



Asian Journal of Management and Commerce

E-ISSN: 2708-4523

P-ISSN: 2708-4515

AJMC 2024; 5(1): 462-467

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www.allcommercejournal.com

Received: 28-01-2024

Accepted: 06-03-2024

Sanya Ahuja

Assistant Professor,
Department of Commerce and
Management, Goswami
Ganesh Dutta Sanatan
Dharma College, Chandigarh,
India

Study on the influence of McGregor's theory x and theory y on psychological contract violations

Sanya Ahuja

Abstract

McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y have long been recognized as influential frameworks in understanding managerial attitudes and behaviours toward employees. This paper explores how these contrasting perspectives impact the development of psychological contract violations within organizations. Drawing upon empirical research and theoretical insights, it examines the mechanisms through which Theory X and Theory Y orientations shape employee-employer relationships, influencing perceptions of fairness, trust, and mutual obligations. By elucidating the linkages between managerial approaches and psychological contract breaches, this paper provides valuable insights for organizational leaders seeking to foster positive workplace dynamics and mitigate the risk of detrimental outcomes associated with contract violations.

Keywords: Psychological contracts, violations of psychological contracts, McGregor's theory x, theory y, renegeing, incongruence

Introduction

In the realm of organizational behaviour and human resource management, the concept of the psychological contract plays a pivotal role in understanding the dynamics between employers and employees. This unwritten set of mutual expectations forms the basis of the relationship between the two parties, encompassing beliefs, perceptions, and obligations regarding employment terms and conditions. However, breaches of this psychological contract can occur, leading to various consequences for both individuals and organizations. This paper aims to explore the role of McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y in the development of psychological contract violations, shedding light on the underlying mechanisms and implications for employee-employer relationships.

Douglas McGregor, a renowned psychologist, introduced Theory X and Theory Y in his seminal work "The Human Side of Enterprise" in 1960. These theories propose contrasting assumptions about human nature and behaviour in the workplace. Theory X portrays a pessimistic view, perceiving employees as inherently lazy, lacking ambition, and requiring strict supervision to ensure productivity. Conversely, Theory Y adopts a more optimistic stance, viewing employees as intrinsically motivated, capable of self-direction, and seeking opportunities for growth and development.

The relevance of McGregor's theories to the psychological contract lies in their profound influence on managerial attitudes and behaviours. Organizations operating under a Theory X framework are more likely to adopt authoritarian management styles, emphasize control mechanisms, and prioritize extrinsic rewards to motivate employees. In such environments, the psychological contract may be characterized by a transactional nature, with employees expecting limited trust, minimal autonomy, and narrowly defined roles and responsibilities.

Conversely, organizations embracing Theory Y principles are inclined to foster a participative management style, encourage employee empowerment, and emphasize intrinsic rewards such as autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Within this context, the psychological contract tends to be more relational, characterized by mutual trust, shared values, and a commitment to employee well-being and professional development.

However, deviations from these idealized scenarios can lead to psychological contract violations, wherein one party perceives that the other has failed to fulfil its obligations, resulting in feelings of betrayal, resentment, and disengagement. For instance, in Theory X-oriented environments, employees may experience violations when promised rewards are withheld, opportunities for advancement are limited, or their input is disregarded by authoritarian managers. Similarly, in Theory Y-oriented organizations, violations may occur

Corresponding Author:

Sanya Ahuja
Assistant Professor,
Department of Commerce and
Management, Goswami
Ganesh Dutta Sanatan
Dharma College, Chandigarh,
India

if employees perceive a lack of support for their growth and development, insufficient recognition for their contributions, or inconsistencies between espoused values and actual practices.

Understanding the interplay between McGregor's theories and psychological contract violations is essential for both scholars and practitioners in the fields of organizational behaviour and human resource management. By elucidating how managerial assumptions about employee motivation and behaviour shape the psychological contract, this research contributes to the development of strategies aimed at fostering healthy, mutually beneficial relationships between employers and employees. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of aligning managerial practices with the principles of trust, empowerment, and respect for individual dignity in order to mitigate the risk of psychological contract violations and promote organizational effectiveness and employee well-being.

