

KARL MARX

1818 - 1883

German-born philosopher, economist, historian, political theorist, sociologist, journalist, and revolutionary socialist. Best known for his “**dialectical materialist**” philosophy (emphasizing the role of practical activity in transcending the philosophical dead-ends of ‘vulgar’ materialism and ‘contemplative’ idealism) and his “**historical materialist**” theory of capitalism’s emergence and development, and its likely replacement by socialism.

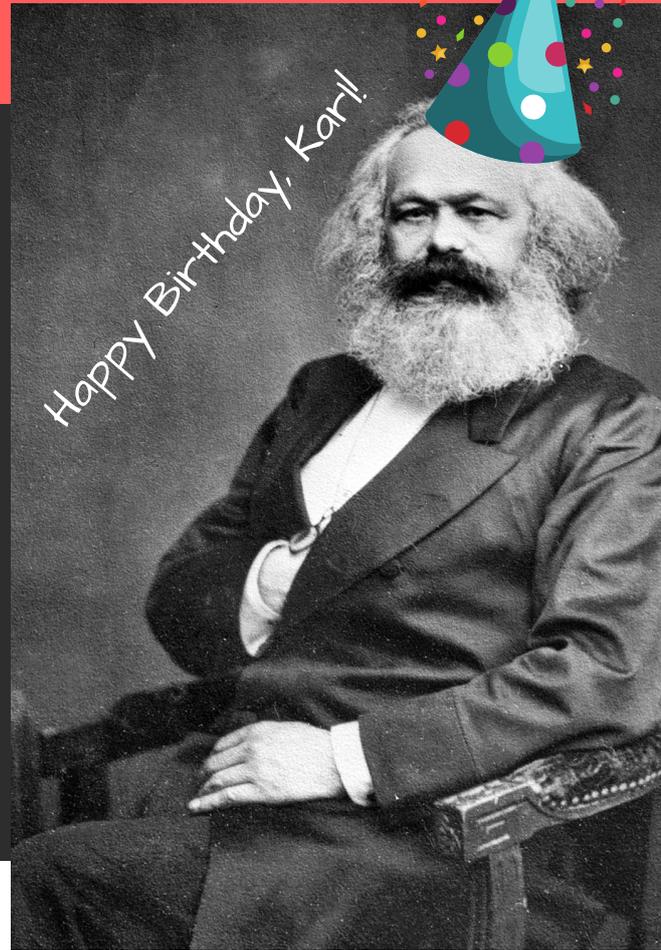
Most famous for:

- The Communist Manifesto
- Capital, volumes 1-4

Relevance for Management and Organization Theory

Marx’s ideas have been and continue to be very impactful in disciplines such as history and education psychology, but much less so in organization theory. The main area of impact in our field is in the analysis of labor/management tensions in the organization of work. Where most organization theory aims to discern timeless generalities/laws of organization, Marx encourages us to consider too the specific forms of organization that arise in capitalist society. Here, unlike in feudalism or other pre-capitalist systems, “free laborers” exchange their capacity to work for a wage, and employers enjoy control over the conditions of work and the disposition of the surplus value created by the enterprise. Marx’s ideas also seep into organization theory through the enduring influence of some key sociologists who were deeply influenced by Marx even when also disagreed with him on some key points and cite him only occasionally. Weber, Durkheim, and Gouldner are perhaps the main channels of this indirect influence.

Not surprisingly, the popularity of Marx’s ideas seems to wax and wane for (a) the greater or lesser intensity of conflict in capitalist societies, and (b) the vitality or decline of societies like the USSR, China, and Cuba whose leaders claim inspiration from Marx.



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