watkins, 1968). More recently, radical social constructionists have claimed that "organizations are *discursive constructions and cultural forms that have no ontological status or epistemological significance beyond their textually created and mediated existence*" (Reed, 2005, p. 1622). As Westwood and Linstead put it, "The notion of structure is illusionary, representing only an ideological practice that pretends to stand in the place of the flux of shifting and seamless textual relationships" (as cited in Reed, 2005, p. 1622; Westwood and Linstead, 2001, pp. 4-5).

This paper, by contrast, argues that organizations are structured social groups with emergent causal powers. One of the merits of an emergentist account of organizations is that, in the face of arguments like those discussed above, it offers the possibility of *justifying* the belief in the real causal significance of organizations that theorists like March and Simon took for granted. Such justifications, however, are only likely to be convincing and useful if they help us to understand *how* organizations as such can be causally effective. One way of doing this it to identify some of the mechanisms at work. Only some versions of emergentist theory, however, lend themselves to such an approach. This paper advocates what I have called a

relational version of emergence theory, which I take to be compatible with most usages of emergence in the complexity theory tradition, as opposed to the *strong* concept of emergence that is usually employed in the other dominant tradition of recent thinking on emergence, that in the philosophy of mind (Kim, 1999; Stephan, 2002). In doing so, I draw on the philosophy of critical realism, and in particular on its emergentist understanding of causality (see Author 2005).[1]

This paper aims, first, to show that critical realism's emergentist approach to questions of structure and agency enables us to explain the causal power of organizations as the emergent causal powers of social groups, and second, to develop a new account of the structure of organizations that makes clear their fundamental dependence on normative social institutions, which can also be understood as the emergent causal powers of *other* social groups

The early parts of the paper summarise previous work that provides the context for the main argument. These parts outline a critical realist understanding of emergence, discuss how this can help us understand the structure of the social world, and illustrate this argument by applying it to normative social institutions, which I argue are the causal powers of specific groups of people: *norm circles*. These sections are necessarily brief, neglecting many of the complexities of the issues concerned, which I have addressed more fully elsewhere. The paper will then develop an emergentist account of two simple types of social forms: *interaction groups* and *associations* – small groups of people interacting with each other in ways that make a causal difference, such as queues and groups of friends. The next section combines some of these ontological building blocks to explain the structure of organizations and the mechanisms that give them emergent causal powers. The net result is a theoretical approach that attributes causal significance to a broad range of social entities as well

as to individual human beings, and allows us to theorise the interactions between them without reducing social entities to mere aggregations of individuals *or* to imaginary side-effects of discourse.

Critical realism and emergence

Theories of emergence have always been motivated by the desire to explain how higher level entities or properties could have a causal impact that is not reducible to the causal impact of lower level entities or properties. Oddly, perhaps, such discussions have often been conducted in isolation from any explicit consideration of how causality works. In the recent critical realist tradition, by contrast, discussion of emergence is set in the context of Roy Bhaskar's realist theory of causal powers.

Bhaskar's theory, developed in his seminal book *A Realist Theory of Science* (1978), rejects the positivist view that causality is nothing more than empirical correlation, as expressed in exceptionless *laws*. Instead, he argues, the causation of actual events occurs as the result of the interaction of the causal powers of things (or, as I shall call them, *entities*). Any single event is *multiply determined* in the sense that it is not the product of a single causal power but rather of multiple interacting powers, and hence the outcome is always contingent on *which* powers are implicated in the production of the event. These causal powers are emergent properties of the things concerned, and depend on what Bhaskar calls *generative mechanisms*: processes that result from the nature of the entity possessing the power, in the sense that they depend on the presence of the particular configuration of parts and relations that is characteristic of the type of entity that possesses this power.[2]

Causal powers are emergent properties in the sense that they are properties of the entity concerned that would not be possessed by its parts if they were not

configured into a whole entity of this type (philosophers sometimes refer to these as *collective* properties). Critical realists therefore advocate what Stephan has called a *weak* emergentism, in the sense that it allows for the possibility that emergent properties can be explained, as opposed to *strong* emergentisms, which deny this possibility (Stephan, 2002; Stephan, 2006). We may illustrate the difference with an example: the power of a thermostat to regulate the temperature of a heated room is an emergent property, for weak emergentists, because the parts of the thermostat would not have this power if they were not combined into the form of a thermostat. For strong emergentists, by contrast, the fact that we can explain how a thermostat works in terms of, say, the properties of bimetallic strips and electrical switches, means that this power is not emergent at all. While recent philosophers of mind predominantly adopt a strong understanding of emergence, it seems doubtful whether there really are any strongly emergent properties at all. Kim, for example, suggests that the only candidate is *qualia* – the way our experiences feel to us (Kim, 1998, p. 116; Kim, 1999, p. 18). One major difficulty facing strong theories of emergence is that it is in principle impossible to tell whether a hitherto unexplained property is strongly emergent (because it is inherently *unexplainable* in lower level terms) or whether the lack of an explanation is simply temporary and science will eventually uncover it.

Even in the philosophy of mind, however, there have been dissident voices advocating a weak (or what I prefer to call a *relational*) version of the concept of emergence. Searle, for example, writes that "Consciousness is a higher-level or emergent property of the brain in the utterly harmless sense of 'higher-level' or 'emergent' in which solidity is a higher-level emergent property of H_2O molecules when they are in a lattice structure (ice)" (Searle, 1992, p. 14). The solidity of ice is a property that scientists can explain by describing the mechanism involved and yet it is

a property of a block of ice and not of the H_2O molecules that are its parts. Consciousness is a property that scientists cannot yet explain in this way but Searle's implication is that this is to be attributed to the undeveloped state of science and not to some inherent unexplainability.

Marras is another philosopher of mind who has criticised the argument, implicit in strong concepts of emergence, that emergent properties cannot be explained: "When we say that *F* causes *G*, we generally assume that there is an underlying mechanism… The efficacy of these mechanisms does not *pre-empt* the claim that *F* causes *G*, but *explains how F* causes *G*… We need to distinguish the *attribution* of causal powers from the *explication of the mechanisms* by which such causal powers are exercised" (Marras, 2006, p. 567). Thus, as in the example above, we may attribute causal power to a thermostat while nevertheless explaining the mechanism that is responsible for it.