Review of Literature

On McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

Parker, S. K., & Wall, T. D. (1998) ^[9] explore the implications of job and work design for employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Drawing on McGregor's theories, they argue that organizations should adopt a Theory Y approach to job design, emphasizing autonomy, skill variety, and task significance to enhance employee satisfaction and performance. This paper contributes to our understanding of how organizational practices can align with McGregor's principles to create positive work environments.

Piccolo, R. F., & Colquitt, J.A. (2006) ^[10] Examine the mediating role of some job characteristics in the relationships between transformational leadership and employee job behaviours. Building on McGregor's theories, they propose that transformational leaders inspire followers by appealing to their higher-order needs, thereby enhancing the meaningfulness of their work. This study offers insights into the mechanisms through which leadership practices influence employee attitude and behaviours in organizational settings.

Chen, J., & Silverthorne, C. (2008) ^[4] investigate the relationship between work-family conflict and quality of life among employees. Drawing on McGregor's theories, they suggest that organizations adopting Theory Y principles, such as supporting work-life balance and providing social support, can mitigate the negative impact of work-family conflict on employees' well-being. This study underscores the practical implications of McGregor's theories for addressing contemporary workplace challenges.

Douglas, C., & Anderson, C. (2018) ^[5] have explored the continued relevance of McGregor's theories in modern management practice. Through a review of empirical studies and case examples, the authors argue that Theory X and Theory Y perspectives still inform managerial approaches today. They have highlighted the importance of adopting Theory Y principles to foster employee engagement, creativity, and organizational innovation.

Sarker, S., & Khan, R. (2019) ^[17] examine the role of transformational leadership in fostering employee engagement, comparing the effectiveness of Theory X and Theory Y managers. Their findings indicate that transformational leaders, who embody Theory Y principles such as empowerment and trust, are more successful in

promoting employee engagement compared to transactional leaders aligned with Theory X assumptions. This study highlights the importance of leadership style in shaping organizational culture and employee outcomes.

On Psychological Contract Violations

Robinson, S. L., & Rousseau, D. M. (1994) ^[12] challenge the notion that psychological contract violations are rare occurrences, arguing instead that they are widespread in contemporary workplaces. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, they identify common forms of contract violations, such as broken promises, unfair treatment, and lack of support. This paper lays the groundwork for subsequent research on the prevalence and impact of psychological contract violations.

Turnley, W. H., & Feldman, D. C. (1999) ^[20] examine the consequences of psychological contract violations on employee responses, including exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. Through survey data analysis, they demonstrate that violations lead to decreased organizational commitment, increased turnover intentions, and greater propensity for passive forms of resistance. This study contributes to our understanding of how employees react to perceived breaches of the psychological contract.

Rigotti, T., & Mohr, G. B. (2005) ^[11] explore the role of affective commitment to change in mitigating the negative effects of psychological contract violations during organizational change. Through survey data analysis, they find that employees with higher levels of affective commitment experience less psychological distress and greater psychological well-being, even in the face of perceived breaches of the psychological contract. This study offers insights into the potential protective factors against the detrimental effects of contract violations.

Tekleab *et al.* (2005) ^[18] examine the mediating role of contract violations in the relationship between organizational justice, social exchange, and employee reactions. Their findings suggest that perceptions of injustice lead to increased contract violations, which, in turn, predict negative employee reactions such as decreased organizational commitment and increased turnover intentions. This study underscores the importance of fairness and reciprocity in maintaining a positive psychological contract.

Zhao *et al.* (2007) ^[22] conduct a meta-analysis to examine the overall impact of psychological contract breaches on various work-related outcomes. Their findings indicate that violations are significantly associated with lower job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and trust in the employer, as well as higher turnover intentions and psychological distress. This paper provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing research on the consequences of psychological contract violations. Bal, P. M., & De Lange, A. H. (2015) ^[3] investigate the relationship between flexibility-oriented human resource management practices and psychological contract fulfilment. Their longitudinal study reveals that employees who perceive higher levels of psychological contract fulfilment report greater engagement and job performance. This research highlights the importance of aligning HR practices with employees' expectations to maintain a positive psychological contract.

