

## The Sociology of Job Performance in the Theory of Douglas McGregor

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### Abstract :

Studying job performance represents a crucial cognitive subject, which is intended to optimize the output of any organisation. The purpose of this study, grounded in a comprehensive literature review, is therefore to address job performance definitions, characteristics, and relevant variables. It also seeks to understand how motivation can drive employees to perform tasks effectively and how different factors can hinder or facilitate performance through Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Y. The results suggest that satisfying social and self-esteem needs, as well as self-actualization needs, are crucial sources of motivation that can facilitate employee performance. Hence, this study suggests that organizations should prioritize creating a supportive work environment.

**Keywords:** *job performance; theory X, theory Y, motivation. needs*

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## **1. Introduction**

Investment in human capital is one of the most crucial challenges that organizations face in today's competitive environment. As such, managers are primarily interested in retaining employees and keeping them motivated to achieve a high level of performance in order to attain organizational goals. Job performance is of primary consideration in the workplace to optimize production, making it a highly essential variable that has attracted the interest of many scholars (Murphy, 1989; Campbell, 1990; Motowidlo, Borman, Schmit, M. J. 1997).

One prominent scholar who contributes significantly to the study of job performance is Douglas McGregor. McGregor is a renowned management theorist who develops Theory X and Y types of management. These theories have been widely studied and still influence the management practices to this day. McGregor's theories provide insight into the factors that affect job performance and the ways in which managers can motivate their employees to perform at their best.

Through an extensive literature review, the article explores the concept of job performance and the various factors that influence it, such as opportunity, capacity, and willingness. It also examines the two types of individual behaviours within an organization that contribute to job performance: task performance and contextual performance, as identified by Borman and Motowidlo (1993). Additionally, the article discusses the theories of Douglas McGregor, particularly Theory X and Theory Y, and how they impact job performance.

## **2. About Job performance**

The importance of job performance cannot be overstated as it pertains to the successful operations of an organization. Job performance refers to the effectiveness and efficiency of employees in carrying out their assigned tasks (Atta, Chafik, & Elalami, 2016, pp. 3-4). Organizations can achieve their objectives, enhance customer satisfaction, foster employee engagement, and gain a competitive edge by accurately measuring and effectively managing job performance. Performance metrics can also identify areas requiring training and development for employees, ultimately leading to a more skilled and proficient workforce (Akinbowale, Lourens, & Jinabhai, 2014, pp. 342-344). Furthermore, job performance can be utilized as the foundation for incentive programs, such as

promotions, bonuses, and pay increases that can motivate employees to perform at higher levels. The subsequent section offers an extensive explanation of job performance, which includes its various types and the factors that affect it.

## **2.1. Job Performance Definition**

Through the literature review researchers consistently argue that job performance is a multidimensional concept that lacks a unified definition. Yet, a considerable number of various interpretations in the performance literature share the idea that job performance is related mainly to two terms: effectiveness as an indicator of the degree of goal attainment and efficiency as an indicator of the resources used to achieve the degree of goal attainment. (Atta, Chafik, & Elalami, 2016, pp. 3-4).

Job performance can be defined as “behaviours or activities that are performed towards accomplishing the organization’s objectives.” (Younes, Abu Daud, Zohara, & Jamilah, 2013, p. 100). Also it is defined as “the result of work of a person or group in an organization at a particular time which reflects how well the person or group reach the qualification of a job in a mission of organization’s goal achievement.” (Khaled & Haneen, 2017, p. 15544). It refers to the “level of success that an employee performs in line with all his/her efforts to do the given job. If the employee is rewarded when he/she reaches his/her job goal, his/her job satisfaction level increases and affects the effort and success level of the work which will be given to the employee later.” (Alpaslan, 2021, p. 134). Job performance is a key factor to meet the organizational goals and to achieve competitive advantage.

