

Functionalism case essay sample

[Sociology](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Functionalists see shared norms and values as being fundamental to society. They focus on social order based on understood agreements and view social change as occurring in a slow and orderly fashion. Their primary concern is with large-scale social structures and institutions of society, their interrelationships and their constraining effects on actors.

Functionalism assumes that society is a system whose various sections work together to encourage balance. It assumes that all aspects of society have a certain function. Under functionalism, it would be hard for society to operate if any one of the parts failed to function properly. A functionalist views society as being like a machine and sees society as a group of institutions. A social institution is any place where there is a set of rules for behavior. Well-known examples include churches, colleges, and marriage. To the functionalist, each institution has its own place in sustaining society.

Talcott Parsons clearly illustrates this functionalist way of looking at society with his AGIL system. In this system, functions are complex activities that are aimed at meeting a need or the needs of a system. Parsons uses this definition to say that there are four functional imperatives that can be attributed to all systems: A is for adaptation; G is for goal attainment; I is for integration; and L is for latency pattern maintenance.

Parsons AGIL model represents the four basic functions that all social systems must perform if they are to persist:

1. Adaptation: the problem of acquiring sufficient resources.
2. Goal attainment: the problem of setting and implementing goals.

3. Integration: the problem of maintaining solidarity or coordination among the subunits of a system.

4. Latency: the problem of creating, preserving, and transmitting the system's distinctive culture and values.

In terms of the larger society, the organizational type that served each function (plus some examples) is:

-Adaptation: organizations oriented to economic production – business firms.

-Goal attainment – organizations oriented to political goals – government agencies, banks.

-Integration – integrative organizations – courts, political parties, social control agencies.

-Latency – pattern maintenance organizations – museums, educational organizations, and religious organizations.

What is a goal for a specific organization is a function for the larger society.

An organization may expect to get resources and approval based on the importance of its function in society. This goal/function system can also be reproduced at the formal organizational level through examination of subunits. While he didn't insist that specific subunits will be created, he does imply they will form based on these four divisions because the various functional needs is somewhat in conflict.

Looking at Parson's action systems and their basic assumptions we can see the functionalists concern with order. The actions systems are cultural,
<https://assignbuster.com/functionalism-case-essay-sample/>

societal, behavioral, and personality. Parsons posits several assumptions about these systems. The first assumption says that systems have order and interdependent parts. The second one states that systems lean toward self-maintaining order or equilibrium. The third assumption claims that the system may be static or involved in an ordered process of change. The fourth assumption sees the nature of one part of the system as having an impact on the form that the other parts can take. The next of Parson's assumptions says that systems maintain boundaries with their environments. Parson's sixth assumption about systems says that allocation and integration are necessary for a given state of equilibrium of a system. This assumption show how view change as a slow process. The last of his assumptions views systems as tending toward self-maintenance involving the maintenance of boundaries and of the relationship of the parts to the whole, control of environmental, variations, and control of tendencies to change the system from within. These assumptions also illustrate the functionalist view of shared norms and values being fundamental to society.

One criticism of Parsons pertains to his personality system. It is said that he does not give the personality enough characteristics and mechanisms for it to be able to function. Supposedly when Parsons is speaking about the personality system he seems to actually be focusing on social systems. This is illustrated in the ways the he links personality to the social system.

Functionalism has been criticized for being politically conservative and unable to deal with social change because of its focus on static structures. They are also incapable of dealing with social conflict. Another major criticism of structural functionalism is that it does not adequately deal with <https://assignbuster.com/functionalism-case-essay-sample/>

history. It is ahistorical. They also see individuals as passive actors, which leads them to a too conservative view of society. They see social and cultural forces as constraining actors.

Teleology and tautology are methodological or logical criticisms of functionalism. A tautological explanation either explains a process by the end-state towards which it is directed, or explains the existence of something by the function it fulfills. Tautology is the use of words to repeat the same statement or meaning. Early functionalists were prone to argue that, because certain social practices existed then they must have a social function - and that one could assume they had that function precisely because the practices themselves existed.

In neofunctionalism, Jeffery Alexander makes an effort to draw upon the best part of functionalism while making it a more fluid theory that would permit a more liberal or radical view. He tries to do this by creating a system with interconnected parts that has a more open nature that could be reinterpreted. They might be connected in various ways for various reasons.

Alexander also tries to address order and action equalities. He says that action can be rational and be either aimed at functions within the system or simply expressing nature. He also views Parsons' systems in a much different way. He sees the dimensions of personality, culture, and the social system through the lens of conflict and change instead of through a constant state of harmony. He notes that adaptation through differentiation can often occur because of strain or conflict. He also sees integration of the parts of a system and equilibrium as possibilities, not a given.

In my opinion, Alexander only partially solves the problems faced by functionalism. His view on the interconnectedness of the parts of a system opens up the possibility for change, but does not allow for major social changes. In addressing order and action equality, Alexander does not adequately explain how action can function within the system. While still able to be expressive in nature when dealing with the problem of conflict, he should consider the various systems both through conflict, change, and order. I believe this to be the only way to get a true picture of the various systems. Alexander makes a few strides in his attempt to evolve functionalism, but the core structural problems are still there.