Research methodology

Research Gap: While existing research has extensively

explored McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y and their implications for various aspects of organizational behaviour and management practices, there remains a noticeable research gap regarding their specific influence on psychological contract violations. While some studies have touched upon the broader implications of managerial attitudes and behaviours aligned with Theory X or Theory Y for employee-employer relationships, few have delved deeply into how these contrasting approaches directly contribute to the occurrence and consequences of psychological contract breaches. Understanding the nuanced ways in which Theory X and Theory Y perspectives shape employees' perceptions of fairness, trust, and reciprocity in the employment relationship could provide valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying psychological contract violations. Addressing this gap in the literature would not only enrich our theoretical understanding of McGregor's theories but also offer practical implications for organizational leaders seeking to foster healthy, mutually beneficial relationships with their employees while minimizing the risk of contract breaches and their adverse outcomes.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of the study investigating the influence of McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y on psychological contract violations is to elucidate the intricate relationship between managerial attitudes, organizational cultures, and employee perceptions within the context of the psychological contract. By examining how Theory X and Theory Y perspectives shape managerial behaviours and practices, this research seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which these contrasting approaches contribute to the occurrence and consequences of psychological contract breaches. Specifically, the study aims to identify the specific managerial practices associated with Theory X and Theory Y orientations that may either uphold or undermine the psychological contract, leading to variations in employee perceptions of fairness, trust, and mutual obligations. Ultimately, the findings of this study have the potential to inform organizational leaders and human resource practitioners about the importance of aligning managerial approaches with Theory Y principles to foster positive employee-employer relationships and mitigate the risk of psychological contract violations, thereby promoting organizational effectiveness and employee well-being.

Research Objectives

- a) To explain the concepts of McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, and their implications on organisational management.
- b) To explain the concepts of psychological contracts, their violations as well as the types of violations.
- c) To study the influence of McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y on the development of different types of psychological contract violations.

Conceptual Framework

On Theory X and Theory Y

Douglas McGregor, a renowned management theorist, introduced Theory X and Theory Y in his seminal work "The Human Side of Enterprise" in 1960. These theories offer contrasting perspectives on human nature and behaviour in the workplace, shaping managerial attitudes

and practices. This note provides a detailed exploration of Theory X and Theory Y, their underlying assumptions, implications for organizational management, and relevance in contemporary workplaces.

Theory X

Theory X presents a pessimistic view of human nature, depicting employees as inherently lazy, unmotivated, and resistant to work. According to this perspective, individuals lack ambition and prefer to avoid responsibility, requiring strict supervision and coercion to ensure productivity. Managers who adhere to Theory X assumptions tend to adopt authoritarian leadership styles, emphasize control mechanisms, and rely on extrinsic rewards and punishments to motivate employees. They believe that most workers inherently dislike work and must be closely monitored and directed to achieve organizational goals (McGregor, 1960) ^[6].

Theory Y

In contrast, Theory Y offers an optimistic view of human nature, viewing employees as intrinsically motivated, capable of self-direction, and seeking opportunities for growth and development. According to this perspective, work is seen as a natural and integral part of life, and individuals are capable of exercising self-control and taking responsibility for their actions. Managers who embrace Theory Y assumptions tend to adopt participative leadership styles, empower employees, and create opportunities for autonomy, mastery, and purpose. They believe that most workers possess the potential for creativity, innovation, and contribution to organizational success if provided with supportive environments and opportunities for self-actualization (McGregor, 1960) ^[6].

McGregor's Theory X posits a pessimistic view of human nature, depicting employees as inherently lazy, unmotivated, and requiring close supervision to ensure productivity. In contrast, Theory Y adopts an optimistic perspective, viewing employees as intrinsically motivated, capable of self-direction, and seeking opportunities for growth and development (McGregor, 1960) ^[6]. These contrasting assumptions about human behaviour have profound implications for managerial attitudes and behaviours within organizations.