Within the complexity theory tradition, relational concepts of emergence tend to predominate over strong versions. Holland, for example, argues that emergence is occurring when

> knowing the behaviours of the isolated parts leaves us a long way from understanding the whole… The simple notion of reduction – studying the parts in isolation – does not work in such cases. We have to study the interactions as well as the parts. Emergence, in the sense used here, occurs only when the activities of the parts do *not* simply sum to give activity of the whole (Holland, 1998, p. 14)

Again, emergence occurs when the whole has properties that the parts do not have, but this is taken to be consistent with *explaining* the mechanisms that underlie emergent properties, and hence this is a relational rather than a strong conception of emergence.

There is something of a tendency amongst complexity theorists, however, to claim that emergence depends upon complexity itself, as it is defined in complexity theory. In the very first issue of this journal, for example, Goldstein argued that

"Emergence, as in the title of this new journal, refers to the arising of novel and coherent structures, patterns, and properties during the process of self-organization in complex systems" (Goldstein, 1999, p. 49). But thermostats and blocks of ice are not *self-organized complex systems* as I understand these terms to be used amongst complexity theorists, and yet on a relational understanding of emergence they would indeed count as entities with emergent properties. Hence I would agree with Corning's rejection of "the claim that emergent effects can only be the result of 'self-organization'" (Corning, 2002, p. 62). Different kinds of entities need different kinds of theories to explain the mechanisms that produce their emergent properties, and complexity theory may be useful in helping us to understand some of these mechanisms, but even quite simple objects can have emergent properties and it may be entirely possible to explain *these* properties without the help of complexity theory.[3] There is no *necessary* dependence of emergentism on complexity theory.

From emergence to social ontology

Critical realism, then, provides a principled foundation for a relational theory of emergence in its general ontology of causality and thus has a valuable contribution to make to the kind of emergentist theorising that has predominated in the complexity theory tradition. How, though, can this be applied to the social world?

On the one hand we must perform what critical realists have called *retroduction* (Lawson, 1997, p. 24): identify the causal powers that influence social events, the entities that possess those powers, and the mechanisms that produce them, given the characteristic parts of such entities and the characteristic relations between those parts. On the other we must perform *retrodiction* (Lawson, 1997, p. 221): for

any given event or class of events, identify the particular causal powers that interact to produce it.[4]

In practice, the application of these methods faces enormous challenges. For example, we must deal with potentially misleading preconceptions about the entities and powers that populate the social world. We must find ways of disentangling the structure of social entities from other entities when there are complex inter-relationships between them. We must deal with all of the difficulties usually faced by social science of determining which causal factors are really significant in any given case. And in analysing part-whole relationships we must achieve an overall vision that is coherent across a range of powers and entities. In any one project we are only likely to be able to make a few steps forward, steps that may need to be modified or even reversed when we broaden the analysis to other related powers, entities and events.

Still, the need for coherence is also a resource: where an entity's existence and its possession of emergent causal powers are well established, we can use this to help us theorise related entities and their powers. In particular, this gives us a head start in theorising the structure and powers of wholes whose parts are relatively well understood already. In the social world, there is one entity whose ontological status seems clear enough and which can therefore act as the first building block of a social ontology: the individual human being. We exist as biological entities with distinct causal powers and tendencies to behave in particular ways (*dispositions*) that arise from our material structure, including the structures of our brains. This is not to deny, incidentally, the influence of the social on our powers and dispositions: our prior social experience influences these through its effects on our neural networks and the mental properties that are (as Searle argues) emergent properties of those neural networks.[5]

This paper seeks to take only a few steps forward from such a foundation, by analysing the complex of entities that make up an organization. As a first approximation, we can say, with March and Simon, that organizations are "assemblages of interacting human beings" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 23). Their parts, in other words, are human individuals, and the resulting assemblages are real entities.[6] But what kinds of relations between those individuals and what kinds of mechanisms could give these assemblages causal powers of their own? This paper will argue that organizations in general are the sites of several interacting types of mechanism, and that they draw their causal capabilities from this interaction. Some of these mechanisms can be seen more clearly in other, simpler, social forms: *normative social institutions*, *interaction groups* and *associations*. The following sections will therefore analyse these simpler forms before proceeding to combine them to explain the ontology of organizations.

Normative social institutions

A norm, in sociological usage, is a guideline for practice. Such norms may be understood at a non-verbal level, such as the understanding each of us has of how close it is appropriate to stand to someone when we have a conversation with them. Other norms (or indeed the same ones, when we reflect upon them) may be verbalisable as rules, such as 'you should apologise if you bump into someone' or 'don't take other people's property without their permission'. Norms are important because they appear to shape social practice in such a way as to standardise patterns of behaviour. Typically, sociologists have attributed the causal capability of norms to shape our practice to *social structure*, or more specifically to *social institutions*.

There is scope for confusion here, as the term *institution* is often used unreflectively in lay discourse to refer to organizations. The normative version of the concept of an *institution* used in social theory, however, is analytically distinct from the concept of an organization. This does not in itself rule out the possibility that some or all organizations *are* normative institutions, as some theorists have argued (Hodgson, 2006a, p. 147; Hodgson, 2006b, p. 8), but I will argue in this paper that although there are many important and interesting interdependencies between organizations and institutions they remain different sorts of things.

But what sort of things are institutions? Are they things – or entities – at all? And how could they have the power to influence our behaviour? These are the sorts of issues raised in the debates over *structure and agency* that have animated social theorists since the time of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. There is not space in this paper to discuss those wider debates in any depth, but I do want to suggest that the retroductive method offered by critical realism may help point the way to a solution.[7] Given the claim that institutions have normative causal power, one of the first questions prompted by this method is: what is the *entity* that possesses this power – and what is the nature of that entity? To the rather limited extent that they have considered this question at all, sociologists have often assumed that it has an obvious answer: that the source of normative power is 'society'.

In recent years, however, the concept of *society* has come to seem increasingly problematic. At one time, there was perhaps a tacit assumption amongst social scientists that *societies* were congruent with the boundaries of nation states, but the progress of globalisation has made us more aware of what in reality was always the case: that social systems do not map neatly onto state boundaries. Not only transnational business corporations and international political structures like the UN

and the IMF, but also families, religious organizations, and trading relationships, to name but a few, criss-cross national boundaries and always have done(see, for example, Walby, 2005). If there is such a thing as a *society* in the sense of a specific entity with well defined parts (and therefore well defined boundaries), it is hard to see how this could be anything less than the whole social world.