When conceptualizing performance one has to take into consideration that it has two different aspects. The first one is related to the actions aspect which refers to the individual’s behaviours within the organization that have to meet the organizational goals and which can be scaled and measured. The second aspect refers to the result of the individual’s behaviour which depends on other factors of the organizational environment and not only on the individual’s behaviour. (Sabine & Michael, 2002, p. 6). The best example to explain the last idea is that a teacher may their best to achieve the planned goals however not all learners reach the same level of understanding and acquisition because of individual differences.

## **2.2. Types of Job Performance**

Borman and Motowidlo (1993) identify two types of the individual behaviour within the organization: task performance and contextual performance. The first type of performance is primary associated with the activities determined by the organization that has to do with the organization's technical core. The second type of performance is represented by actions of cooperation, help, self discipline and hard working, which create a catalyst environmental atmosphere that drives the performance of the employee. Although contextual performance is not formally considered as part of the job, it is of great interest to increase the organization's outputs. (Korkaew & Suthinee, 2012, pp. 116-117)

## **2.3. What Affects Job performance?**

Job performance can be determined through various factors namely opportunity, capacity and willingness:

- Opportunity refers to the resources the organization provides to its employees to perform their tasks and reach the organizational goals including tools, materials, supplies, salary, time and work conditions as they include the policies and the leadership type. (Arik, 2018, pp. 2-3). In their study, Angeles, Paula and Lara (2021) claim that transformational leadership, empowerment, task significance, social support have all together a positive impact on the employee performance. (M. Angeles López, Paula, & Lara, 2021, p. 7).
- Capacity refers to the intellectual and individual skills that the individual's abilities are made of such as skill, intelligence, motor skills educational and energy levels.
- Willingness represents the various types of motivation, job satisfaction, ego-involvement, self image, values, perceptions and sense of justice.

These factors play a great role in affecting the level of the individual's performance to attain the organizational goals. (Arik, 2018, p. 3)

## **3. The Theory X and Y of Douglas McGregor**

Douglas McGregor (1906-1964) is a social psychologist, who succeeded to make a substantial contribution to the field of sociology of organization in general and management in particular. (Dave & Anna, 2013, p. 85). His ideas are originated from a social psychology background mainly Maslow theory (a psychological theory that describes human motivation and behaviour). He

opposed the principles of the classical management theory giving birth to X and Y theory, which is considered as one among the most influential theories in the organizational behaviour. It was first introduced in his article “The Human Side of the Enterprise” (McGregor, 1957) and was further developed in his landmark book with the same title (McGregor, 1960). His theory focuses on the elements that motivate employees and affect their performance. His aim was to change the way to management thinking by focusing on the human side of the employee to attain success.

### **3.1. Theory X and Y background**

Theory X and Y is considered as a strong reaction to the classical management theory (Taylor, 1911), which is based on monitoring, modifying and controlling the employees’ performance to reach the organizational goals. Additionally, it is grounded in the necessity of the active intervention of management by rewarding or punishing the employees since it considers them as passive. In the interest of achieving financial goals, management, in the classical viewpoint, is responsible for organizing the components of a productive enterprise, including personnel, resources, and tools.

The conventional basic principles create additional less explicit believes, named as assumptions of theory X by McGregor, such as considering the employee as being passive by nature, indolent, gullible and resistible to change. At the heart of McGregor's argument is the notion that the conventional concept of management task is no more adequate because it gives no importance to the social, egoistic and self-fulfilment needs basing his viewpoint on Maslow’s theory. (Douglas, 1957, pp. 167-168). “Needs” as have been explained in the theory of Maslow (1943) are organized in a series of a hierarchy of importance into five levels starting from the lowest to the highest. (Ahmad, 2021, p. 107) .

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is classified as follows:

- 1- Physiological needs refer to the most vital basic needs such as the need for water, food, and shelter. Until these physiological requirements are satisfied, all other needs, in Maslow's view, become secondary.
- 2- Security needs include the desires for safety and security.
- 3- Social needs refer to the needs for, love and belonging which are considered as less basic compared to the two others.