Implications for Organizational Management

The contrasting assumptions of Theory X and Theory Y have profound implications for organizational management practices and employee-employer relationships. In Theory X environments, where managers perceive employees as inherently lazy and untrustworthy, organizational cultures may be characterized by micromanagement, rigid hierarchies, and a focus on command and control (Russ, 2013) ^[16]. This approach often leads to employee disengagement, low morale, and limited innovation, ultimately undermining organizational effectiveness and performance.

On the other hand, Theory Y orientations encourage a more participative and empowering management approach, fostering environments of trust, collaboration, and employee development. Organizations that embrace Theory Y principles tend to prioritize employee well-being, offer opportunities for skill development and advancement, and promote a culture of innovation and continuous

improvement. This approach enhances employee engagement, fosters creativity and initiative, and contributes to organizational agility and resilience in an ever-changing business landscape (Aithal and Kumar, 2016) ^[1].

On Psychological Contracts

Psychological contracts are an important aspect of the employment relationship, representing the implicit expectations and obligations that exist between employees and their organizations. These contracts are based on perceptions of mutual promises, obligations, and commitments, which may not be explicitly outlined in formal employment agreements but are nonetheless influential in shaping employees' attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of fairness within the workplace (Rousseau, 1989) ^[15].

Psychological contracts encompass both transactional and relational elements. Transactional components involve explicit, tangible aspects of the employment relationship, such as salary, benefits, and job responsibilities, while relational components are more subjective and based on trust, mutual respect, and perceived obligations regarding job security, career development, and treatment by supervisors and colleagues.

Psychological contracts are dynamic and can evolve over time as a result of various factors, including changes in organizational policies, leadership, work conditions, and individual experiences (Robinson and Morrison, 2000). Violations of the psychological contract occur when one party perceives that the other has failed to fulfil their obligations, leading to feelings of breach, distrust, and dissatisfaction.

For instance, if an employee perceives that they have been unfairly passed over for a promotion despite meeting performance expectations and receiving assurances of advancement, they may feel that the organization has violated the relational aspect of their psychological contract regarding career development opportunities.

Similarly, if an organization implements layoffs or restructuring without providing adequate communication or support to affected employees, it may be seen as a violation of the transactional aspect of the psychological contract regarding job security.

On Psychological Contract Violations and Its Types

Psychological contract violations occur when there is a perceived breach of the implicit expectations and obligations that exist between employees and their organizations. These violations can take various forms, two of which are renegeing and incongruence.

Reneging Psychological Contract Violations

Reneging violations occur when an organization fails to fulfil explicit or implicit promises made to employees. This can include renegeing on commitments related to job security, career advancement, compensation, or work conditions. For example, if an organization promises employees a certain level of job security but later implements layoffs without adequate justification or communication, it can be perceived as a renegeing violation (Morrison and Robinson, 1997) ^[8]. Similarly, if an employee is promised a promotion or salary increase but the organization fails to deliver on these commitments, it can lead to feelings of betrayal and breach of trust.

Incongruence Psychological Contract Violations

Incongruence violations occur when there is a misalignment or discrepancy between employees' expectations and perceptions of what they believe they are entitled to and the actual practices or policies implemented by the organization. This misalignment can arise due to changes in organizational practices, leadership, or work conditions that deviate from what employees perceive as fair or appropriate (Turnley, *et al.*, 2003) ^[21]. For instance, if employees expect to be involved in decision-making processes but the organization adopts a top-down management approach without consulting them, it can create a sense of incongruence. Similarly, if employees expect to receive recognition or rewards for their contributions but the organization fails to provide adequate acknowledgment or appreciation, it can lead to feelings of disappointment and disillusionment.

In both cases, psychological contract violations can have detrimental effects on employee attitudes, behaviours, and organizational outcomes. They can lead to decreased job satisfaction, lowered organizational commitment, increased turnover intentions, and reduced performance. Therefore, it is essential for organizations to be aware of these potential violations and take proactive measures to align their practices and policies with employees' expectations to foster a positive and mutually beneficial employment relationship.

