



The Great Post Office Scandal

(and other misadventures)

The publication of Nick Wallis' exposé on the catalogue of failings at the Post Office is rightly shining a light on government digital upgrade failures. Spoiler alert: there are loads.

"The Fourth Industrial Revolution has the potential to empower individuals and communities, as it creates new opportunities for economic, social, and personal development. But it also could lead to the marginalisation of some groups, exacerbate inequality, create new security risks and undermine human relationships."

- Klaus Schwab, Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum.

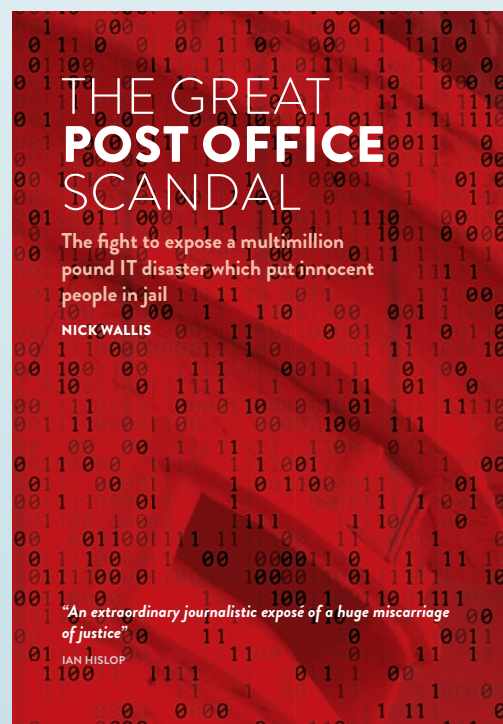
As revolutions go, the Digital one rolls off the tongue a little less easily than perhaps the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions. Arguably we are still working our way through it; the vantage point of history isn't quite in view yet. It still feels too soon to comfortably give any of this unregulated chaos a name.

A curious and expensive phenomenon has occurred repeatedly over the last 20 years during this Digital Revolution and is not limited to any one nation, or any one industry. In the name of progress, billions have been wasted, lives ruined, reputations shattered and criminal investigations launched as governments, slow moving machines at best, have been variously forced, inspired or politically motivated to move with the times.

Wholesale upgrades of antiquated manual systems have been replaced by automated ones, connecting a network of remote sites to a central operating system, introducing shiny new back-up systems in the cloud, making data widely accessible

and so on. The list of system failures across the board over the last 20 years is extraordinary and ongoing, and it is clear lessons are not being learned; the same mistakes occur time and time again.

This article examines the causes of some of these debacles with a look in particular at the Great Post Office Scandal and asks why lessons aren't being learned.



THE MAGIC BULLET

The full automation of Post Office systems was set in motion in 1992, initially as part of a solution to rampant fraud.

In those days benefits were paid at the Post Office by exchanging vouchers from social security order books for cash. Between 1991 and 1992, £230m worth of order books were lost, of which £85m had been found to be fraudulently cashed. A further £16m was lost through fraudulent encashment of girocheques. The paper system was vulnerable, and needed upgrading.

After a few experiments with barcoded order books, the Department of Social Security decided it wanted to use a magnetic-strip swipe-card as a vehicle for dispensing benefits payments. The cards would be given to claimants, who would have their use of the card electronically registered at a central database each time they were swiped at a Post Office. This ensured each card could only be used once a week, and deactivated if lost. Swipe-cards were an established technology. The problem was, the Post Office had nowhere to swipe them.

For decades the Post Office had been the place where British citizens did their admin with the state. Each day millions of people would visit their local branch to buy stamps, tax discs, traveller's cheques, premium bonds or TV licences. They would cash benefits and pensions, or make utility bill payments, National Savings Bank account withdrawals or deposits, or apply for passports or driving, fishing or game licences or any number of other permits and services.

