**CHAPTER 2**

**THE CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

1. Examining the emergence of the critical perspective
   1. Karl Marx’s work is foundational for the critical perspective.
      1. Marx’s Key Issues
         1. Marx provides an analysis of the historical development of different economic systems: tribal, ancient, feudal, and capitalist.
            1. Developed the theory of *historical materialism* which analyzes history according to different modes of production.
            2. Different modes of production were identified as: common ownership (tribal), citizen-slave (ancient), aristocrat-serf (feudal), and capitalist-wage laborer (capitalist). In the last three systems there is an exploiting and an exploited class.
         2. Marx criticized capitalism for the ways in which it exploited working people, specifically identifying three elements peculiar to the capitalist economic system:
            1. Workers are not able to produce for themselves because they do not own “means of production.”
            2. The system works not to make goods to produce more goods; rather, the goal is to turn money into more money. Exchange value is much more important than use value and thus everything can become a commodity to be bought and sold.
            3. The exploitative nature is hidden in the difference between the value of the labor power as purchased by the capitalist, and the actual value produced by the laborer. This difference, the *surplus value*, is the source of profit for the capitalist, but hides the fact that the laborer is essentially unpaid for a portion of the working day.
         3. Marx uses the theory of ideology to show how economic structure in society has a direct impact on the system of ideas that prevail in that society.
            1. According to Marx, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.”
            2. *Ideology* is a system of attitudes, beliefs, ideas, perceptions, and values that structure reality in a way that serves the interests of the dominant class.
      2. Critiques and limitations of Marx’s work
         1. Marx believed that because capitalism was so beset by problems, revolution was inevitable. His “evolutionary” position has not proven correct.
         2. Marx overemphasizes the extent to which the economic structure of a society determines its cultural, political and ideological features. Later scholars show that there is no easy one-to-one correspondence between economics and social reality.
         3. Marx’s work is an appropriate analysis for the middle of the 19th century but he could not foresee, and address, the significant changes in capitalism that have occurred since that time.
   2. The Institute for Social Research (the Frankfurt School) extended Marx’s work attempting to make Marxist theory relevant to their current environment.
      1. They focused on capitalism not only as an economic system, but also as a cultural and ideological system.
         1. They rejected *economic determinism*, the idea that the nature of society was causally determined by its economic foundation.
         2. Instead, they developed a *dialectical theory* through which they viewed society as the product of the interrelationships among its cultural, ideological, and economic aspects.
      2. *Critical theory* is the term used to describe this neo-Marxist theory and research.
         1. Critique of capitalism and the culture industry
            1. Popular culture is mass produced
            2. It is administered from above and imposed on people
            3. It creates needs in people that would not otherwise exist
         2. Critique of Enlightenment thought
            1. Although Frankfurt school members saw themselves as working in the tradition of Enlightenment rationality, they considered the confluence of modern influences had perverted the Enlightenment project.
            2. They critiqued the emergence of science and technology and the dominance of instrumental reasoning.
      3. Critiques of the Frankfurt school
         1. Overestimated the power of the culture industry to create a society
         2. Underestimated the ability of the average person to develop interpretations that contest “administered” meanings – they are not unwitting dupes
   3. Cultural studies
      1. Researchers in the cultural studies tradition take popular culture as a serious object of study, examining the complex ways in which it structures social reality.
      2. “Culture” within cultural studies refers not to the “high” and “low” culture distinction made by Marx, but to the system of shared meanings that unites members of a particular group or community.
         1. *Semiotics* is the scientific study of systems of representations. Signs are both arbitrary and conventional and depend on an agreed-on set of rules, as well as its relationship to other signs in the same system.
         2. Cultural studies researchers explore how these signs are interpreted and made sense of, changing over time or functioning with multiple meanings.
         3. Some people or groups have greater influence over meaning construction than others because they have greater “cultural capital.”
2. The critical approach makes a number of assumptions about organizations as *communicative* phenomena.
   1. Organizations are socially constructed through communication processes
      1. Organizations come into being through communication processes (“social constructionist” approach)
      2. Social actors are active participants in the communicative construction of reality through symbolic practices such as storytelling, metaphors, and humor.
   2. Organizations are political sites of power and control
      1. Communicative construction processes are influenced by various actor and stakeholder interests.
      2. *Hegemony* refers to the establishment of certain meanings and ideas in society in which general direction is imposed by the dominant fundamental group through developing consensus of others.
      3. The concern is that multiple and competing interests are not represented, but rather only those of the dominant group.
      4. The critical approach emphasizes the “deep structure” of organizational life – the underlying interests, values, and assumptions.
   3. Organizations are key sites of human identity formation in modern society
      1. Because the modern corporation has become the primary institution for the development of our identities, we are all subject to *corporate colonization* – corporate ideologies and discourses pervade our lives.
      2. Boundaries between work and other spheres of life have blurred or broken down completely.
   4. Organizations are important sites of collective decision making and democracy
      1. Traditional, hierarchical organizational structures are being challenged in favor of more democratic workplaces.
      2. Organizations shape the meaning systems with which we make sense of the world, and thus critical research examines the consequences of these structuring processes in our wider world.
   5. Organizations are sites of ethical issues and dilemmas
      1. Ethics is a fundamental feature of organizational life and organizational decisions affect people’s lives in fundamental ways.
      2. Ethics are political because some ethical systems come to dominate over others through political power.
      3. Ethical communication promotes dialogue, contributes to the growth, recognizes the possibility of different organizational realities, acknowledges multiple interests, and facilitates participatory decision-making processes.