A further problem with the idea that *society* is responsible for the causal power of social institutions over us is that this seems difficult or impossible to reconcile with the empirical fact that there are many different, competing, and sometimes downright contradictory social norms at large in the social world. If *society* in general is causally responsible for norm observance, for example, then how can we explain the radically different norms regarding meat-eating held by vegetarians, Muslims, orthodox Jews, Hindus, and many other social groups?

The solution I have offered to this problem elsewhere is that each socially influential norm is the product of a specific social group. For each norm, I argue, there is a group of people who are committed to endorsing and enforcing that norm in their interactions with each other and with those around them. We can call this group the *norm circle* for the norm concerned.[8] Each normative social institution is an emergent property or power of the norm circle that supports the norm concerned. If this is so, however, then we should be able to identify the mechanism responsible for the property, and the characteristic parts of the group and relations between them that underpin this mechanism.

The parts, in this case, are the people who are the members of the group. The relation between them that is significant here is the commitment they have to interact in certain ways with each other, that is, to endorse and enforce the norm. Such endorsement or enforcement may take a variety of forms, both subtle and direct. At

the direct extreme, physical violence may be employed, as for example when a nightclub bouncer ejects a customer who has transgressed against the club's rules. More typically, even enforcement action, that taken against those who breach the norm, is more subtle – perhaps a verbal rebuke, a frown, a turning away, or a joke made at the transgressor's expense. And enforcement is complemented by endorsement, which may include praise for observing a norm, explanation of it, or even just conspicuous enactment of it in order to set an example.

The effect of such behaviour is to alter the normative environment faced by those with whom the members of the norm circle endorse and enforce the norm. Let us call these individuals the *targets* of the norm circle. As a result of their past experience of such behaviour, the targets know that they face a systematic incentive to enact the practice. Individual beliefs (or indeed dispositions, as in Bourdieu's well known analysis of the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990)) are a crucial part of the mechanism underpinning the causal power of the larger group. At the level of the individual, social institutions work because the individual knows both what behaviour is expected of them, and the pattern of incentives their behaviour is likely to confront. Individual beliefs, then, mediate between the social institution and individual behaviour. These beliefs create a tendency for the individual to enact the practice concerned; but they take the form they do at least in part because of the emergent causal effect of the norm group.

In practice, any given individual is usually only exposed to the endorsing or enforcing behaviour of a small subset of the whole norm circle for any given norm. We may call this subset the *proximal norm circle* for this norm, for this individual. It is their experience of the proximal norm circle that directly impacts on the target's beliefs regarding their normative environment. Yet individuals tend to generalise from

such experience to the belief that there is a wider group of people who would also endorse and enforce the norm. If, for example, an individual experiences three different teachers enforcing the norm 'no talking in class', then these three teachers will form her proximal norm circle for 'no talking in class', but she may well develop the belief that *all* teachers (and only teachers) are part of the norm circle for this norm. This wider understanding of the norm circle (the *imagined norm circle* for this norm, for this individual) is still particular to the individual concerned, since different individuals may imagine the extent of the norm circle differently. It is, however, causally significant, since it is when the individual is in the presence of members of their imagined norm circle for a norm that they are most likely to conform to it. This pupil, for example, may fall silent when a new teacher walks into the room, because of her beliefs concerning the extent of this norm circle. However, individuals can be wrong in their beliefs about the extent of a norm circle – in this case, for example, there may be teachers who do not discourage this practice, and non-teachers who do discourage it. Our pupil may continue chatting to her friends when a prefect enters the room only to find herself sanctioned for the behaviour from an unexpected quarter. The *actual* group of people who tend to endorse or enforce any given norm form the *objective norm circle* for that norm and it is the membership of this circle (and not our imagined norm circle) that determines whether or not sanctioning behaviour will actually occur. Experiences in which we find that the objective norm circle is larger or smaller than our imagined norm circle will, of course, tend to produce convergence of the latter towards the former.

In general, I argue, it is the objective norm circle that has the causal power to influence our normative beliefs and dispositions and thus our behaviour, but it does to through those parts of it to which we are objectively exposed (the proximal norm

circle) and through the beliefs we develop about its extent (the imagined norm circle). As a consequence of the influence of a norm circle, then, a target individual acts differently than they would do otherwise. But what justifies the claim that this is an emergent causal power of the norm circle as a collective social entity, and not just an aggregative effect of the target's exposure to the causal influences of particular individuals?

This claim rests on the argument that endorsing and enforcing behaviour by members of the norm circle is action *on behalf of* the norm circle, action that would not be so likely to occur if the sanctioning individuals were not themselves part of a norm circle. Even if any given norm endorser held the same normative belief, they would not enforce or endorse it so strongly or so frequently (or perhaps at all) if they did not believe that they were part of a social group that shares a commitment to support the norm. And such beliefs, I suggest, are generally well founded, because these too rest on prior experience of endorsing and enforcing behaviour. Such behaviour gives us only a rather uncertain foundation for beliefs about the *extent* of any given norm circle, but it gives us good reasons to believe in the *existence* of a norm circle.

To summarise, norm circles have an emergent causal power to influence the normative beliefs and behaviour of individuals because (i) the commitment that their members share to endorse and enforce a particular norm increases their tendency to *actually* endorse and enforce that norm beyond the level that would prevail if these individuals were not related to each other in this way; and (ii) this endorsing and enforcing behaviour alters the perception of their normative environment held by the affected individuals in such a way that they will tend to conform to the norm concerned. This is the mechanism that produces normative social institutions.

There are two further characteristics of norms and norm circles that will be important as we develop the argument further. First: in the contemporary social world, norm circles intersect in enormously diverse and complex ways. We may draw our normative beliefs on one subject from a radically different group of people than our normative beliefs on another, and any given individual is therefore at the meeting point of a large number of norm circles. A given individual, for example, may draw her norms regarding religious practice from a church, those on ways of dressing from a youth subculture, and those regarding working practices from the organization in which she works.

Second: although we are accustomed to thinking of norms as constraints on how we behave, they can also be resources. Constraining norms take forms like 'you may not eat in the office'; resource norms take forms like 'if you wish to earn a pension, you must make monthly contributions'. Resource norms constrain us in a conditional sense, but also provide opportunities to achieve things that would not otherwise be possible (hence they are similar to what Searle has called constitutive, as opposed to regulative, rules (Searle, 1995, pp. 27-8)). Norms, therefore, may be productive of more than order and conformity.

