

Call for Abstracts

Moral Injury as an Occupational Hazard: Structural Determinants and Organisational Dynamics

**Critical Management Studies beyond the Academy? 30th June – 2nd July 2027,
Lancaster University**

Session Type: Hybrid Format

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Moral injury or ethical suffering at work arises when organisational authority legitimises morally wrong practices, generating a sense of collective betrayal (Dejours et al. 2018:157). While existing research links moral injury to organisational dynamics, it rarely connects it to macro-level factors. This session aims to address this gap by conceptualising moral injury as a structurally produced and organisationally mediated phenomenon.

Moral injury has been most extensively theorised in relation to military personnel and healthcare workers, where decisions carry life-or-death stakes (Molendijk 2025). Yet the phenomenon is neither exceptional nor confined to high-risk professions. Modern work routinely involves tasks that are legal but morally questionable: manipulating clients, suppressing information, maintaining silence about harm, or facilitating practices whose costs are borne by others. Employees frequently become unwilling participants in organisational wrongdoing. It is precisely this complicity, imposed from above yet experienced as personal, that renders moral injury both psychologically damaging and difficult to name, let alone resist.

Tech workers have organised against contracts with military and surveillance programmes, sometimes at significant professional risk; others have supplied information to investigative journalists. Others have resigned and founded alternative enterprises premised on different ethical commitments. However these acts occupy a space between heroism and professional transgression. We aim to explore the policy conditions that would enable collective responses to moral injury, moving beyond the individualised options of heroism or entrepreneurial exit.

Trade unionism has historically offered one institutional response to this problem. The social movement trade union tradition has extended union action beyond the workplace into questions of wider social justice. Where unions are strong, they can provide a moral safety net: collective frameworks within which individual ethical distress can be named, shared, and acted upon. Where unions are weak or absent, organisational silence tends to dominate, and the burden of moral injury is individualised and pathologised.

When organisations systematically suppress ethical dissent through fear and precarious employment, they normalise the harm and foreclose the conditions for accountability. What begins as individual moral distress can harden into moral disengagement: employees rationalise their complicity (Harrington 2019), withdraw their ethical judgement from the workplace, develop psychopathological symptoms or exit entirely. Alternatively, it can prompt

forms of resistance (whistleblowing, collective organising, public disclosure) that carry heavy personal costs and are rarely adequately recognised or protected (Munro 2025).

The debate is more relevant amid wars, pandemics, climate crisis, earthquakes and other social crises (housing, care, health), where the moral economy of work (Bolton and Laaser 2013) ruptures visibly: whose interests does the organisation serve, and at what cost to those who carry it out? These moments reveal that the moral distress of workers is inseparable from the broader social relations in which their organisations are embedded.

We aim to explore whether moral injury might be recognised as a work hazard moving away from identity politics framings that reduce moral judgement differences to cultural variation (Palmer 2012), and avoiding the heroisation of individual resistance.

We invite presentations, linking micro-level moral judgement, meso-level organisational dynamics, and macro-level governance.

We hope to contribute to the sociology of work, inform occupational health governance, and offer insights transferable to different work settings with a debate around moral injury.

Relation to the conference theme. This session speaks directly to the ICMS 2027 question of "CMS beyond the Academy?" in two ways. First, moral injury is a concept workers themselves often name before academics do. Second, the session raises questions about what the Academy itself produces and forecloses: academic institutions are not exempt from the dynamics of organisational silence and complicity that this session examines, and we welcome reflexive engagement with this.

We invite contributions on, but not limited to, the following themes:

- Moral injury, moral distress, ethical suffering at work
- Recognition, misrecognition and social suffering
- Corporate crime, employee complicity and the moral costs of work
- Organisational silence, fear, and the suppression of ethical voice
- Whistleblowing: legal frameworks, aftermath, and recognition
- Safety net for whistleblower workers
- Trade unions as moral communities: social movement unionism and ethical solidarity
- Possibility of an "EmployeeLeaks Platform" and the problem of verification.
- Employee suicides as political protest: recognition and accountability
- Moral disengagement at work
- Methodological and ethical challenges in researching moral injury

Please send an abstract of not more than 250 words to ebru.isikli@bogazici.edu.tr by December 1st, 2026. Acceptance decisions will be communicated by end of January 2027.

References

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