Important documents were stamped, signed, shown or submitted, and cash would be paid or received accordingly. These transactions, made in their millions every day, gave the Post Office a multi-billion pound annual turnover. It would be signed, folded and posted back to the Post Office's financial HQ in Chesterfield.

By the 1990s this antiquated system was in need of an overhaul. With the race for digitisation happening everywhere, the Post Office, government and many Subpostmasters felt that automating the Post Office network was a nettle which needed to be grasped. The DSS swipe-card idea provided the impetus for starting to wrestle with the eye-watering cost and logistics of doing so. The eventual solution was a £1bn PFI contract. This was tendered in 1994 by both the DSS-owned Benefits Agency and the Post Office. It would deliver the swipe-card scheme and automate the front and back end of Britain's twenty thousand Post Offices – a transformative project.

The candidates were whittled down to a shortlist of three. In May 1996, the winner was announced. Pathway, a consortium owned almost entirely by a company called International Computers Ltd – better known as ICL – got the gig. ICL once saw itself as Britain's answer to the American computing giant IBM, but its glory days were long gone. In 1990, the Japanese tech corp Fujitsu had taken an 80% stake in ICL with a view to outright ownership. Whilst Pathway was being tendered, Fujitsu was in the process of swallowing ICL whole.

Pathway managed to come bottom in eight of the 11 scoring criteria drawn up to quantify the strengths of each bid, but it was the cheapest in terms of its cost to the government. Fujitsu's business model for Pathway saw it shouldering almost all the project's commercial risk by paying for its development and rollout. In return Pathway would get a transaction fee every time a shiny new Benefits Agency card was swiped through a shiny new Post Office card-swiper, for a guaranteed period of eight years. If all went according to plan, Project Pathway would deliver automation of the Post Office and vast sums of cash to Fujitsu, without any risk to the public purse. As an incentive to get things operational as soon as possible, the eight year guaranteed transaction fee period would start the moment the PFI deal was signed. Almost as soon as the ink on the contract was dry,

Pathway ran into difficulties. Serious, big-picture difficulties. It seemed everyone had badly underestimated the complexity of automating 20,000 geographically isolated and disparate Post Offices carrying out multiple (and sometimes region-specific) transactions which were many times more complicated than the average bank.

The logistics of building, testing and installing a bespoke IT system of this size was uncharted territory for the government, and Fujitsu. 20,000 Post Offices would need 40,000 terminals. 67,000 people with variable technical skills would have to be trained to successfully keep handing out £56 billion in benefits alone to their 28 million annual customers.

The hardware would have to be robust. The software would have to process millions of transactions a year. Training and support would have to be first rate. Fujitsu had bid for IT's Operation Moonshot by undercutting the competition. Having won the contract, they were realising how complex and expensive moonshots can be.

Conceptually, Horizon was relatively straightforward. The front-end terminals would be custom-specced PCs running Microsoft's Windows NT operating system. These would sit in a box under each Post Office counter window. Each PC would be connected to a custom keyboard, a barcode scanner, a 3.5 inch receipts printer and a touchscreen, which would sit on top of the counter. Running bespoke Horizon software, each counter PC would write both manually- and barcode-inputted transactions into the branch accounts. Every night all the information collected from the branch would be uploaded via ISDN or (in some cases) satellite to a centrally-located Post Office mainframe.

That was the theory. Writing the code to make this system work reliably appeared to be completely beyond Fujitsu. Despite burning through £10m a month, by the middle of 1997, Fujitsu was not able to deliver an (already renegotiated) contractual obligation to demonstrate Horizon's 'satisfactory, sustained' operation. Even in a controlled environment, they simply could not get it to work.

Fujitsu was not helped by its clients, two state-owned entities with different and sometimes competing priorities. Goalposts for the project were constantly being moved. Fujitsu would later tell parliament that over three years, Pathway's 366 original contractual requirements had been subject to 323 formal change requests by the Post Office and the Benefits Agency. This was exacerbated, it said, by numerous informal changes and 'clarifications' which necessitated 'significant system re-design'.