Interaction groups

A second basic form of sociation that has been widely theorised in the sociological literature is what its leading theorist, Erving Goffman, calls *interaction situations* (Goffman, 1956). In an interaction situation, two or more people interact in a manner that is shaped by their conventional understandings of the situation and of the appropriate way to behave in situations of this type. These tend to be relatively short-lived interactions, with no necessary commitment of the parties to each other, or

to longer term persistence of the interaction, and participation in them is relatively open. Such interactions come about whenever two or more people recognize that they are in a situation where their behaviour is expected to be guided by certain conventions specific to that kind of situation. The vast majority of social interactions would seem to conform to this pattern. This section will argue that in at least some interaction situations, the participants may form a group with emergent causal powers, and hence it will refer to the group of people involved in an interaction situation as an *interaction group*.[9] The causal powers of interaction groups as such may seem quite insignificant in some respects, but they are worth considering carefully because the mechanism at work is one that is replicated in organizations, with much more significant consequences.

Let us consider the case of queuing. There are many situations in contemporary Western societies when individuals spontaneously form queues. Typically this occurs when there is a physical point from which a service is being provided to one person at a time (or a series of such points), all of the available service points are in use, and more than one person is waiting to access the service. Examples of such service points would include checkouts or tills in shops, ticket windows in railway stations, and public toilets. When there is more than one person waiting for such a service point, they will commonly form a line, ordered by the time at which the individuals concerned joined it (as a result of each new person joining the line at the back), with the understanding that the first person in the line will take the next turn to access the service when a point becomes available, and the rest will then move up a place.

A queue, I suggest, is an interaction group, whose formation is prompted by two main sets of factors. First, the participants understand queuing, and are committed

to observing the norms it entails (roughly, that they should behave as specified in the paragraph above).[10] Second, the situation itself is one in which queuing is appropriate, and is recognizable as such by the participants (this is sometimes aided by the physical setting – props such as signs saying 'queue here', or ropes marking out an area for queuing in). The situation differs somewhat depending on whether the individual is the first to arrive after all the service points become busy, or the second (is that first person queuing or not?) or whether they arrive when there are already at least two people there, in which case the existence of a queuing situation is more obvious. Nevertheless, anyone familiar with the institution of queuing will recognize any of these variations and will tend to respond appropriately.

When individuals do not conform with these norms in situations where others expect them to, they are likely to face strong negative sanctions, particularly from those who are already participating in the queue, but often also from those staffing the service points concerned. A queue may be an interaction group, but *queuing* as such is a normative social institution, endorsed and enforced by the usual normative mechanisms. There is, in other words, a norm circle for queuing, and the power of the norm circle tends to influence individuals to form queues, to observe the norms of queuing within the queue, and to endorse and enforce queuing norms in queuing situations. These norms also help us to make sense of the situation and of the behaviour of other actors within it.[11]

Norm circles thus play a substantial causal role in generating queuing behaviour. But I have also suggested that queues themselves, as groups of people who are interacting with each other in the ways defined by queuing norms, may be an interaction group with emergent causal powers. What causal role does the queue itself play, beyond the causal contribution of the institution of queuing and the contributions

of the participants as individual agents? The main contribution would seem to be towards our understanding of the situation. When we see a queue, this makes a contribution to our realisation that this is a queuing situation (the causal consequence is that "the existence of a queuing situation is more obvious", as I put it above). More substantially, perhaps, the existence of the queue contributes causally to our decision as to *where* to queue. When we perceive that a queue exists already, we know that we should join it at the back, rather than, for example, starting a new queue of our own, or trying to join the existing queue in the middle.

This (small but essential) causal contribution of the queue results from it being a certain types of parts (people) organised by certain relations (standing in line adjacent to a service point), giving it the emergent property of being recognizable as an instance of queuing. We could perhaps say that queues are *instantiations* of the institution of queuing, which provide a site for the enactment and reinforcement of the norms concerned, and I suggest that these arguments apply equally to interaction situations in general. Each of them is an instantiation of a related set of institutions as a result of the participants recognizing that the situation is one to which those institutions apply.

What then, is the ontological relationship between the interaction group and the norm circle responsible for the institution that it instantiates? At any given moment, an interaction group is composed of parts which are the people who participate in it, and the properties of the interaction group as a whole depend on those parts, including the properties of those parts, and the relations between them. In particular, the existence and properties of the interaction group depend upon a specific set of properties of the people concerned: their beliefs about the relevant norms. These beliefs are the outcome, in part, of the *previous* causal influences of the norm circles

propagating the norms concerned. Thus the interaction group is *causally* dependent on the prior impact of the norm circle on these beliefs, but this does not entail that the norm circle itself is *part* of the interaction group, nor that the interaction group is *part* of the norm circle: the two structures are ontologically distinct, although they share some of their parts – the individuals who are members of both.[12] As we shall see, a similar relationship exists between institutions and organizations, and is indeed fundamental to understanding the ontology of organizations. There is, however, an intermediate step between interaction groups and organizations, which we must consider first: *associations*.

[Note: the paper could be split into two parts here, with the addition of a short conclusion for part 1 and a short introduction for part 2]

Associations

I define an *association* as a group of two or more people who have a continuing commitment to the group as such and not just to any normative institutions that the group may happen to instantiate. Perhaps the key respect in which associations differ from interaction groups is that due to this commitment the group can persist beyond the duration of a single interaction situation. Its members are likely to have a sense of the group continuing to exist as a group even when they are not engaged in interaction with each other, and they will tend to engage in repeated interactions. One implication is that there is a degree of stability in the membership of the group over a period of time, although associations may allow some turnover of membership.[13]

As with most such distinctions in the social world, there is something of a grey area in the distinction between interaction group and association. We can illustrate this with the example of dating. In some cultures, two people with a romantic interest in each other may agree to go out on a date – say for a meal in a restaurant. A date is an interaction situation, and its participants form an interaction group, governed by certain (culturally-specific) norms – say, for example, that they should take an interest in each other, converse in a friendly way, and reveal facts about themselves that they would not normally reveal to strangers. Such an interaction situation need not imply any commitment to a longer term relationship; the participants may decide, for example, that they are not suited to each other and never date again.

On the other hand, they may both feel encouraged in their interest in each other, and agree to date again. This is where our grey area appears. Dating more than once does not necessarily commit them to being "a couple"; they may still feel they are getting to know each other before making such a decision, for example, and one or both may feel they could still go on a date with someone else without being in any way disloyal. At some point, however, if the relationship develops well, the participants may decide that they are indeed a couple, with a continuing commitment to being so, and at this point we could certainly say that they form not just an interaction group but an association.

