Functionalism vs Symbolic interaction theory:

They're both theoretical paradigms that can be applied when studying society's structure. A functionalist approach is based on the more objective scientific method, meaning that they tend to see society as an organism with interacting and interlocking parts. They want to know how society fits together. How parts function to lend to stability or instability of the whole. A symbolic interactionist approach is more interpretive. They would focus more on the actions or reactions that individuals have when they attach meaning to these interacting and interlocking parts. They are more interested in why and how people define their situations because they believe that it is how these individuals create their identity, which is why most research is based on individuals' observations.

The main difference is a macro level for functionalism meaning that we look at the issues as a whole. Interactionalist approaches look at the individual's interpretation of their place in society. It is more of a micro approach or an approach of the individual. Also Functionanism looks at the mechanics of groups and norms within those groups as the driving force behind society working the way it does. Interactionalism are values taking from personal interactions amongst social groups.

Symbolic interactionism- This perspective relies on the symbolic meaning that people develop and rely upon in the process of social interaction. Society is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation. People interpret one another's behavior and it is these interpretations that form the social bond.

An example, why would young people smoke cigarettes even when all objective medical evidence points to the dangers of doing so? The answer is in the definition of the situation that people create. Studies find that teenagers are well informed about the risks of tobacco, but they also think that smoking is cool, that they themselves will be safe from harm, and that smoking projects a positive image to their peers. So, the symbolic meaning of smoking overrides that actual facts regarding smoking and risk.

Functionalist- Functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how it contributes to the stability of the whole society. Society is more than the sum of its parts; rather, each part of society is functional for the stability of the whole society. The different parts are primarily the institutions of society, each of which is organized to fill different needs and each of which has particular consequences for the form and shape of society. The parts all depend on each other.

For example, the government, or state, provides education for the children of the family, which in turn pays taxes on which the state depends to keep itself running. The family is dependent upon the school to help children grow up to have good jobs so that they can raise and support their own families. In the process, the children become law-abiding, taxpaying citizens, who in turn support the state. If all goes well, the parts of society produce order, stability, and productivity. If all does not go well, the parts of society then must adapt to recapture a new order, stability, and productivity. Functionalism emphasizes the consensus and order that exist in society, focusing on social stability and shared public values.