Frustrated with the delays, in December 1997, the Benefits Agency and the Post Office served Fujitsu with a formal notice of breach of contract. Fujitsu, fed up with the way it was being treated, refused to accept the notice. It then upped the ante by threatening to stop work on the Horizon project altogether unless it received a guaranteed hike in the fee it was going to get from each swipe of the DSS benefits card.

The stand-off turned critical when the Benefits Agency responded by announcing it no longer wished to use swipe-cards to dispense benefits payments. Instead, it was going to encourage claimants to have their benefits delivered direct to their bank accounts. In one swoop, Fujitsu's potential income from the project had been reduced to zero. On top of that, the Post Office was looking at losing a third of its customer base overnight.

In January 1998, serious consideration was given to abandoning Horizon altogether, but the project limped on. Despite a shifting brief and its lack of operability, there was a feeling in Whitehall that Horizon had become too expensive to kill. Someone was going to have to find a way through, because the fallout caused by cancelling the project would be politically disastrous.

This excerpt is from the recently published book on the financial and personal losses suffered by Subpostmasters working for the Post Office in the UK between 2000 and 2015. “The Great Post Office Scandal” covers the story in sympathetic yet forensic detail, further to a High Court trial last year compensating the 2000 victims. More than 700 people were convicted between 2000 and 2015. 72 of these have been cleared so far by the Court of Appeal in England. There are 2,000+ compensation claims in the pipeline. £1bn has been earmarked by the government, but hardly anyone has received what they are actually owed to date.

Journalist Nick Wallis has spent the last decade covering every possible element of this injustice in exhaustive, granular detail, and his book is a compelling read. With typical modesty, Nick shuns the credit. “No - that’s reserved for Alan Bates from the Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance and his band of Subpostmaster campaigners, aided by some extraordinary politicians/experts/lawyers who got them to where they are today.”

Thanks to his efforts and those of a few dedicated experts, this an overdue triumph of David and Goliath proportions, the scale of which is only just fully emerging. The inquiry into the scandal has not yet begun, but the trial has gone some way to providing overdue vindication for the victims and their families, some of whom are sadly no longer even with us.

One might think bringing the Post Office into the 21st Century is a tricky brief, but hardly impossible surely? There are multiple moving parts of course, but was that all?

“It’s worth pointing out the colossal scale of the Post Office in the UK,” Nick explained. “There are only just fewer post offices than banks and supermarkets altogether. It is a vast and sprawling network. The Post Office is the biggest retail network in the country by far. There are outposts in the tiniest of highlands and islands, so you might imagine correctly that connectivity issues are huge. Data dropouts are common, and

they can cause different numbers to appear on your balance sheet.”

What went wrong

The book goes into some detail. “Conceptually, Horizon was relatively straightforward. The front-end terminals would be custom-specced PCs running Microsoft Windows NT operating system. These would sit in a box under each Post Office counter window. Each PC would be connected to a custom keyboard, a barcode scanner, a 3.5 inch receipts printer and a touchscreen, which would sit on top of the counter. Running bespoke Horizon software, each counter PC would write both manually- and barcode-inputted transactions into the branch accounts. Every night all the

information collected from the brand would be uploaded to the ISDN (or in some cases) satellite to a centrally located Post Office mainframe.”

Nick added, “I have some sympathy with Fujitsu as out of the original 366 criteria for the project; 323 were changed by the government over the course of the tender process alone. However, both the government and Fujitsu massively underestimated the complexity of automating 20,000 post offices, to the extent that within months of signing the contract they had to renegotiate the terms as they just couldn’t do it.”

From the start the process was besieged with problems, not least because the government opted for the cheapest provider, not the best.