There is a variety of reasons why individuals might feel committed to a group, but in general we can say that such commitment is likely to arise when the member feels that the group gives them some continuing benefit or meets some continuing need that they have.[14] In informal associations, these may include, for example, emotional support, or identity definition/affirmation. An interesting case of the latter has been documented by Mary Bucholtz in a study of a group of nerd girls in a US

high school (Bucholtz, 1999). The group that Bucholtz observed were close friends who banded together to reaffirm a positive nerd identity for themselves, at least in part as a defence against the denigration of such identities by the prevailing 'jock' and 'burnout' cultures in the social context of the school. They met frequently, for example in the school grounds during break times, and even named their group and identified themselves as its members in the school yearbook.

The significance of associations for this paper is that, I suggest, they are social entities with emergent causal powers, and in particular that they have more significant causal powers than interaction groups. In the case of Bucholtz's nerd girls, for example, she documents a fascinating case in which they negatively sanction the linguistic behaviour of a peripheral member of the group (referred to as Carrie) when she employs a word drawn from the sort of cool youth culture that is rejected by the group (Bucholtz, 1999, p. 219). Now in one respect, this is a classic case of norm enforcement, conducted by members of a wider norm circle, but the impact of this norm enforcement on Carrie is potentially greater than it would be if done by someone outside the group. To the extent that Carrie is committed to the group, her tendency to accept the normative standards endorsed by the group is increased. She is more likely to be influenced by their norm supporting behaviour, in other words, than someone else would be if they experienced exactly the same behaviour from exactly the same individuals, but had no desire to maintain membership and status within the group. This additional impact is a causal impact of the association as such (which Bucholtz refers to as a *community of practice*) (Author, under consideration-b).

Such impacts need not be confined to conformance with constraining norms. Consider the hypothetical case of a group of teenagers who meet frequently in a local park to skateboard together, and who value skateboarding performance as part of their

group identity. We might expect the members of the group to be more likely to turn up at the park when the group is expected to be there, more likely to learn new skateboarding skills, and more likely to try to skateboard to the best of their ability, all in order to improve their standing within the group. Perhaps the case that is most clearly distinguished from constraining normativity is the last one here: the suggestion that the skateboarders would try harder in order to improve their standing. This effect might well be produced even if members of the group explicitly endorsed the 'cool' norm of not trying too hard. Status is achieved by being good at skateboarding, which requires trying hard, even though the explicit normative environment sanctions trying hard, and the most skilled members of the group may reconcile these pressures by learning how to try hard while appearing not to. All of these are effects of the causal influence of the group

Associations, in other words, exert a causal influence over the activities of their members: a case of what emergence theorists call *downward causation*. This is an emergent causal power, produced by a mechanism that depends upon the parts of the entity – the members of the association – and the relations between them. The mechanisms that are responsible for the causal powers that associations have, beyond those of interaction groups, depend upon that class of relations that distinguish associations from interaction groups: the various types of commitment of the members to the group. At one level the mechanisms we are talking about here are similar to those involved in normative social institutions: dispositions and beliefs about the incentives an individual faces in their social environment are produced by the individual's experience of that environment, and influence subsequent behaviour in ways that respond to that experience. The difference is that the incentives to which an individual responds in an association exist only because the association exists and

are produced within it. To the extent that the interactions that occur within the association generate a degree of consensus about the status of an individual within that association (including whether or not they are considered a member), and to the extent that such consensus affects the behaviour of the other members towards the individual concerned, then these interactions generate an incentive for the individual to seek higher status within the association. To the extent that such status within the organization concerned *matters* to the individual, or in other words to the extent that the individual is committed to the association, these incentives will affect her behaviour. The specific effects depend upon which sorts of behaviour are incentivised in the association, which will vary from case to case.

The causal power of organizations

Organizations are a type of association: they are groups of people who have a continuing commitment to the organization as such. However, organizations are more complex than the simple sorts of association discussed so far in this paper, in at least two significant dimensions. First, they tend to be strongly structured by specialised *roles*; and second, they are marked by significant *authority* relations between at least some of these roles. This is not to deny that role specialisation can exist in simpler forms of social structure. If our skateboarders had been football (soccer) players instead, for example, then roles such as “the person who brings the football” or “goalkeeper” might exist within the group: roles, in other words, may be found in simpler forms of association. But they may also be found in interaction groups: the roles of “first in queue” and “last in queue” are significant in queues, for example. This suggests that it is authority relations between roles that are the significant differentiator between organizations and these simpler social forms, though I will also

argue that role specialisation become more significant in the context of authority relations.

Support for this understanding of organizations can be found, for example, in Weber:

> by no means every closed communal or associative relationship is an organization. For instance, this is not true of an erotic relationship or of a kinship group without a head. Whether or not an organization exists is entirely a matter of the presence of a person in authority (Weber, 1978, pp. 48-9)

Weber illustrates the argument with a list of such persons: "the head of a family, the executive committee of an association, a managing director, a prince, a president, the head of a church" (Weber, 1978, p. 48). The inclusion of executive committees in his list somewhat modifies his argument – it is not "a person in authority" that is decisive, but the vesting of authority within some person or group within the organization.

Nevertheless, I will suggest, it is because authority relations make *role specialisation* more powerful that organizations are potentially more powerful than simpler associations. Authority relations themselves are a variety of role specialization: the holders of certain roles in the organization have, as part of their role description, authority in certain respects over the holders of other roles. Hence, in some respects at least, the combination 'role specialisation plus authority relations' is simply a more developed variety of role specialisation. Roles that confer authority on their holders effectively confer some part of the power of the organization as a whole preferentially on certain role occupants.

This is not to say that authority in organizations is *entirely* a product of role specifications; other factors may co-determine the possession of authority. In particular, the possession of capital of various kinds may be a significant factor. Most obviously, the owner-managers characteristic of small businesses acquire their

authority primarily from their ownership of the business, and their role definition is dependent on this primary source. Even in large businesses, authority is to some extent dependent on, and delegated from, the ownership of share capital. Other individuals may acquire a degree of authority, or augment authority that is derived from their role, as a result of possessing superior knowledge or skills (educational capital, or cultural capital as Bourdieu would say), or in some cultural contexts as a result of holding an elevated social position outside the organization (social capital). Furthermore, the *acceptance* of authority relations by those who are subject to them may sometimes be due to a *lack* of capital or of alternative opportunities. This is central to Marx's understanding of wage labour: workers have little choice but to accept alienating authority relations since in the absence of capital of their own they must sell their labour power to survive and *all* of the opportunities available to them require them to accept such authority relations. For such participants in organizations, their continuing commitment to the organization and their role in it may be entirely instrumental.

