

PERSON, MIND AND ORGANISATION

(Draft - 0.01)

Fundamental Concepts

The key conjecture here is that, at an abstract level, a *person* and an *organisation* share fundamental *commonalities*, as does any other *system* (with ref to Stafford Beer's Viable Systems Model)¹. Understanding one will give understanding of the other.

An *organisation* is a collection of coordinated parts behaving as a coherent entity. At a *conceptual level*, an organization, such as a corporation or government, operates in the same way as a person: a person is also a collection of coordinated parts and also behaves as a coherent entity. By this I mean that the *parts* of an organisation and a person may be very different in a *physical* sense, but conceptually they are *analogous*. For example, both person and organisation need coherent decision making capability, they both need sensory capability to detect threats from their environments, etc. Most importantly, here, they regulate their own behaviour.

This paper outlines some foundational discussion points about organisational systems and how some key concepts relate to each other. As the main organisational system in question here is a *synthetic persona*, it makes sense to discuss what a *person* 'is' and what a *mind* 'is', at least within the context of this particular project. ('This particular project' is about organizational cognition and the creation of a synthetic persona for organizational research)

Since we're dealing with organizational consciousness, as found in a mind, an appropriate starting point is *reality*. I'm assuming there is *no* absolute *reality*. What something 'is' is its *meaning* and this is constructed by the observer and represented as a symbol or model in their mind, e.g. for reasons of mental manipulation and for transmission of meaning (e.g. to another person, by *reference*).

A *thing*, or what is *perceived* as a thing, is what's *filtered out* of what's either observed but deemed irrelevant or simply not detectable because of limited sensory capacity or capability. Whatever is left is 'the *thing*' (as far as the observer is concerned).

A good analogy for the way the observer creates meaning is the way Michelangelo 'liberated' the figure of David from a block of stone. 'David' in a physical sense was already in there (as was *everything*) but Michelangelo just observed the David.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viable_system_model

This is relevant because what one observer perceives as a system could be perceived by another observer as something entirely different.

Context also plays its part – the same thing but in a different context could easily mean something totally different. Context is a modulator of meaning.

Essentially then, a ‘thing’ is just a *symbol* (such as a *name*) that carries meaning as recognised by an observer. This applies to any identified system, such as a person, a mind or an organization.

The Person

We all ‘know’ what a person is, but this is just *symbolic*. Settling upon an objective definition of ‘person’ is virtually impossible. A Google search for ‘person definition’ brings back the typical, “*a human being regarded as an individual*”, which is problematic:

1. ‘Human Being’

The terms “human being” and “person” seem to be regarded as interchangeable, so this doesn’t really get us anywhere. What is a human being? Does this imply human genetic material is a prerequisite? Would this make a tomato spliced with a few human genes a partial person???

Organ transplants from animals are getting more ambitious. Taken to future extreme, even if a person has so many transplants they are now mainly pig, even if a damaged brain was recreated partially, and eventually fully, from that of another species, it is likely that the transplant recipient would still be regarded as a *person*, and probably even as the same person they were previously.

Technology is also progressing in a way that it seems possible that a person’s brain capability could one day be extended with technology so that they have a massively improved ‘direct access’ memory (for example). Perhaps even more of a person’s thinking capacity could be externalised – e.g. online logic and calculation capability. In some ways, this already happens – a diary or notebook is external ‘memory’ and a computer extends a person’s calculation capability making it possible to observe them as a ‘person-machine *system*’.

A *person* is therefore getting less dependent upon being physically ‘human’ for existence. Technology and medicine are progressing to the point where it seems not too farfetched to consider the possibility of a person having little or no dependency at all on their original human flesh and bone.

2. ‘Regarded’

This implies that a human being has to be observed as a ‘human being’ to be counted as such. This may be correct but is ethically dangerous, as the logical reverse would also be true, i.e. an organisation (such as a state) might ‘regard’ an unfavoured class of persons as ‘non human’.

The significant point here is that a person can also be observer of themselves as a person; the observer doesn't have to be external and separate from the thing they're observing as a person.

3. 'Individual'

'Individual' implies that the person is somehow separate or distinct from their environment or separate from other humans. However, a person can't exist in total isolation; even in a complete vacuum they are not isolated from their personal or genetic history (see *continuons*).

A person is dependent physically on air, food, water and has social dependencies. They are not and cannot be separate from their environment, other than hypothetically. Also, their ideas, thoughts, memories are also a product of information input from, or output to, their environment.

A person is therefore an intrinsic part of their environment and it is the observer who filters out anything extraneous and bestows individuality or a 'person' identity on what's left.

Ultimately it would seem that, to qualify as a *person*, a person is not dependent upon a particular or standard physical shape or configuration, or to be made of 'human DNA' and that they don't need to exist entirely in one physical place but they *do* need to be considered a person by an observer.

To a typical observer therefore, the phenomenon commonly known as a 'person' is a *subset* of *universal* relationships and interactions, syntheses of many complex, changing things such as information, context, rules, environmental interaction, sensory capability and arrangement of physical matter from which emerge a relatable sense of identity and purpose. In effect, the observer creates this *subset* by selecting order from the chaos of the universe ('The Cacophony' as I've started calling it).

