

According help the
young men and
women



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

According to Merton, “ Manifest” functions are those that are intended and recognised;” latent” functions are unrecognised and unintended”.

Manifest Functions: These are “ intended and recognised” functions. These are functions which people assume and expect the institutions to fulfill.

Examples: (i) Schools are expected to educate the young in the knowledge and skills that they need.

It is its manifest function; (ii) Economic institutions are expected to produce and distribute goods and direct the flow of capital wherever it is needed. (iii)

Dating is expected to help the young men and women to find out their suitability for marriage. (iv) The welfare system has the manifest function of preventing the poor from starving, (v) similarly, incest taboos are expected to prevent biological degeneration. These manifest functions are obvious, admitted, and generally applauded.

Latent Functions: These are “ unrecognised and unintended” functions.

These are the unforeseen consequences of institutions. **Examples:** (i) Schools not only educate youth, they also provide mass entertainment and keep the young out of employment market. (ii) Economic institutions not only produce and distribute goods, but also promote technological, political and educational changes, and even philanthropy. (iii) Dating not only selects marriage partners, but also supports a large entertainment industry. (iv) The welfare system not only protects the starving, but it also has the latent function of preventing a civil disorder that might result if millions of people had no source of income. (v) Incest taboo has the latent function of preventing conflicts within the family. It’s another latent function is.

It reinforces the sexual union between husband and wife. Role of Latent Functions in Relation to Manifest Functions: Latent functions of an institution or partial structure may- (i) support the manifest functions, or (ii) be irrelevant to, or (iii) may even undermine manifest functions. These points may be clarified with examples. (i) Latent functions may support the manifest functions.

Example: The latent functions of religious institutions in the modern society include-offering recreational activities and courtship opportunities to young people. All Church leaders agree that these activities help Churches pursue (ii) Latent functions may be irrelevant to manifest functions. Example: It is very much doubtful that the sports spectacles staged by schools and colleges have much effect upon the manifest functions of promoting education.

But, they seem to be largely irrelevant to this manifest function. (iii) Latent functions sometimes undermine manifest functions. Example: The manifest function of civil service regulations is to secure a competent, dedicated staff of civil servants to make government more efficient. But the civil service system may have the latent function of establishing a rigid bureaucracy (consisting of bureaucrats with least concern) which may block the programme of an elected government.

Such a bureaucracy may refuse to carry out the government programmes, which disturb the bureaucrats' routine procedures. This could be referred to as the 'dysfunctional' aspect of the civil service system. Latent

Dysfunctions: As it is clear, a particular or some latent functions of an

element or a particular structure may prove to be dysfunctional for the system as such.

Example: The manifest function of the regulation of drugs by the government is to protect consumers against injurious substances. Its latent function may be to delay the introduction of new, lifesaving drugs. This latent function, it is obvious, is dysfunctional for the social system. Similarly, the manifest function of Western health institutions has been to reduce illness, premature death and human misery; the latent function has been to promote a population explosion and massive famine in the underdeveloped countries. These latent functions are definitely ‘dysfunctional’ in nature. There are, therefore, many instances in which latent functions might more precisely be called “latent dysfunctions”. Because they tend to undermine and weaken institution or to impede attainment of its manifest functions.

Interlink between Latent and Manifest Functions: As H. M. Johnson has pointed out the distinction between manifest and latent functions is essentially relative and not absolute. A function may appear to be ‘manifest’ for some participants in the social system and ‘latent’ for others. But the individuals, many times, are not aware of the latent, or manifest dysfunctions of most of the partial structures of society. Still the distinction between them is of some importance. Firstly, if the sociologist is not aware of the possibility of latent functions, he might often think that some partial structures have no function at all.

Further, he might become quite contented with discovering manifest functions only. It is here, that the sociologist in his investigation has got

ample chance to go beyond his “ common sense” to find out explanation for certain social element in terms of latent functions and dysfunctions.

Secondly, any social reformer must be sufficiently aware of the latent functions and dysfunctions of any partial structure which he wants to reform or change. His proposals for reform would become ineffective, if he is not conscious of these functions. In fact, “ knowledge of the way in which society actually “ works” is the only sound basis for social planning. Naive moralising can be not only ineffectual but wasteful and otherwise harmful”. For example, mere launching a crusade against the so called ‘ corrupt’ political machines in a city or a province in a blind manner is of no use if one is ignorant of the latent functions of ‘ corruption’.

Finally, the distinction will help one to know or estimate the effects of transformation of a previously latent function into a manifest function; the distinction also involves the problem of the role of knowledge in human behaviour and the problems of “ manipulation” of human behaviour.