These influences on authority, however important they may be, are distinct from those that are intrinsic to organizations, and if we are to isolate the causal powers of organizations *as such*, as opposed to particular organizations or organizations of particular types, we must focus on the mechanisms that arise from the structure of organizations. Here it is role specifications that are of paramount importance.

Any organization, I argue, is an emergent entity composed of a group of human individuals, structured by the relationships between them specified in the descriptions of the roles occupied by those individuals.[15] Role descriptions implicitly or explicitly specify rules that define how an incumbent of the position concerned

must relate to other members of the organization, and also how they must relate to outsiders when acting on behalf of the organization.

Now, when a role incumbent adopts the behaviours defined by a role (e.g. answering the phone in the call centre if the incumbent's role is 'call handling agent'), we have another case of 'downward causation'. Here the action of the role incumbent is co-determined by a variety of causal powers, including the causal power of the organization, as well as the causal powers of the individual role incumbent herself (cf. Archer, 1995: 184). Thus, the organization has a causal effect on the role incumbent, although this effect, like any causal influence, does not fully determine a necessary outcome.

To the extent, however, that this causal mechanism is effective, the behaviour of the role incumbent 'in the role' is part of the behaviour of the organization, and the causal effects of the organization are the aggregate of the causal effects of its role incumbents when they do act in role. Now, a methodological individualist might argue that this reduces the behaviour of the organization to that of the individuals and there is no need for the organization at all in this explanation.[16] However, the role incumbents have the effects that they do when acting in these roles only because they are organised into this organization. If there were no organization there would be no such roles and the people would behave differently. Hence the emergent causal powers of the organization cannot be eliminated from the explanation of this behaviour.

Similarly, if there were no organization, then those with whom the role incumbents interact would treat them differently. Customers, suppliers, and others who interact with an organization always do so through the human individuals who occupy roles within it, but the way they interact with these individuals is conditioned

by their understanding that the role incumbents represent the organization concerned, that they act on its behalf. Thus the existence of the organization also affects how these external individuals behave towards its members.

Let me illustrate the arguments of the last three paragraphs in a simple hypothetical example: I walk into an electrical shop and purchase a TV from a sales assistant, who arranges for it to be delivered to my home in a few days time.

First, it is perfectly clear that when I ask the assistant to sell me a TV, the assistant's behaviour is in certain respects determined by her incumbency of the sales assistant role. I do not mean to deny that the sales assistant exercises her individual agency – she does so in *choosing* to inhabit the role, and in deciding *how* to enact it. Yet as long as she does choose to inhabit the role, certain behaviours are expected of her, such as agreeing to sell me what I wish to buy (assuming it is in stock, etc.), taking payment, and arranging delivery. No doubt she will have been taught these behaviours by individuals, and no doubt she understands that individual managers will discipline or dismiss her if she fails to enact them adequately. Yet all of these people act in these ways towards her purely because they too are enacting roles. Neither they, nor the sales assistant herself, would behave in these ways if they were not part of the organization as a whole.

Second, when the sales assistant sells me the TV, she does not do so on behalf of herself. She does not own the TV – the organization does. She sells it in her capacity as part of that organization. In other words, it is the organization that sells me the TV, though it does so through the sales assistant, who is one of its parts. Just as we accept that human beings are causally responsible for the behaviour of their parts when it is directed by their decisions, so we must accept that organizations are

causally responsible for the behaviour of their members or employees when that behaviour is motivated by organizational policy.

Thirdly, as a customer I would not hand over my money to this sales assistant unless I believed she had, through her role incumbency, the right on behalf of the business she represents to sell me the television I expect in return. Although I am served by an individual person I know that she does not own the TV, and will not deliver it to me personally, but I take her to be an authorised representative of a reputable business against which I have legal redress should the TV fail to arrive. In other words, while some aspects of my behaviour towards the sales assistant may be oriented to her as an individual – I may greet her and chat about the weather, for example, before buying the TV – others are oriented towards her as a part of an organization. I only purchase the TV from her because I take her to be acting as part of the organization that owns it, and so my behaviour as an actor external to it is causally influenced by the existence of the organization as such.

Now, in arguing that when the sales assistant sells me a TV she does so as a part of the organization concerned and as a result of its causal influence, I am seeking to isolate the causal significance of the organization in this transaction.[17] This is, like most of this paper, an exercise in *retroduction* – in the identification and explanation of a particular class of causal powers. My argument here does *not* entail reducing the sales assistant to a 'structural dope', devoid of any influence of her own on the transaction, as some methodological individualists would claim. For a full explanation of any actual social event, we must move on from *retroduction* to *retrodiction*, in which we recognise the force of what Bhaskar calls the *multiple determination* of actual events (Bhaskar, 1978, pp. 110-111). In other words, to explain a specific event, we need to do much more than explaining one particular causal power; we need

to identify all the powers that are interacting to produce the event, and how they affect each other. Once we turn to retrodiction, we must bring back in the person and indeed a range of other entities that may have influenced the event concerned.

In this case the sales assistant, in dealing with my interest in purchasing a television, may be affected at one and the same time by, for example, (a) her role in the organisation, which requires her to sell products to customers on behalf of the organisation; (b) styles of speech and gesture unconsciously imitated from her colleagues; (c) norms of customer treatment that are prevalent in the organisation, or in that particular shop; (d) incentive schemes; (e) norms of ethical treatment of people absorbed from some wider normative community, e.g. a religious community of which the sales assistant is a member; (f) interaction norms that influence how we all behave in face to face interactions in general, and in specific types of interaction situation such as sales assistant/customer interactions; and (g) the sales assistant's own decisions about how to accommodate these sometimes conflicting pressures. Her behaviour is therefore multiply determined by the interacting causal powers of (i) the organisation; (ii) a number of distinct norm circles; (iii) the interaction group formed by herself and her customer; and (iv) the individual herself. The influence of organisations, norm circles and the interaction group is mediated through the individual's beliefs about the normative environment that she faces, and the dispositions she has formed due to unanalysed environmental pressures. Where these are in conflict with each other or with other elements of the situation the assistant faces, she as an individual must make decisions on how to resolve these difficulties: decisions on how to enact her role.