- 4- Esteem needs include the need self-esteem, social recognition, and accomplishment.
- 5- Maslow's order of needs is assumed by self-actualizing needs, which are interested in achieving one's potential and personal development. (Munyaradzi, Tapiwa, Mirjam, & Gertjan, 2016).

Maslow came to the conclusion that no need can ever be completely satisfied, and that a need that has been satisfied can no more be considered as a motivator. (Ahmad, 2021, p. 107)

According to McGregor (1957), the negative perception of the employee is a result of the organizational system's laws. The individual's ability to act positively within an organization is hindered by a sense of dependence and insecurity resulting from unmet basic needs such as safety and social needs. These needs are often overlooked by the organization, which perceives them as a threat. (Douglas, 1957, p. 168)

McGregor claims that classical management fails to provide an organizational environment that fosters creativity since individuals cannot desire higher needs in Maslow's hierarchy until their basic needs are met. Basing his viewpoint on the afro-mentioned ideas, Douglas develops Y theory which assumes that that people are active, self-directed and very creative. Therefore, it is necessary for managers to comprehend the needs of their employees and endeavour to fulfil them by establishing a motivating work environment to achieve the predetermined objectives.

McGregor believes that a manager's approach to motivating their employees is a reflection of their underlying beliefs about human nature, and that their values significantly influence how organizations are managed. According to McGregor, these beliefs fall into two distinct categories known as Theory X and Theory Y, which represent contrasting approaches to management based on divergent views of people at work. These two theories offer opposing perspectives on how employees should be managed. (Anastasia & Michael, 2022, p. 783). A detailed explanation of theories X and Y will be presented in the subsequent section.

### **3.2. Theory X**

Every managerial decision or action is based on certain assumptions about human nature which are explicit but have a strong effect on managing the

organisation. This theory is based on the underlying assumptions that follow (Douglas,1960) :

- 1- A prevailing human trait is an inherent aversion to work, which leads people to avoid it if possible.
- 2- Consequently, a majority of individuals require a form of monitoring, guidance, and threat of punishment to ensure their satisfactory contribution towards the attainment of organizational objectives.
- 3- The average person tends to prefer guidance, evade responsibility, exhibit low levels of ambition, and prioritize security above other considerations. (Cutcher Gershenfeld, 2006, p. 84)

The X manager holds a negative perception of the employee because he considers them as being passive by nature, fundamentally lazy, with an inherent dislike of responsibility and work, which they avoid when possible. Therefore, it is the role of the manager to control, monitor the employee performance through a hierarchical structure organizational system and threat of punishment in order to attain the organizational goals.

Anasatsia and Michel (2022) claim that theory X managers employ an authoritarian leadership style, based on mistrust and micro managing, that places a high priority on production and output. It encourages autocratic leadership. (Anastasia & Michael, 2022, p. 784). Yet, “X managers are narrow-minded and usually attain inferior outcomes and performance.” (Ahmad, 2021, p. 107). A significant number of management strategies that have emerged from such assumptions have been found to be inadequate in motivating individuals to perform at a high level. (Ovidiu-Iliuta, 2013, p. 54). One of the primary criticisms of Theory X is that it restricts employees' ability to fulfil higher-order social needs, such as self-esteem and self-actualization, as identified by Maslow.

### **3.3. Theory Y**

McGregor's theory Y (1960) brought about transformation in management thinking and practice. It is founded on the following assumptions:

- 1- The expenditure of both physical and mental effort in the context of work is a natural behaviour, much like that of play or rest. People, in general, do not dislike work inherently depending on certain controllable factors.

