

### **Comparison and Contrast of Conflict Organization Theories**

There are many views from many scholars about conflict theories of organizations. Those scholars include Karl Marx, Richard Edwards, and Randall Collins. All three have different views and different opinions on conflict theories of organizations. Furthermore, theorist Max Weber has both similar and contrasting views about those theories. Therefore, the focus of this paper will be on the similarities and differences of Max Weber's views to those of Marx, Edwards and Collins. Weber's ideas of impersonal order and material rewards are similar to those of Edwards and Collins respectively. However, Weber's idea of domination is in total contrast with that of Marx.

There are many definitions of bureaucracy. However, Weber believes that, "experience tends universally to show that the purely technical point of view is from a superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and its reliability" (pg. 223). In addition, Weber has six main characteristics of bureaucracy. However, Mr. Kaplan has condensed those six characteristics into four. According to Mr. Kaplan, the four characteristics of bureaucracy are, "hierarchy of authority, salaried careers, specialization and technical qualifications, and written rules" (lec. slide 69).

Marx's seminal thinking of capitalism led him to develop what he calls the classical model. Marx believes that "how we produce our means of subsistence determines our way of life, which determines our consciousness" (lec. slide 6). He calls this idea economic determinism. The two parts to Marx's classical model is the economic substructure and the societal superstructure.

The economic substructure consists of the forces/means of production, which are the tools, technology, and knowledge at the disposal of people to produce. Marx feels that, “class is determined by the relationship to the means of production” (lec. slide 8). The owners are those who own the forces/means of production and expropriate the lion’s share of surplus, which is known as exploitation. The workers are those that get exploited and get nothing.

In contrast, Marx believes that the societal superstructure is how people relate to each other in the use of tools, technology, and knowledge. Some parts of the superstructure include the political state, religion, family, education, and media. If you are an owner, you use the superstructure to maintain your status quo, and to promote false consciences and class-consciousness among the workers. According to Marx, “ideology is the deliberate falsification and distortion of reality” (lec. slide 13). The main function of those involved in the superstructure is to ideologically indoctrinate the masses by creating a false consciousness.

From the above statements, we see that there are obvious differences from Weber’s ideas to Marx’s ideals of domination and control. First, Marx believes that workers are unwise, and that there is no chance for them to be dominating, because they are distorted of reality as a result of ideology. However, Weber sees differently. According to Weber, “Domination is the probability that certain specific commands will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (pg. 212). Furthermore, Weber states, “every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an interest in obedience” (pg. 212). All these ideas impede the conception that workers volunteer and comply.

Noticeably, Weber and Marx’s views on this matter are totally contrary. Marx says that the owners are dominate because the workers are unwise and have a false consciousness, and they don’t know any other way. On the other hand, Weber denotes that in order for owners to be

dominate, that the workers must have a minimum of voluntary compliance, and an interest in obedience. This means that the workers have some kind of choice.

Edwards's three types of control are simple, technical, and bureaucratic. According to Edwards, "Control is the ability of capitalist and/or managers to obtain desired work behavior from workers" (pg. 17). Simple control is small, personal, and arbitrary. Technical control is controlled through machinery. As a result, this type of control creates impersonal contact between owners and workers. Bureaucratic control is all about rules. Edwards believe that increased bureaucratic control leads to alienation of workers. Also, because you focus more on rules, you loose insight on the focus of the business. The above ideas imply that each type of control has different characteristics and results due to their different elements.

In this situation, Edwards believes that impersonal order is due to technical control through machinery. And when you have more machines to simplify skills, there is a high level of impersonal contact with the workers from the owners. However, Weber believes that not only the workers are subject to impersonal order, but the owners are also subject to impersonal order. He states that, "The typical person in authority, the 'superior,' is himself subject to an impersonal order by orienting his actions to it in his own dispositions and commands" (pg. 217). This contrast Edwards view that only workers are subject to impersonal order.

Collins three types of control are coercion, material rewards, and normative control. According to Collins, "an organization is a network of interpersonal influences . . . fundamental to influence are the sanctions available and applied; people attempting to get certain things for themselves using other people as the means" (lec. slide 48). Coercion is using force as a means of control. It results in dull compliance and passive resistance. According to Collins, "Coercion is involved in almost every organization, but in differing degrees, it is most implicit in any

organization that has property, since that is ultimately upheld by the state; and it is lacking only in pure voluntary associations without property” (pg. 292). Material rewards ties pay to performance. Normative control gets into the hearts and minds of the workers. Normative control “identifies with the organization by giving orders in its name and proving loyalty to get authority” (lec. slide 50). As with Edwards, Collins three types of control have different characteristics and results depending on their elements.

In this instance, Collins and Weber have similar ideas when it comes to material rewards. Collins believe that you will get compliance from workers only to the extent that rewards are linked to behavior, “Which results in an acquisitive mentality, greater materialism, and the manipulation of the system of management” (lec. slide 50). Similarly, Weber believes, “Loyalty may be hypocritically simulated by individuals or by whole groups on purely opportunistic grounds, or carried out in practice for reasons of material self-interest” (pg. 214). Both Collins and Weber believe that loyalty and compliance from workers is based on material rewards.

In summary, although Marx, Edwards, and Collins does a great job in proving their views on conflict theories of organizations, nevertheless, I believe Weber’s bureaucracy is the best. Having rules leads to increased standardization. This encourages one to “keep turning the wheel,” instead of constantly trying to keep “re-inventing the wheel!”