When individuals become parts of organizations, they do not lose the powers they have as individuals, but those powers are channelled and constrained as a result

of the relations those individuals now have with others in the organization. The behaviour of the organization, then, is the aggregate of the behaviours of its role incumbents 'in the role'. Although the relationship between these behaviours is additive, the organization is nevertheless emergent, because the organization has a non-linear effect on each of these behaviours as a result of the fact that the role incumbents behave differently as role incumbents than they would have done in isolation if they were not incumbents of these roles.

It is worth remarking on the role of the sales assistant's managers in this example. Ultimately it is the authority vested in those holding managerial roles (whatever its source) that makes role specifications so strongly binding in organizations. The structural significance of such authority roles is that they make it possible to co-ordinate the activities of other role incumbents at quite a detailed level, and hence make it possible for the organization as a whole to achieve much more than would otherwise be possible. As Davis puts it, "hierarchical organizations are enormously powerful at accomplishing actions well beyond the grasp of individual members. How? March and Simon answer that hierarchies divide the labor into discrete, cognitively manageable tasks and then reaggregate the product of these tasks into a whole" (Davis, 2006, p. 116). In other words, organizations can reap the benefit of a sophisticated division of labour.

But this still does not entirely capture the power that arises from combining authority relations with role specification. Part of the power of organizations is that they can combine highly regulated task-focussed roles, where the role and its expected behaviours are specified in detail for a variety of types of task, with far more flexible roles charged in very general terms with ensuring the co-ordination of the others. In other words: managers, who provide what March and Simon call the "central

coordinative system" of organizations (March and Simon, 1993, p. 23). Most significantly of all, the management role includes the development of the role specifications themselves, and their continuing elaboration in response to the goals, performance and circumstances of the organization.[18] It is this that gives organizations the potential flexibility to adapt and also to develop increasing levels of specialization.

Organizations and institutions

The previous section has argued that role specialisation is the mechanism that underpins the emergent causal powers of organizations. But roles themselves are defined in terms of rules, rules that specify how incumbents of the role should behave in certain circumstances, and as we have already seen, a rule is a variety of *norm*. Roles, in other words, are normative constructions, and the rules involved are causally effective as a result of just the same mechanisms as any other norm: they are emergent properties of norm circles, which are effective because individuals recognize that they face normative pressures supporting the norm and therefore tend to act in conformance with the norm.

Broadly speaking, the norms defining any role in an organization can be divided into two groups: those that are specific to the organization concerned and those that are backed by a wider norm circle. Let me call the former *local* role norms and the latter *general* role norms. A company with a unique process for manufacturing widgets may define a role like 'Stage 1 Widget Assembler' that includes a local role norm like 'Perform process *x* then pass the part-assembled widget on to a Stage 2 Widget Assembler'. Even such a role, however, is likely to include a selection of much more general role norms, such as 'work an eight-hour shift, five

days a week' or 'always wear protective eyewear when at your work station'. And less unique roles, such as 'bricklayer', 'lecturer' or 'office manager' may be defined by almost entirely general role norms, though the particular selection of norms included in the role specification may be locally distinctive.

The norm circles for local role norms may be confined to the organization concerned (or to a sub-set of its members), whereas those for general role norms will be much wider. These wider norm circles may sometimes be significant even within the organization. For example, a trade union may defend certain general role norms that are seen to benefit the incumbents of the roles concerned, or government legislation may do so (as, perhaps, in the case of protective eyewear). But in most cases, the proximate endorsement and enforcement of role norms is dominated by the managers, and sometimes the co-workers or customers, of the workers concerned. As March and Simon put it, "Not only is the role defined for the individual who occupies it, but it is known in considerable detail to others in the organization who have occasion to deal with him" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 22). When those others stand in a relation of authority to the individual, their support for the norm is particularly powerful. Role specialization only works because roles norms are endorsed and enforced by the proximal norm circles, predominantly within the organization, of the role incumbents. Yet at the same time, role incumbents are influenced by a large range of intersecting norm circles, relating not only to these role norms but also to other norms that are not specific to their roles but which do affect their role performance.

Organizations, then, are structures that depend on normativity, just as interaction groups (and indeed simpler forms of association) are. Like an interaction group, an organization is composed of parts which are the people who participate in it,

and the properties of the organization as a whole depend on those parts, including the properties of those parts, and the relations between them. In particular, the causal powers of the organization depend upon a specific set of properties of its members: their beliefs about the norms that define their roles. These beliefs are the outcome, in part, of the *previous* causal influences of the norm circles propagating the norms concerned, which will generally include, but not be confined to, their immediate managers. Thus the organization's powers are *causally* dependent on the prior impact of norm circles on these beliefs, but those norm circles are ontologically distinct from the organization as such, although some individuals are members of both.

Like interaction groups, organizations can also instantiate wider norms, and depend upon the norms that they instantiate. Businesses, for example, may instantiate various legal norms regarding the formation of limited liability companies. However, the relation between organizations and institutions is more complex than that between interaction groups and institutions, for a number of reasons.

Most obviously, they can, like associations, preferentially favour some norms over others, and use the commitment of members to the organization (whatever its source) as a lever to influence their conformance with those specific norms. This is another crucial element of the role mechanism: organizations can make role specialisation work because they amplify and focus the influence of the norm circles that endorse the norms that make up the roles. When a manager, in particular, presses a worker to conform with a particular norm that is constitutive of their role, they act on behalf of the organization and bring the authority (and potential sanctions) that their own role endows them with to bear in support of that norm.

Furthemore, organizations (unlike interaction groups) can also have a causal impact on the shaping of the norms that are supported by norm circles. This is

particularly clear in the case of local role norms, which are developed entirely within the organization and by staff acting on behalf of the organization. They can even influence the membership of the norm circles supporting both local and general role norms by making the endorsement and/or enforcement of them part of the roles of certain positions. It is these powers to shape norms and norm circles that makes it possible for managers to adapt and develop the role specialization that is the source of the organization's powers.

In shaping roles, organizations may draw on wider social institutions by adopting practices drawn from the wider normative culture that forms part of the organization's social context, but the influence of this wider normative culture is far from being entirely under the organization's control. As well as being encouraged by the organization to conform with their roles, its members are also simultaneously members of norm circles that are much wider in extent and that influence their performance in the role. These may be of positive value to the organization, for example when members bring a commitment to values such as honesty, working hard, punctuality and politeness from the wider culture to their work in the organization. But they may equally well undermine the purposes or functioning of the organization, for example in cultures that encourage nepotism or corruption, or in the case of capitalist business organizations, cultures that are hostile to putting profit before the welfare of employees. It is precisely because organizations depend upon normativity to drive role performance and because the performance of the organization is so dependent on role performance that they are so vulnerable to such cultural issues.