- 2- Fear of punishment or external control is not the only way for motivating individuals to strive towards organizational objectives since they are self-directed and self-controlled.
- 3- The degree of individuals' commitment to their goals depends on the rewards they associate with achieving them. The most significant incentives are the ones that fulfil their self-esteem and self-actualization needs. By working towards organizational goals, individuals can attain these rewards.
- 4- Under optimal conditions, individuals can learn to embrace responsibility.
- 5- People's ability to think imaginatively, creatively and come up with solutions to organizational problems is not limited to a few individuals but is widely distributed throughout the population.
- 6- In modern industrial settings, people's intellectual potential is not fully utilized. (Cutcher Gershenfeld, 2006, p. 101)

Y managers assume that people enjoy work and seek out opportunities to be productive. They are capable of being creative, innovative, self-directed and self-controlled with greater responsibilities. The commitment of individuals towards their work is positively correlated with their perception that their work holds significance and provides a sense of satisfaction.

Theory Y emphasizes participative management based on decision making (Aykut & Selva, 2013, p. 104) since Y Managers believe that their employees are able to accomplish organizational goals without being closely monitored or micromanaged. Richard and David (2008) believe that “ with appropriate management practices, such as providing objectives and rewards and the opportunity to participate in decision making, personal and organizational goals can simultaneously be realized” (Richard & David, 2008, p. 255). McGregor's work challenges traditional management approaches and “McGregor urged organizations to adopt theory Y as he believed that motivated people are significantly more productive and therefore to result in the highest levels of achievements” (Anastasia & Michael, 2022, p. 784) he insists on the importance of creating work environment that fosters employee engagement, autonomy, empowerment and creativity.

Theory Y portrays a management approach that is more humanistic and collaborative, where employees are seen as active partners in accomplishing organizational objectives rather than as passive tools to be managed. “Importantly, McGregor observes that the organization is likely to suffer if it ignores the

“personal needs and goals” of the workforce. He calls for “integration,” which “demands that both the organization’s and the individual’s needs be recognized.”. (Cutcher Gershenfeld, 2006, p. 97) which means that the organisational goals have to align the individual goals.

It is crucial to recognize that neither Theory X nor Theory Y is intrinsically positive or negative. Instead, they depict varying perspectives towards employees that may be suitable in different contexts. (Ovidiu-Iliuta, 2013, p. 55) .Although Theory Y is typically considered a more successful management style, there might be instances where a more authoritative and commanding approach to solve specific situational problem and assist individuals when necessary.

The following table may provide a better explanation and summarize the most important points related to theory x and theory Y

**Table (01):** A comparison between theory X and Y

<b>Theory X</b>	<b>Theory Y</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The individual hates work and avoids it when possible.</li><li>• As a result there is a perceived need to a strict control, guidance and punishment to achieve the planned goals of the organization.</li><li>• The individual hates assuming responsibility and prefers guiding. Thus, they lack creativity.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The actor, in general, does not hate work and believes that it is a natural aspect of life.</li><li>• The actor can be self-directed and self-controlled without the need to punishment or strict guidance</li><li>• The actor learns to take the responsibility under optimal conditions. They can be creative and think in an imaginative way.</li></ul>

**Source:** Author’s own work

#### **4. Criticism of McGregor's Theory**

Douglas McGregor's theory had a significant impact on the field of work and organizational sociology. However, it, like previous theories, was not without criticism. Among the criticisms directed at it:

- The theory overlooks the complex side of human nature since the same individual may have characteristics of both theories, X and Y.
- The managerial style cannot be limited only to two extremes.
- According to some critics, Theory Y is a dismissive strategy for improving efficiency without ensuring that employees share the economic gains (Singh, 2019, p. 44).
- The theory ignores an effective leadership style and the leader's capacity to adapt their managerial approach based on the type of their subordinates. Furthermore, McGregor's theory fails to address fundamental research, and it did not provide new concepts but rather consolidated already held beliefs. (Abdelmalek & Boufoula, 2020, p. 265)

#### **5. Discussion**

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that there are diverse interpretations of “job performance” and its definitions vary among scholars (Murphy, 1989; Campbell, 1990; Motowidlo, Borman, Schmit, M. J. 1997). Nevertheless, performance is ultimately regarded as an action directed towards accomplishing the goals of the organization, which reflects the overall behaviours and activities of individuals within the organization. Employees require an autonomous organizational climate that motivates social support and empowerment to perform better.

