

## Douglas M. McGregor



Douglas M. McGregor was a social psychologist that is best known for his Theory X Theory Y contributions to Motivation Theory. (Theory X is the conventional management view of workers attributed to Sigmund Freud and named by McGregor.)

McGregor was born in 1906 in Detroit, Michigan where his grandfather Thomas McGregor founded McGregor Institute to aid Great Lakes sailors and other transient labor in about 1895. Douglas grew up around the Institute with it's strong religious emphasis. During high school and much of college, he worked as night clerk and played the piano and organ at the chapel services. In this way he became acquainted with working men and their problems.

McGregor attended Oberlin College and Wayne Universities, graduating from the

latter in 1932. He received a Ph.D. degree from Harvard in 1935 in Experimental Psychology, carrying an A grade in every course.

On his way through college he was married and discontinued college work for five years to save enough money to start a family. Starting as a gasoline station attendant in Buffalo he became district manager of stations in the Detroit area.

On his graduation from Harvard he taught there for two years and then in 1937 he went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was the first full-time Professor of Psychology and the Executive Director of the Industrial Relations Section of M.I.T.

At M.I.T. about two thirds of his time was spent at teaching and as Director of the Industrial Relations Section, and about one third as consultant in industry. From 1943 – 1945, on leave from M.I.T., he was the Director of Industrial Relations for the Dewey Army Company of Cambridge, manufacturer of rubber goods.

McGregor was the President of Antioch College from 1948 to 1954. The combination of teaching, educational administration and practical experience provides an exceptionally good background for a president of Antioch. He continued to give part of his time to industrial relations consultation.

Since 1939 Douglas McGregor served as consultant for a dozen industries and labor. His work covered wage and

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salary administration, contract negotiation, foremen training, grievance handling, executive development programs, union and management cooperation programs, and problems of organizational structure and function. He is a member of the panel of arbitrators of the American Arbitration Association. He has been a frequent speaker before many management and labor groups in the United States and Canada and has led conferences on human relations for small groups of top executives in a number of nationally known companies.

McGregor rejoined the MIT faculty in its new School of Industrial Management in 1954. Shortly after the school was founded, Alfred P. Sloan asked Douglas McGregor, an MIT Sloan professor, whether effective managers were born or made. Professor McGregor's research to answer that question led to his formulating the groundbreaking Theory X and Theory Y of management.

His major contribution is to the management theory of motivational thinking with the concepts of Theory X and Theory Y. Theory X assumed that workers were inherently lazy and needed to be supervised and motivated. It underlays conventional managerial thinking at the time. Theory Y was based on the principle that people want and need to work, want to be given responsibility, and should be encouraged to take it and commit themselves actively to the objectives of the organizations they work for. It underlays the thinking of the human relations school of management that developed and flourished in the latter part of the 20th century.

Almost any of today's approaches to leadership development can be traced back to Douglas McGregor's work at the MIT Sloan.

### References:

Antioch College biographical info: <http://www.antioch-college.edu/antiochiana/McGregor.htm>

Business Balls.com information: <http://www.businessballs.com/mcgregor.htm>

Business Library- Bio and works by Douglas McGregor: <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/business/dougmcgregor.html>

Accell-Team articles on Theory X and Theory Y: [http://www.accel-team.com/human\\_relations/hrels\\_03\\_mcgregor.html](http://www.accel-team.com/human_relations/hrels_03_mcgregor.html)