

Compliance Theory and Organizational Effectiveness

Fred C. Lunenburg
Sam Houston State University

ABSTRACT

According to compliance theory, organizations can be classified by the type of power they use to direct the behavior of their members and the type of involvement of the participants. In most organizations, types of power and involvement are related in three predictable combinations: coercive-alienative, utilitarian-calculative, and normative-moral. Of course, a few organizations combine two or even all three types. Nevertheless, school officials who attempt to use types of power that are not appropriate for the environment can reduce organizational effectiveness. Schools tend to be normative organizations. According to this logic, oppressive use of coercive and utilitarian power with teachers and students can be dysfunctional.

Etzioni (1975, 1997) developed an innovative approach to the structure of organizations that he calls *compliance theory*. He classifies organizations by the type of power they use to direct the behavior of their members and the type of involvement of the participants. Etzioni identifies three types of organizational power: coercive, utilitarian, and normative, and relates these to three types of involvement: alienative, calculative, and moral (see Figure 1). This figure, while grossly oversimplifying the relationships, helps to make clear the pattern among the components. It should be noted that life in organizations is much more complicated.

		Types of Power		
Types of Involvement	Alienative	X		
	Calculative		X	
	Moral			X

Figure 1. Etzioni's compliance types.

Types of Power

Coercive Power

Coercive power uses force and fear to control lower-level participants. Examples of organizations that rely on coercive power include prisons, custodial mental hospitals, and basic training in the military.

Utilitarian Power

Utilitarian power uses remuneration or extrinsic rewards to control lower-level participants. Most business firms emphasize such extrinsic rewards. These rewards include salary, merit pay, fringe benefits, working conditions, and job security. Besides many business firms, utilitarian organizations include unions, farmers' co-ops, and various government agencies.

Normative Power

Normative power controls through allocation of intrinsic rewards, such as interesting work, identification with goals, and making a contribution to society. Management's power in this case rests on its ability to manipulate symbolic rewards, allocate esteem and prestige symbols, administer ritual, and influence the distribution of acceptance and positive response in the organization.

Many professional people work in normative organizations. Examples of such organizations are churches, political organizations, hospitals, universities, and professional associations (such as the American Association of School Administrators, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and National Education Association). Public schools probably fit this category for the most part, although there are vast differences in their use of power to gain member compliance, particularly the control of pupils (Lunenburg, 1984).

Types of Involvement

All three types of power can be useful in obtaining subordinates' cooperation in organizations. However, the relative effectiveness of each approach depends on the organizational participant's involvement (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). Involvement refers to the orientation of a person to an object, characterized in terms of intensity and direction. Accordingly, people can be placed on an involvement continuum that ranges from highly negative to highly positive. Etzioni suggests that participants' involvement can be broadly categorized as alienative, calculative, or moral.

Alienative Involvement

Alienative involvement designates an intense, negative orientation. Inmates in prisons, patients in custodial mental hospitals, and enlisted personnel in basic training all tend to be alienated from their respective organizations. However, in the case of military personnel undergoing basic training, the ultimate goal is adherence to the organization's values (Champoux, 2011). Identification with underlying values helps military recruits reconcile personal discomfort caused by their membership in the organization during boot camp (Lalor, 2011). Personnel learn to accept the organization's values and place trust in the organization not to hurt them. This may lead ultimately to the graduate's shift to moral involvement (Goldish, 2011).

Calculative Involvement

Calculative involvement designates either a negative or a positive orientation of low intensity. Calculative orientations are predominant in relationships of merchants who have permanent customers in various types of business associations. Similarly, inmates in prisons ("rats") who have established contact with prison authorities often have predominantly calculative attitudes toward those in power.

Moral Involvement

Moral involvement designates a positive orientation of high intensity. The involvement of the parishioner in her church or synagogue, the devoted member of his political party, and the loyal follower of her leader are all moral.

Relationship of Power to Involvement

According to Etzioni, when an organization employs coercive power, participants usually react to the organization with hostility, which is alienative involvement. Utilitarian power usually results in calculative involvement; that is, participants desire to maximize personal gain. Finally, normative power frequently creates moral involvement; for instance, participants are committed to the socially beneficial features of their organizations.

Some organizations employ all three types of power, but most tend to emphasize only one, relying less on the other two. Power specialization occurs because when two types of power are emphasized simultaneously with the same participant group, they tend to neutralize each other.

Applying force, fear, or other coercive measures, for example, usually creates such high-degree alienation that it becomes impossible to apply normative power successfully (Lunenburg, 1983). This may be one reason why using coercive control in gaining student compliance in schools often leads to a displacement of educational goals. Similarly, it may be why teachers in progressive schools tend to oppose corporal punishment (Bulach, Lunenburg, & Potter, 2008).

Conclusion

Compliance theory is an approach to organizational structure that integrates several ideas from the classical and participatory management models. According to compliance theory, organizations can be classified by the type of power they use to direct the behavior of their members and the type of involvement of the participants. In most organizations, types of power and involvement are related in three predictable combinations: coercive-alienative, utilitarian-calculative, and normative-moral. Of course, a few organizations combine two or even all three types. For instance, some teachers' unions use both utilitarian and normative power to gain compliance from their members. Nevertheless, school officials who attempt to use types of power that are not appropriate for the environment can reduce organizational effectiveness. Schools tend to be normative organizations. According to this logic, oppressive use of coercive and utilitarian power with teachers and students can be dysfunctional.

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