Classical theories (Taylor, 1911; Fayol, 1949), similar to Taylorism (Taylor, 1911), had a crucial role in replacing the trial-and-error phase in job performance with observation, experimentation, and results analysis as an alternative scientific approach. However, Frederick Taylor, having employed observation in the workplace, concluded that individuals are inherently lazy and exert minimal effort in their tasks. This perception introduced a conflict of interests between employers and employees. Consequently, workers, according to Taylor, will not seek to improve their performance unless monetary incentives are supplied. Taylor's method of centralizing and standardizing work resulted in

organizational stagnation by emphasizing the formal aspect and ignoring the human dimension of work.

A critical examination of Taylor's solutions reveals parallels with the assumptions of Douglas McGregor. McGregor, in his "pessimistic" Theory X (McGregor, 1960), criticized Taylorism for its use of threatening language, punishment, and preconceived judgments about workers disliking their jobs and their need to constant surveillance. Both Douglas McGregor and Chris Argyris (1960) criticized this kind of classical management approach for treating employees as if they were "children" who need to be closely monitored and controlled. Taylorism based the resolution of organizational management difficulties on their material dimension, prolonging and exacerbating crisis resolution. This was especially clear when Taylor ignored "motivation" among workers, a concept Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943) succinctly expressed in his hierarchy of needs.

Maslow's emphasis on recognizing and fulfilling workers' needs within the organization might lead to the achievement of defined goals. He focused on meeting physiological needs, security needs, social needs, esteem needs which can lead to self-actualization. And, as Peter Drucker (1954) described, once employees reach this level, they require a "social exchange" incentive to improve their performance. Employees who feel valued and encouraged at work are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of participation and commitment, resulting in increased productivity and performance. Consequently, there exists a close relationship between the managerial culture within an organization and the type of performance demonstrated by employees as a reaction. When people' aspirations and aims do not coincide with those of the organization, it is reasonable to expect that these answers will not deliver favourable results in terms of goal achievement. Negative responses may be a natural response in such situations.

Douglas McGregor examined Abraham Maslow's theory and optimistically established Theory Y (McGregor, 1960), emphasizing that work is a source of personal fulfilment. Individuals in this situation willingly accomplish their tasks out of intrinsic satisfaction rather than compulsion. Close supervision may not be an effective way to motivate employees to put up the necessary effort and performance. Furthermore, humans exhibit self-control at work, which leads to responsibility, problem-solving and improved performance efficiency. It is the obligation of the organization to produce an optimistic value for the actors within

its organizational structure. The role of leaders is critical in designing procedures that allow organizational actors to attain their full potential, improve their performance, and fulfil the organization's goals.

Despite criticism, Douglas McGregor's theory has resonated as one among the starting points for sociological theory of organizations. William Ouchi (Ouchi, 1981) enhanced this by utilizing 'Z' as an extension of Douglas McGregor's 'X' and 'Y'. 'Z,' upon closer analysis of its conceptual framework, reflects the field study of McGregore's theoretical work, for which he was criticized since he focused his research purely on the theoretical side, ignoring the field study. 'Z' incorporated trust, collective effort, responsibility, and self-regulation as values that culminated in the success and excellence of Japanese organizations, as praised by Douglas McGregor. This acknowledgment marked McGregor's realization that a leader's culture could either be the pathway or hindrance to success. The perception of worker aversion to work, according to McGregor, stems from the organization's failure to motivate and drive them.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this literature review has demonstrated that job performance is a complex and multi-dimensional construct that is influenced by various organizational and individual factors. The review has highlighted the importance of organisational culture, management styles, and individual needs and aspirations in shaping job performance. The theory of McGregor provides valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms that drive job performance, emphasizing the significance of meeting employees' needs and promoting worker motivation and engagement. To enhance job performance, organisations should consider these factors and implement effective strategies that prioritize employees' well-being and foster a positive work environment.

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