

>> INTRODUCTION

Douglas McGregor's theory of motivation or XY theory proposes that organisations follow one of two approaches in their management of people.

Theory X assumptions that people dislike work and aim to avoid it have deep roots. The emphasis that management places on productivity, on the concept of "a fair day's work," on the evils of featherbedding and restriction of output, and on rewards for performance, reflects an underlying belief that management must counteract an inherent human tendency to avoid work. Theory X proponents argue that the dislike of work is so strong that even the promise of rewards is not generally enough to overcome it. People will accept the rewards and demand continually higher ones, but these alone will not produce the necessary effort. Only the threat of punishment will do the trick.

Theory Y proponents, meanwhile, believe that the average human being does not inherently dislike work and work may be a source of satisfaction. The most significant rewards, e.g., the satisfaction of ego and self-actualisation needs, can be direct products of effort directed toward organisational objectives. Avoidance of responsibility, lack of ambition, and emphasis on security are generally consequences of experience, not inherent human characteristics.

>> HOW CAN THIS HELP ME?

Theory X is known as "the authoritarian management style", as it states that the average person needs to be coerced into working towards organisational objectives. Theory Y is known as "the participative management style" - a theory Y organisation's view of people is in many ways the opposite of an organisation applying theory X. These theories can help you to look critically at your own and your organisation's views of human behaviour and people management.

>> ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Douglas McGregor: theory X and theory Y (CMI Management Thinker 026)

The human side of enterprise, Douglas McGregor
New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960

>> THE MODEL

THEORY X

- 1) The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can.
- 2) Because of this dislike of work, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, and threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort toward the achievement of organizational objectives.
- 3) The average human being prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition, wants security above all.

THEORY Y

- 1) Work is as natural as play or rest.
- 2) External control and the threat of punishment are not the only means for bringing about effort as man will exercise self-direction and control in the service of objectives to which he is committed.
- 3) Commitment to objectives is a function of the rewards associated with their achievement.
- 4) The average human being learns to accept and to seek responsibility.
- 5) The capacity to exercise imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in the solution of organisational problems is widely distributed in the population.
- 6) The intellectual potentialities of the average human being are underutilised.