Finally, we must recognize that organizations influence not only the norms that comprise their internal role specifications but also norms for the wider social world. Indeed, they may not only shape or modify norms, but even bring normative

institutions into existence or destroy them. Most obviously, states (a particularly complex form of organization, but a form of organization nevertheless) produce laws and develop apparatuses to enforce them, and organizations of many kinds pressure states to introduce laws that constrain us in many different ways. But it is not only constraining norms that organizations produce; many of their most substantial contributions to the modern world come in the form of resource norms, rules whose observance enables us to access social resources that otherwise would not exist. Thus, for example, post offices have produced ways of sending letters and parcels; software companies have produced more efficient ways of typing documents; human resources departments and trade unions between them have produced ways of dealing with grievances at work.

Organizations, then, are distinct from normative institutions and the norm circles that are causally responsible for them, but there is a complex web of causal inter-relationships between these two types of social structure.

Conclusion

This paper is an essay in the social ontology of organizations: an essay about what sorts of things organizations *are* and how they can have the causal significance that they do. It has thus sought to provide a framework that allows us to see how organizations can be causally effective and provides a basis for theorising about how organizations work.

In doing so, the paper has made three quite distinct arguments. First, it has explained the structure of organizations as complex associations structured by role norms, in which the power of role specialization is substantially amplified by the development of roles endowed with authority and roles with the power to adapt and

develop the role specifications themselves. Second, it has sought to identify some of the complex set of causal inter-relationships between organizations and normative institutions. And third, it has illustrated the argument that particular social events are the products of the interacting causal influences of organizations, norm circles, and human individuals.

In the natural sciences, theories about how things work have moved ahead in tandem with ontological understandings about what those things are, but in the social sciences ontology has been curiously neglected, and the interdependence between what things are and how they work frequently ignored. Theories about how things work, I suggest, must be consistent with our ontological understandings of what those things are – and of course this relation also operates in the opposite direction. If the account of the ontology of organizations given here is inconsistent with well-founded theories of how organizations work then it should be revised. Its potential significance for organization theory, however, arises from the opposite relationship: if this account is itself well-founded then our theories of how organizations work should be consistent with this ontology. No doubt, revisions may be required on both sides of this relationship, but what does seem clear is that by taking account of this relationship we create the opportunity to improve our understandings of both the ontology and the theory of organizations.

A similar relationship, however, also exists between ontological accounts of particular kinds of things and the broader philosophical framework that informs these accounts. In developing a social ontology of organizations, this paper has sought to apply the broader philosophical framework provided by critical realism and its relational theory of emergence. All of its substantive arguments rest on critical

realism's emergentist theory of causal powers. It thus constitutes both an illustration and a test case for this approach to emergence.

From the perspective of social theory, the most significant consequence of such an approach is to affirm that collective social entities have real causal powers that materially affect social events. I hope this paper has helped to convince some readers that this can indeed be the case. To the extent that it has, it provides a principled challenge to both methodologically individualist and radically constructionist accounts of the ontology of organizations and indeed of the social world more generally.

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[1] There is already a significant literature on the critical realist contribution to organization and management studies. A useful collection is (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). Note that the account of emergence I employ also has a great deal in common with the work of Mario Bunge (e.g. Bunge, 2003).

[2] I have examined the critical realist account of emergence in some detail in (Author, 2005).

[3] An outstanding analysis of the features that *are* necessary for an entity to have emergent (or 'non-aggregative') properties is provided by Wimsatt (Wimsatt, 2000; Wimsatt, 2006).

[4] The method discussed in this section is examined more thoroughly in (Author, 2007b).

[5] For detailed discussions of the relation between sociological understandings of agency and the idea of humans as beings with emergent properties, see (Archer, 2003; Archer, 2007; Author, 2007c).

[6] In economic theory, a related argument has been made by David Gindis (Gindis, forthcoming).

[7] Useful discussions of the wider debate on structure and agency are can be found in (Crothers, 1996; Author, 2008; Lopez and Scott, 2000; Parker, 2000).

[8] The *norm circles* argument is developed in depth in (Author, under consideration-a). An earlier and less complete version of the argument can be found in (Author, 2008), which uses the term *norm group* instead of *norm circle*.

[9] Goffman sometimes refers to *interaction entities*, though as far as I am aware he does not ascribe causal powers to them (e.g. Goffman, 1983, p. 7).

[10] Goffman touches on queues as interaction situations (Goffman, 1983, p. 14).

[11] I have spelled out the institution of queuing in detail that may seem superfluous to those (most of my readers, I imagine) to whom it is entirely obvious and taken for granted. It is just such taken for granted norms on which all social interaction rests, as Garfinkel has shown, though I do not accept his view that such norms are independent of wider social structures (Garfinkel, 1967).

[12] The distinction that is being drawn here is similar to the distinctions that Mouzelis makes between paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures, and between institutional and figurational structures (Mouzelis, 1995, ch. 6).

[13] Except in the case of two-member associations – which Simmel, or at least his translators, called *dyads* – in which the association must necessarily come to an end if one member leaves, although some kinds of dyads may be capable of growing into larger groups (Simmel, 1950, pp. 122-5).

[14] The strength of members' commitment to an association may vary. March and Simon suggest that some of the factors influencing this strength of commitment include the extent to which goals are perceived as shared among members of a group, the frequency of interaction between an individual and the members of a group, and the number of individual needs satisfied in the group (March and Simon, 1993, p. 85). Although March and Simon are thinking in the context of organizations, their argument would seem to apply equally well to associations.

[15] The argument of the next two pages, including the TV sales example, is drawn largely from (Author, 2007a).

[16] Such an argument is offered, for example, by Anthony King (King, 1999: 271), though King denies that this makes him a methodological individualist (Author, 2007d; King, 2007).

[17] For a fuller version of the argument of this and the following paragraph, see (Author, 2007d, pp. 472-5).

[18] Of course, different managers have different degrees of freedom from task constraints. Generally it is more senior managers and those in more strategy-oriented roles that have most flexibility to drive changes in role specialization, whereas more junior and more task-oriented managers are more likely to be focussed on managing role performance.