

# Promoting Discipline & Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

## *Immaculate Perception*

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**There is no such thing as immaculate perception.  
What you see is what you thought before you looked.**

**Our beliefs and theories direct our thoughts, and these thoughts mold our perceptions.** These perceptions then direct our actions.

In 1960, Douglas McGregor published *The Human Side of Enterprise*. This book was a major influence in promoting the application of behavioral sciences in organizations.

McGregor studied various approaches to managing people, concluded that managerial approaches could be understood from the ASSUMPTIONS managers made about people. McGregor concluded that the thinking and activity of people in authority is based on two very different sets of assumptions. He referred to these assumptions as **Theory X** and **Theory Y**.

### **Theory X**

McGregor labeled the assumptions upon which the **top-down, authoritarian style** is based as "Theory X." He concluded that this style is inadequate for full development of human potential. Theory X is based on the following beliefs:

1. The average person has an inherent dislike for work and will avoid it if possible.
2. Because of this human characteristic of dislike for work, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, or threatened with punishment to get them to put forth

adequate effort toward the achievement of goals.

3. The average person prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition, and wants security above all.

These assumptions can be seen as goals that are **imposed** and decisions that are made without involving the participants.

**Rewards** are contingent upon conforming to the system.

**Punishments** are the consequence of deviation from the rules.

Theory X styles vary from "hard" to "soft." A drill instructor uses a "hard" approach. A "soft" approach is used in less coercive strategies, such as coaxing and rewarding.

## **Theory Y**

Theory Y assumptions are more consistent with current research and knowledge, and they lead to **higher motivation** and greater success. The central principle of Theory Y is to create conditions whereby participants are **self-directed** in their efforts at the organization's success. This approach is most effectively achieved using **collaboration**, rather than through *coercion*.

Some assumptions of Theory Y are:

1. The expenditure of physical and mental effort is **as natural in work as it is in play**. The average person does not inherently dislike work. Depending upon controllable conditions, work may be a source of satisfaction and will be voluntarily performed, or it can be a source of punishment and will be avoided.
2. People will exercise self-direction and self-control toward objectives to which they are **committed**.
3. Commitment to objectives depends on the rewards associated with achieving them. ***The most significant of such rewards is the internal reward of self-satisfaction.***

Theory Y encourages growth and development. Above all, Theory Y points up the fact that the limits of human collaboration are not limits of human nature but of the authority figures' ingenuity and

skill in discovering how to realize the potential of the people with whom they work.

Theory Y is not a soft approach to managing. It can be a very demanding style. It sets up realistic expectations and expects people to achieve them. It is more challenging to the participants—the teacher, the student, and the administrator.

While a growing number of people in education use a Theory Y approach, **many schools still tend toward Theory X** in attempts to change behavior, especially when disciplining. Theory Y can be threatening to teachers who are accustomed to using the power of their position. People who use **Theory X** rely on **external motivators** *to influence, manipulate, and change others.*

In contrast, the **Theory Y** person uses **collaboration** and realizes that *improvement comes through desire, rather than by control.* In using Theory Y, for example, errors are viewed as *feedback* because this is the key characteristic for promoting growth and continual improvement.

An old story dramatizes the effects of Theory X. An expedition of scientists went on a mission to capture a Tonkin snub-nosed monkey. Only an estimated 100-200 of this particular species exists, and they reside only in the jungles of Vietnam. The objective was to capture one of the monkeys alive and unharmed.

Using their knowledge of monkeys, the scientists devised a trap consisting of a small bottle with a long narrow neck. A handful of nuts was placed in it, and the bottle was staked out and secured by a thin wire attached to a tree. Sure enough, one of the desired monkeys scented the nuts in the bottle, thrust an arm into the long neck, and grabbed a fistful. But when the monkey tried to withdraw the prize, his fist, now made larger by its contents, would not pass through the narrow neck of the bottle. He was trapped, anchored in the bottle, unable to escape with his booty, and yet unwilling to let go. The monkey was easily captured.

We may smile at such foolishness, but in some respects we operate in the same manner. **We cling to the very things that hold us back**, remaining captive through sheer unwillingness to let go. So often *people fail because of what they will not give up*. They cling to what has always worked, clearly after it has stopped working.

The person who holds on to coercion, in all its various forms, will remain captive like the monkey. In a sense, the person loses freedom. A person becomes liberated when willing to let go of the coercion and manipulation of Theory X with its stress, resistance, and poor relationships. *The use of the collaboration and empowerment of Theory Y reduces stress, improves relationships, and is much more powerful in effecting change in others.*

## **APPLICATION TO THE CLASSROOM**

***How a person attempts to motivate others depends upon how the person views others.*** If the teacher views a student's irresponsible behavior to be deliberately disruptive, then the coercive approaches of **Theory X will most probably be employed**. Poor relationships and stress are natural outcomes of this approach.

In contrast, *if the teacher perceives that the behavior is the youngster's best attempt to solve a frustration or problem*, then the adult views the situation as an **opportunity to help and uses the approaches of Theory Y**. In the process, resistance and resentment are reduced, and effectiveness is increased.

Specifics on how to implement a Theory Y approach are available at <http://www.MarvinMarshall.com>.

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