Perhaps then, there's not much to be gained by just talking in terms of 'person'. The essence of a person is just the 'ghost in the system' (the ghost being *mind* or the identity), which seemingly doesn't *need* to inhabit any *particular* physical space.

The Mind

Most definitions of the mind allude to consciousness and intellect.

1. Consciousness. This is generally taken to mean 'awareness' or 'awareness of ones' surroundings'
2. Intellect. The ability to reason

The arguments about what make a mind aren't much different than those for a person. For example, a mind needs context, information, sensory capability, rules by which to operate, interactions with its environment, some kind of physical component, etc. The mind itself seems to emerge from the interactions and relationships between them, or a number of them.

It is hard to comprehend that a mind with no sensory capability, no interaction with its environment, that has no context, contains no information such as personal history or language and has no rules to operate by would be capable of any kind of consciousness or intellect.

Information is not contained, *literally*, in the mind (or brain). Mental information, such as a memory, is just a configuration from which the mind, as observer, *makes* meaning (in a very similar way it makes meaning from reality or carves a figure from stone). Incidentally, this is a reason why 'sci fi' mind reading using *technology* is problematic – the observer would not only need to see the mental configuration of a certain memory but also de-cypher meaning from it in exactly the same way the 'in mind' observer does. In effect, the observing mind would need to contain the observed mind as well as itself – which doesn't seem easily possible from a logical point of view.

Where does the mind exist?

There doesn't seem to be any conclusive evidence that the mind resides exclusively in the *brain* or even in the *person*. Some experiments indicate that two joined up brains can operate coherently as one. Certainly, the saying that 'two heads are better than one' helps demonstrate that two minds can be greater than the sum of their parts. Also, as discussed above, it's conceivable that parts of the mind could exist outside of the original, human brain.

So, a single mind doesn't necessarily need to inhabit a single physical place to still be a mind, but can multiple minds exist in just one place? Or could several minds contribute to just one?

Leaving aside mental disorders, is it possible to *create* an identity that has access to another's mental hardware, information, sensory equipment, etc., and can functionally operate? Isn't this what a *character*, acted out by a person is doing? Actors (including confidence tricksters and undercover operatives) can get so deep into character that it's the character that responds to any given situation (or *challenge*) – they 'are' the character.

If the actor believes they are the character and others' observe them as that character and they have all of the other attributes of that character, to all intents and purposes they *are* that character. So the question here is why, **explicitly**, would we still say that this character is *not* an actual person or a mind in their own right?

Is it because:

- Chronologically, the actor was someone else before they took on the persona of the character, and will be that person again when they drop the persona? I.e. is it partly because the new persona is only temporary?
- Is it partly because the actor has the genes and physical matter of an existing identity and that the character can't come along and take over the same genes and physical space as an established real person? I.e. once you have an identity inhabiting a person shaped space, it can't be usurped by another identity?
- Is it because the actor is the one in control (of the character)? I.e. we assume the organ grinder is the significant presence and not the monkey?
- Is it because if the character is fictional, they have never been perceived to exist as a 'real' person?

...or a combination of the above?

None of the above seem satisfactory. E.g. a human clone could theoretically have the same genetic material and even the same history as the character they are now acting, but we'd still not see the character as a person in their own right. Or supposing someone is acting out something that happened to themselves yesterday? There is then a character that is the 'yesterday self' as well as the actor who is the 'today self' - yet even though they are exactly the same person, we would still see yesterday's self as a character, not the real person!

It seems that the context and the observer that are as responsible, or more so than anything else, for defining the mind.

The Organisation

Most dictionaries define 'Organisation' as 'a group of people coordinated towards a common purpose', or something similar. This is OK as a handle for the time being, but it should be remembered that what we're really talking about is an organisational *system*, and in the same way that a person is an organisational system. People aren't necessarily the only decision making agents within an organisation and, also, an organisation could be made up of other organisations.

As with a person, or mind, there is nothing within the definition of an organisation that says it *must* exist physically in one place. Also, as with a person, a lot of its physical 'self' can be removed and it will still retain the identity of that particular organisation, e.g. it could go virtual and still have, or be, the essence of that organisation.

An organisation does not exist separately from the rest of its environment – cut off supply chains, external stakeholders, etc, and it would 'die', as a person would die if cut off from its supplies of air or food.

An organisation replenishes itself in the same way a biological organism such as person does – people come and go in an organisation, cells come and go in a person. Even though every person, building, desk and chair in an organisation might be replaced, the organisation would retain its identity (ref Theseus Paradox)²

In the same way that a person is not dependent upon physical matter to still be a person, an organisation doesn't necessarily have to be dependent upon people to be an organisation (a principle of recursion)

An organisation doesn't stop with its physical boundaries, any more than a person does.

Summary

At a *functional* level, a person and an organisation are **analogous**.

In cybernetic terms, understanding organizational cognition can give insights into cognition in the mind and vice versa.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_of_Theseus