The management structure and culture of the Post Office meant that money could go to waste without question and decisions made at a senior level unchallenged. The officer-class nature of senior management within the Post Office and the dim view they took of their parochial Subpostmasters up and down the country added very much to an us-and-them dynamic. This impeded the chances of Subpostmasters at trial, who were considered guilty, and it was very much up to them to prove their innocence. The nature of Horizon backed that approach up; the deficits appeared while the Subpostmasters were at work, so it was nobody’s fault but theirs.



Nick Wallis



The Horizon IT system was built on a Windows NT operating system on a PC using a database software program called Riposte. Even at the time, Nick says, it wasn't written properly. Matters were not helped by Microsoft, who stopped providing support for NT a few years into Horizon's existence. One can only guess at the security given such a shaky start.

Nick went on, "Then it all went really wrong, and the Benefits Agency and the Post Office served a notice of non-compliance to Fujitsu, who rejected it. The Benefits Agency walked away, leaving the Post Office to deal with it." A slew of financial incentives and contract revisions later, Fujitsu had benefitted handsomely in order to make the project work and in 2000 a report by the NAO (National Audit Office) estimated that £500m of public money had been wasted on the project before it had even been rolled out.

Connectivity Issues

Contract revisions aside, how much was actually wrong with the software and the connection? At the time Internet connections were via modem, if at all. Nick explained. "Initially – between 2000-2010 most of the transactions were stored on site and uploaded at the end of each working day by ISDN to a series of back-end servers. After 2010 Horizon Online was brought in which provided real-time ADSL connectivity to the back end.

Reconciliation issues were common as a result. "If you have electricity suppliers, banks, various other systems bolted onto the back end, well you can imagine the damage that got done. Bureau de change was a nightmare at first." Horizon still exists today; it has limped on through various upgrades and revisions.

Given what the Post Office has experienced since, and the other digitisation projects that the government has poorly executed one might imagine the appetite to have another crack at it – with new software, across all these lines of businesses, with all these retail outlets nationwide and the potential for bad publicity – is low.

The Landscape

With the benefit of hindsight it is perhaps too easy to assume that the lack of oversight, regulation, best practice, independent scrutiny were symptoms of a broader 'wild west' period in history where technology is concerned. After all, the mid 90s were when most of us will have sent an email for the first time; the Internet was powered by forgotten browsers Netscape and Lycos, and we didn't really know what the

Internet was for anyway. Friends Reunited and MySpace were still light years away. Hotmail – the preposterous idea that you could send an email from your own address regardless of your location – blew my mind, so much so that I stuffed airmail envelopes into my backpack ahead of a round the world trip in 1997, so dubious was I at the viability of the world wide web.

Certainly as far as contractors are concerned there were, as Nick Wallis confirms, "plenty of chancers talking themselves into jobs they weren't qualified to do. Coders, testers, systems and network engineers were all in demand, alongside the usual project managers, sales and marketing people. There were also plenty of middle-ranking execs with little understanding of what the young Turks in their charge were up to but had learned just about enough to bluff their way through."

On a corporate level however, that kind of view is at best irrelevant and at worst completely wrong.

James Christie, an IT security manager and auditor is as passionate about seeing the victims see justice as Nick Wallis and has written a powerful and scathing blog on the subject. In his introduction he says, "It's very rare for an internal accounting system to attract massive publicity, but this has been a special case. Many lives have been ruined by a mixture of bad software and truly dreadful management."

Equally as passionate about ensuring the victims see justice, as an IT auditor and Information Security Manager with 20 years' experience in blue-chip organisations, James rejected the notion that the Horizon debacle could be put down to the 'wild west nature' of the IT landscape at the time.

"No, that isn't right. Fujitsu and the Post Office were doing things that more mature corporations had stamped out maybe 10 years previously. Both corporations were deeply irresponsible, doing things that would have cost me my job working for IBM on large, outsourced contracts at that time. There was a general slackness in the management of IT that was unacceptable given the size of these organisations."

