Theory X and Theory Y
1960
Douglas McGregor
**Brief Biography**

- Douglas McGregor
- Born in 1906 and died in 1964
- Professor at Harvard University and MIT
- Managerial consultant
- Social psychologist
- His work was closely linked to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs
- His theory fits within the behavioural school of leadership study

Publications

- McGregor did not publish much.
- In this text, McGregor discusses his management theories cleverly titled, Theory X and Theory Y.
Theory X and Theory Y

- The theories refer to managers and their beliefs of their employees.

- You will see that Theory X managers are more authoritarian in nature where as Theory Y managers are more participative.

- This is not exactly a leadership theory, but rather a behaviour theory that speaks to managers.

- Leadership strategies here are influenced by a leader's assumptions about human nature.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory X</th>
<th>Theory Y</th>
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<tr>
<td>• People are passive and must be directed and extrinsically motivated to serve the organizational needs</td>
<td>• People are already intrinsically motivated and need proper working conditions</td>
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<td>• The average human dislikes work and will avoid it if possible</td>
<td>• People enjoy work that is meaningful</td>
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<td>• Most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, or threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort to achieve organizational objectives</td>
<td>• Physical and mental effort in work is natural</td>
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<td>• The average human being prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition, and wants security above all else.</td>
<td>• The average human being learns to accept and seek responsibility.</td>
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<td>• People will exercise self-direction and self-control to achieve objectives to which they are committed to and believe in</td>
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<td>• Exercise a relatively high level of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in the solution of organizational problems</td>
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McGregor work is based on social science research and he did not intend for his work to be scientific (Strauss, 1968; Schrage, 2000).

He expected his work to promote scholarly questions research scientific research.

He wanted to develop controversy.

The Economist article on Douglas McGregor touches on how his ideas target “the weaker member of society (i.e. those who need guidance and who are not self-starters).”

To respond to these criticisms, he began to compose a Theory Z but due to his relatively short life, was unable to publish material on this theory.

Some research has been completed that use Theory X and Theory Y to answer individual studies.

Aydin (2002) from Okan University in Turkey uses McGregor’s theory to study factors effecting research performance of academics. The findings were as expected, Theory X effects research performance in a negative way whereas Theory Y effects research performance in a positive way.

Final Quote

“One should not generalize one assumption to fit all situations. The main focus should still be on individual needs and differences.”
References


