

# The three classical theories of marx, durkheim and weber essay



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This assignment will comment upon the three classical theories of Marx, Durkheim and Weber and the way that these three theories have spawned three classical perspectives (Conflict Theory, Functionalism and Symbolic Interactionism), and then, in turn, analyze how they have changed organizational theory today. With Marx's theories occurring during a transitional period he identifies a change in society that results in two key pieces of work these being " Conflict theory" and " Theory of alienation". Most of Marx's works emphasis is on how capitalist society has changed society and the effect it has had on many key institutions of society (Education, economics etc.

), His works were pivotal in the transitional period where society moved from feudalism to capitalism as his research and theories provided many explanations for a changing society. As industry found itself under a power shift from where ownership of the means of production was a greater indicator of power than ownership of land, he argued that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. For the poor to survive they would need to acquire capital by working, this would make an organisation a dominant tool for the owners of capital because of the power it imposes on the owners. This sense of domination led to one of Marx's first theories the " Theory of Alienation" for Marx this represented " The underlying law of motion of capitalism and the central condition of society. " (Fincham and Rhodes, 1999, P.

252) Marx thought alienation was a key tool of social change and although the nature of alienation is negative it doesn't necessarily mean the individual is dissatisfied but can affect their experiences of work. Read why Marx believes that alienation occurs because of many externalities; simply <https://assignbuster.com/the-three-classical-theories-of-marx-durkheim-and-weber-essay/>

Bennett defines this as “ When workers inwardly feel that work is not relevant or an important part of their lives. ” (1995 P. 87), this may be because of the fact that the work or product is of no relevance to themselves this causes the worker great dissatisfaction Marx states in his 1844 manuscripts “ he does not confirm himself to his work, but denies himself, feels miserable, and not happy.

” (1975, P. 326). The actual labor that is produced is only a means to an end for an individual so Marx states that and the individual can also become alienated from themselves, ridding themselves of individuality and resulting in a mere zombie-like workforce. This theory can be likened to many industries in today’s society such as Tracks in car factories, assembly lines etc. This has lead to many companies changing their working practices to avoid the thought of alienation and an unmotivated workforce, an example of this is Toyotaim where workers have a say in the running of business and decision making. One conflicting view of Marxism is Weber’s theory of rationalisation in this theory it states that because of the industrialisation of society people became more scientific and logical in there thinking and business practises, this led to a decrease in the use of folklore and traditional “ methods” to define actions that happened in society.

Weber believes this to be down to the “ Rise of Capitalism”, this new industrial rationality led to the introduction of formal procedures and operation into the workplace Weber believes this will lead to a sense of security, as it would allow for future planning for further investments of capital. At a later date Weber redefined rationality into two types formal and sustentative rationality, the first is concerned with financial and economic

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decisions within the business whilst the other is human relation based, however like Marxist theory there were always conflict between the two values. However, for formal rationality to occur there would have to be a removal of autonomy, Baron and Greenberg define this as “ The freedom for an individual to do their job as they see fit. (1989, P.

78), Weber believed that if a company was to achieve large scale enterprise that “ Any rights to management in practice led to irrational objects of obscurity” (1964, P. 247), this led Weber to believe that all human interaction was concerned with work and was unsocial. He was led to believe that for an organization to become most efficient that it would have to drive out character in their employees by concentrating on meeting economic goals and targets. This focus on rationality led Weber to focus his interest on bureaucracy Chell defines bureaucracy to have the following characteristics “ Specialisation, Hierarchy of command, Rules implied rationally” (1987, P. 164) and they are companies concerned primarily with pure administration. The most obvious example of this is the financial service industry where no actual product is produced but work is completed. In addition to Chells components, Weber defined there to be five key elements to Bureaucracy in his 1970 Bureaucratic model “

1. Staff.
2. A division of labour.
3. Hierarchy.
4. Competence.
5. Objectivity.

” Weber believed if a company were to have these attributes that success was inevitable for both the organisation and the economy. The model is commenting on how social rules take control over human behaviour so by implying rules it is likely that there will be a more submissive and a more productive workforce, these rules set in the workplace will lead to the effectiveness of procedures. However, there are problems with this viewpoint mostly in the fact that a human’s individuality and character will always be different so unpredictability occurs, this is evident as this is only a model of bureaucracy not social fact. In informal organisation it may take employees time to adapt to rules and the nature that some individuals adopt is that “ Rules are made to be broken” so there may not be widespread acceptance of the rules.

It has also been criticised by many sociologists who feel it has lead to “ Depersonalisation” Fincham and Rhodes define this as “ Narrow one-dimensional kind of individual. (1999. P. 334) One key theory that has evolved from Weber’s view of bureaucracy is Ritzers study of “ The McDonaldisation of Society” (1993) this states that the next step in the evolution of rationality is the McDonaldisation, this is “ That the business principles pioneered by McDonald’s are increasingly dominating other industries and activities.

” (Fincham and Rhodes 1999. P. 39), It is concerned with the fact that McDonald’s is now seen as popular culture and that there success has caused other industries to imitate there style of business behavior. Another alternative to Marx and Weber is Durkheim. Durkheim’s studies were

concerned with establishing order and solidarity between society and its individual aspects (Education, welfare, law and order etc. ).