It seems surprising that chancers only appeared at contractor level; surely that attitude prevailed further up the ladder? "I think the line that people from the Post Office and Fujitsu are wanting to put out is that this happened a long time ago and people didn't really know better then," James answered. "I've seen it being argued, and that's not so because 20 years ago it was quite clear that the things they were doing were wrong.

He went on, “ When I was an Information Security Manager working with Nokia, there was a €30,000 a week penalty if I didn’t ensure there was a proper control regime for powerful user accounts. Between the Post Office and Fujitsu, 19 years on, they’ve still not got these things sorted out. 19 years on, that’s more than many people’s career in IT. They were never going to get it sorted out.”

There is of course usually the beleaguered taxpayer in between, too often unaware where increasing and eye-watering amounts of their money is being wasted. The NAO have kept grim track of every one of these disasters and gave a withering assessment of the knowledge gap between digital leaders and senior management in a report published only last year:

‘Initiating digital change involves taking a difficult set of decisions about risk and opportunity, but these decisions often do not reflect the reality of the legacy environment and do not fit comfortably into government’s standard mechanisms for approval, procurement, funding and assurance. This report found that digital leaders understand these issues well and bring much needed expertise to the public sector, but they

often struggle to get the attention, understanding and support they need from senior decision-makers who lack sufficient digital expertise.’

Last year an NAO Cross Government Report entitled ‘The Challenges in Implementing Digital Change’ even spent tax-payers money looking into why so much tax-payer’s money had been wasted, concluding that “only a small proportion of permanent secretaries and other senior officials have first-hand experience of digital business change and as a result many lack sufficient understanding of the business, technical and delivery risks for which they are responsible.

This means that many of the problems stem from the inability of senior decision-makers to engage effectively with the difficult decisions required to implement technology-enabled business change.”

While it is tempting to work ourselves up into a froth about inefficient government departments and their collective incompetency, that is a lazy approach and ignores the sheer number of projects that have failed and the similarities their failures share. Each of the projects over-run in the time they take to roll out, they all bloat considerably in budget, and many of them never even make it to fruition. Often the solution during the process is to terminate the contract with the service provider and start again or fire the senior manager responsible.

Neither of these options save money or time, and usually achieve the reverse in compensation pay outs and more red faces in front of the NAO or the PAC (Public Accounts Committee). Meanwhile the approach of these committees, while well-intentioned, probably knocks the confidence of humiliated managers already out of their depth and the damning language attributed to their reports does not help: “Optimism bias and failing to set clear objectives”, “a masterclass in incompetency”, “a catastrophic waste of money” are just a few.

Government Response

You can’t knock the government for trying. There are white papers, strategies, committees and units all over Whitehall trying to get to grips with the problem and avoid further staggering losses, scathing reports and embarrassment.

A common response to failed public sector projects is to set up a crack response team, a task force dedicated to weeding out the rot and instilling best practice all along the





supply chain. Boris Johnson announced one just last week in response to the ongoing Partygate scandal even, the new “Office of the Prime Minister”, in order to “improve the No 10 operation and deliver the change necessary to get on with the job.” It makes for good optics in the media, and voters like to see their governments “getting on with the job”. Unfortunately, and perhaps predictably, these departments are often no more fit for purpose than the projects they are overseeing.

The Government Digital Service (GDS) is one example, founded in 2011 as a ‘Cabinet Office unit in charge of driving digital transformation within government.’ While it has achieved some of its objectives, it has seen off countless directors and at the time of writing the exact brief for the department remains unclear, despite calls from the Science and Technology Committee in 2020 for a clear definition of its mission. The latest update on the GDS website itself is revealing: “We’ll soon be publishing the first version of the 2021/2022 roadmap so you can see more of the details of the work we’re intending to do.”

Management styles

Taking a step back, it is more likely that the application of 20th century management styles are not fit for purpose in a 21st century setting. Steve Denning is a Management Consultant and author of several books on the subject. His view is straightforward.

Management as most of us know it is characterised like this:

- The goal of the firm is to make money for the firm and its executives. Maximising shareholder value has been the catch cry of large organisations for the last 50 years and is still, despite recent language change, driving the behaviour of most large organisations.
- The architecture of work is bureaucratic with individuals reporting to bosses and filling defined roles.
- The dynamic of the firm is a top-down hierarchy of authority. The top is assumed to know best.

(Source: Forbes Magazine, Sept 2020)

We have seen this in other areas covered by Broadband Journal but the broad thrust is that technology is moving faster than large companies can keep pace with it. Apply that to public sector departments not driven by profit and the problem is even more acute. Senior management will likely not have grown up with technology as it is in 2022 (case in

point: Nadine Dorries, Culture Secretary told Sky News only last week that ‘we’ve had the Internet for ten years’ to hoots of derision on social media. She also boasted on Twitter in 2017 that she and her staff, including interns on exchange programmes, routinely shared each other logins. Such poor education is endemic and not helpful to the overall IT ecosystem) and while they may certainly be computer literate, they are not pioneers.

In technology pioneers appear at a junior level, hence the tech landscape is characterised by young, dynamic start-ups, and the world’s big four tech companies are headed up by men with an average age now of just 52. When Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple began life, their owners’ lightbulb moment occurred in their late teens and 20s.

US Management Consultants McKinsey & Company have done a lot of work in this space and feel their Digital Factory approach can achieve significant change quickly via small groups of experts on the ground, effecting change as errors occur. They say their research tells them “only 16% of executives say their company’s digital transformations are succeeding”, so clearly something fundamental is required.

Could this happen again?

Nick sighed. “Unfortunately, yes. I hope this episode will put to bed once and for all the idea that computers are glorified calculators and 2+2 will always equal 4. Modern systems are vast, sprawling ecosystems that are regularly updated by back-end inputs, to the extent that if you press 2+2 on the front end of your terminal you might nine times out of ten get four, but once in a while you’ll get five. And therefore, you cannot rely on those systems.”

James Christie agrees. “Nick has put his finger on the problem, although I would add that we have to rely on these systems, but we CANNOT trust them absolutely. We need very carefully designed checks and balances to help us spot and contain problems before they lead to disaster.”

All the examples covered have much in common but in the case of the Post Office, the uniquely antiquated culture within the organisation served management far better than the Subpostmasters themselves. Sloppy IT security, a culture of staff openly sharing logins and terminals also served to benefit the Post Office and undermine the victims’ defence.

Government Digitisation Disasters

Covid-19 Test and Trace App (2020) - Widely acknowledged as the nadir in government waste. Outsourced to consultants at £1000 a day, it was considered unfit for purpose, cost a bewildering £37bn and was abandoned long before the pandemic was considered in its endemic phase. A report by SAGE advised that it was having 'only a marginal impact on transmission'.

Emergency Services Network (2017) - Included a planned 4G network to replace national radio infrastructure and new mobile devices – we are now welcoming 5G onto the market. Has long since passed its completion date and is currently overbudget by £3.1bn. It is unlikely to roll out this year. A report by the NAO blames Home Office incompetence.

National Programme for IT (2002) - Intended for easy access to patient records and to transform the way the NHS used data; it began in 2002. Complex and never completed, it cost the taxpayer £9.8bn. Considered not fit for purpose, it was dismantled nine years after work started on the project. The PAC called it one of the "worst and most expensive contracting fiascos in the history of the public sector".

E-borders programme (2003) - An all-too-familiar story involving a third-party supplier under-delivering for the Home Office, who were blamed for its failure. Fraught with problems from the outset, the third party's contract was cancelled, so it sued the Home Office, ultimately costing the taxpayer £224m in compensation. The project was never completed in its original form.

Verify (2016) - A digital ID service to provide users access to all online services was found to be underused and "not fit for purpose", its failure was put down to "Optimism bias and failing to set clear objectives" according to a report by National Audit Office.