He implied that through the solidarity and co-operative existence of society and its core aspects that economic growth can be achieved, this is respective with the organic analogy where Durkheim compares society to a living organism or body, in this he states that like the body all organs are dependant with each other so if one fails the body is put into chaos, much like what would happen to society if say education were removed. Durkheim does however; determine the fact that the solidarity is based on different variables whether it is based within an agricultural society or in an industrial society. In an agriculturally based society Durkheim believes the solidarity is based upon the likeness of existence for the individuals as there is not a great deal of social differentiation so because of these similarities of everyday experiences people come together to share there views and opinions on how they operate in their everyday lives. This however, is different in an industrial society, it can be seen as more complex because of the vast amounts of industries and the sheer amounts of labour and the complex divisions of labour that occur, because of the complex division of labour each person still has common experiences yet growing differences are focused upon by the individual this is due to the fact that everyone's economic situation is different so socio-economic divides occur causing rifts between society groups eventually causing rifts in social order and increasing the difficulty of social integration. Durkheim believes that this solidarity can now be attributed to interdependence of the individual, that if people can rely on themselves then they can perfectly integrate into society.

However, Durkheim does state that the biggest social problem is finding the correct balance between differentiation and social integration. An example of this theory is the introduction of groups into the industry by allowing for groups people can still have differentiation within their job yet still integrate with their peers. To conclude on the three key perspectives they broadly cover many social issues that deal with conflict in society, economic development and the usefulness of bureaucracy. These three key thinkers in the sociological world have led to great advancements in the field of organisational behaviour.

Marxism led to what is now known as Conflict theory, Durkheim's theory led to the Functionalist school of thought and Weber's thoughts led to Social interactionism. Conflict theory can also be known as the political system metaphor, this is when the owners of the means of production serve their own interests distancing them from the workers. These are likely to be proletariat whilst the owners would be bourgeoisies. The workers are only there for the benefit of gaining money or possibly some capital so this gap leads to the staff becoming unmotivated and causing what is likely to be a socio-economic rift with each respecting social group resenting each other because of many differences these can be because of any reason be it race, social class, age, religion, gender etc. This often leads to instability within the workplace and means that some degree of change is likely.

Conflict theory has led to many researchers into organisation theory consider conflict when constructing theory's for example Edwards (1990) study into " Structural Antagonism" found that as workers and managers are not constantly battling for control it is inappropriate to call this conflict, <https://assignbuster.com/the-three-classical-theories-of-marx-durkheim-and-weber-essay/>

instead he found that structural antagonism was the cause for the subordinates/ managerial employment relationship where domination by the managers over the subordinates lead to the typical form of product relations. Durkheim's views of economical development processes threatening the solidarity of society through excessive divisions of labour led to the functionalist school of thought. One of the key thinkers behind the development of functionalism was Talcot Parsons (1902-1979). He identified that there were four functions that businesses had to perform to succeed and survive.

These are Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration and Latency. For any business to survive it is clear that it will have to adapt to accommodate change in the workplace both economically and in the human relations department. Goal Attainment will help a company establish itself a direction and formal procedures that would allow the company to meet the direction of the firm. Integration expands on Durkheim's point relating to the level of differentiation and social interaction, if it is hard for a member of staff to integrate into the workplace resulting in a lack of cohesion and sense of team spirit, lack of this may lead to conflict theory.

Latency is the adaptation of the companies system of existence refines itself with social and cultural change over a set period of time, without this a company is likely to be seen as rigid and not adapt to changing times very well. However, this view spawned a counter critique brought forward by Merton (1957). Firstly he believes that the four survival functions are obvious for all organisations and that they are actually the purpose that they wish to cement into the organisation, Parsons also believes that Latency is totally <https://assignbuster.com/the-three-classical-theories-of-marx-durkheim-and-weber-essay/>



unplanned and not relevant to the theory in the respect that organisation wish to achieve Latency as it has totally random occurrence, also Parsons believes that Latency can have unannounced functions not just positive but negative as well, it may produce religious conflict for example. Parsons also believes that this theory fails to consider the current human relations and mood in the organisation it doesn't consider tension, conflict etc. He believes that this omission of tensions and conflict leads to social disorder and instability.

Finally, symbolic interactionism has led on from Weber's theories on the superiority of bureaucracy. Unlike Functionalism and Conflict theory Symbolic Interactionism is a micro perspective, unlike macro perspectives (Looks at the whole of society) micro perspectives function at an individual level of social interaction. This theory believes that social order is constructed on how individuals interpret factors in their lives and transmitting meanings during socialisation in an organisation. This however, does not just occur through individual interaction it can happen through the working environment also.

A prime example of an organisation where symbolic interactionism is present is in a court because a decision in a court can be determined on interaction between lawyers and plaintiff. A recent theory to spawn from symbolic interactionism is Weick's (1995, 2001) concepts of enactment and sense making. This states that definitions help individuals to enact a concept but their own free will, will allow them to make sense of a concept/ topic etc. This is a very important theory into educational studies, especially higher educational studies where this concept is the basis of learning.

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To conclude all three of the perspectives have importance in the development in organisational theory and conceptualism of organisations. Functionalism concerned itself with trying to explain why certain functions of an organisation lead to its survival and it's reasoning to explain social order within an organisation, this has lead to Merton's counter critique. Conflict theory is interested in explaining the conflict amongst groups within an organisation because of a struggle for capital, it also explains why these divides happen and hat they represent, this had lead to such new theories a s neo-Marxism, structural antagonism etc. Whilst symbolic interactionism focus' on the transmission of rules, codes of conduct, norms, values through interaction within an organisation by either a human body or the working environment. Change brought about these revelations in the sociological world with it either being the industrialisation of society or a changing social environment, but whatever changes happen in the future it is clear that the three theorists and the surrounding theory's and schools of thought that were produced around them will be applicable in the future.