Ministry of Justice (2011) - Upgrade across finance, HR, procurement and payroll – overran by 5 years at a cost of £56m to the taxpayer, before being abandoned and outsourced. "A catastrophic waste of money", according to the PAC.

The Army (2012) - A doomed Recruiting Partnering Project overran by 4 years, went £75m over budget and spectacularly under-delivered. Outsourcing the work to a third party with no military experience was only one of the many problems highlighted in a report by the PAC.

DBS Service (2012) - A digital modernisation project by the Home Office, considered "a masterclass in incompetency" by the Public Accounts Committee after it overran by 4 years and over budget by £229m.

Universal Credit (2010) - Its creation and roll out has been inefficient and delays in paying out UC caused much high-profile misery for claimants, some of whom have died while waiting for payment. Its implementation has cost taxpayer £837m to date.

James Christie feels strongly that such a practice "completely undermines accountability. I am amazed that convictions took place at all. A good barrister could surely have thrown a skipload of reasonable doubt onto the prosecution case if the defence had brought in a co-worker to confirm the routine sharing of IDs, and an expert witness to confirm that such sharing makes it impossible to prove who took what action – and that is why responsible corporations try to ensure it does not happen."

Nick's book explains that while owned by the government, it had neither oversight into what was going on, nor much interest either. The organisation itself seemed answerable to nobody and in the case of the Horizon software issues, the onus was on the Subpostmasters to prove the software was faulty, rather than the Post Office to support their workers, whose contracts with the Post Office had them at a distinct disadvantage as well. It was easy to just keep prosecuting the little people than admit the software was faulty.

Several elements are at work here, preventing positive change for the better. We have looked at the problems associated with dated management styles, public sector accountability and ambitious digitisation projects. Culturally, there is an element of secrecy within digitisation; the IT industry is characterised by independent contractors who would be understandably unwilling to fall on their sword and risk never working in the industry again by speaking out about wrongdoings, cover-ups or just plain old incompetence.

Auditors are supposed to prevent issues like this from becoming huge problems but that did not happen in the case of the Post Office. External auditors must "evaluate the internal controls of the corporation, and that includes the effectiveness of the internal auditors while also assessing whether the financial position of the company," according to James Christie, and he is right of course. It is not within their remit to tackle user errors, bugs and glitches. Internal IT auditors should have been investigating whether these compromised the integrity of systems but Christie feels they were "toothless, asleep on the job and not challenging the rampant misconduct and incompetence at work."

How this was allowed to happen undetected, for so long, is astonishing. "The Post Office internal audit function was a disgrace. So far, no one has actually been found accountable for any of this misconduct within the Post Office in all this time, but the long-overdue inquiry will hopefully remedy that."

Another aspect is the sheer number of parties involved along a digitisation supply chain, and the resulting margin for error that can take place at any point. Making changes in that environment is like turning a super tanker around; it is glacial in speed and imprecise, and there are the careers and egos of senior managers on the line, preventing progress. The more high-profile the project, the harder it is to turn the tanker, or even slow it down; people are generally not interested in turning it around and it is always politically disastrous to admit mistakes have been made. Better to continue the same path and throw money at the problem, or in the case of the Post Office, throw innocent people into jail.

As with many of today's technology problems, it seems education and the mere passage of time are possible solutions to the problems highlighted here. Certainly, a new agile approach to management is essential, given the outrageous sums of money wasted in applying yesterday's approaches to tomorrow's problems. There are cultural issues, egos to massage, optics to consider and popularity in the polls all playing a part. In the case of the Post Office, it was a catastrophic set of circumstances and an unholy cover-up that has caused decades of misery and a jail term for so many innocent victims. One would hope that The Great Post Office Scandal is the last of these books that needs writing and that lessons are learned; the inquiry starting this month will hopefully provide answers many have waited years for.



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