Findings and Implications

Influence of McGregor's Theory X

On Reneging Psychological Contract Violations

- **Transactional Relationships:** Theory X managers often view the employment relationship as transactional, where employees are motivated primarily by external rewards and punishments. In cases of renegeing psychological contract violations, managers may prioritize short-term gains and disregard the long-term implications of their actions. They may feel justified in renegeing on promises if it serves the organization's immediate interests, without considering the negative impact on employee morale or trust.
- **Control and Coercion:** Managers adhering to Theory X may resort to coercion and micromanagement to maintain control over employees. In situations where the organization renegees on its commitments, managers may attempt to enforce compliance through punitive measures or intimidation tactics. This approach can further erode trust and damage the psychological contract, as employees feel undervalued and disempowered (Mohammed and Nor, 2013) ^[7].
- **Limited Trust:** Theory X managers may inherently distrust employees' motivations and capabilities, leading to a lack of mutual trust in the employment relationship. When the organization renegees on its promises, employees may perceive this as confirmation of their suspicions, reinforcing feelings of betrayal and disillusionment. This breakdown in trust can have long-lasting repercussions on employee engagement and organizational commitment.

On Incongruence Psychological Contract Violations

- **Control and Compliance:** Theory X managers tend to emphasize control and supervision, believing that employees need to be closely monitored to ensure productivity. In cases of incongruence psychological

contract violations, these managers may resort to enforcing compliance with organizational policies or procedures, even if they contradict employees' expectations or preferences. This can lead to feelings of frustration and resentment among employees who feel constrained by rigid rules and regulations.

- **Transactional Relationships:** Managers adhering to Theory X often view the employment relationship as transactional, based on the exchange of rewards for compliance. When faced with incongruence psychological contract violations, these managers may prioritize the organization's interests over those of the employees, viewing any discrepancies as deviations from the established agreement. This can exacerbate feelings of mistrust and alienation among employees who perceive the organization as prioritizing its own objectives at their expense.
- **Limited Trust:** Theory X managers may have a fundamental distrust of employees' motivations and capabilities, leading to a lack of mutual trust in the employment relationship. In cases of incongruence psychological contract violations, this lack of trust can manifest as scepticism or disbelief when employees express concerns or dissatisfaction with organizational practices. Instead of addressing the underlying issues, managers may dismiss employees' perspectives, further eroding trust and exacerbating the incongruence.

Influence of McGregor's Theory Y

On Reneging Psychological Contract Violations

- **Empowerment and Collaboration:** Theory Y managers believe in empowering employees and fostering collaborative relationships based on trust and mutual respect. In cases of reneging psychological contract violations, these managers are more likely to engage in open communication and problem-solving with employees. They may acknowledge the breach of trust and work collaboratively to find solutions that address employees' concerns and rebuild trust.
- **Long-Term Focus:** Managers who embrace Theory Y principles prioritize building long-term relationships with employees. When faced with reneging psychological contract violations, these managers may consider the broader impact on employee morale, job satisfaction, and organizational culture (Alam, 2015) [2]. They may take proactive measures to mitigate the negative consequences of the breach and reaffirm their commitment to honouring future obligations.
- **Mutual Respect:** Theory Y managers emphasize mutual respect and empathy in their interactions with employees. In cases of reneging psychological contract violations, these managers are more likely to acknowledge the emotional impact on employees and demonstrate empathy for their concerns. By treating employees with dignity and respect, Theory Y managers can mitigate the damage to the psychological contract and foster a sense of solidarity and loyalty.

On Incongruence Psychological Contract Violations

- **Empowerment and Collaboration:** Theory Y managers believe in empowering employees and fostering collaborative relationships based on trust and mutual respect. In cases of incongruence psychological contract violations, these managers are more likely to

engage in open communication and problem-solving with employees (Touma, 2021) [19]. They may acknowledge the mismatch between employees' expectations and organizational actions and work collaboratively to find solutions that address employees' concerns and improve alignment.

- **Long-Term Focus:** Managers who embrace Theory Y principles prioritize building long-term relationships with employees. When faced with incongruence psychological contract violations, these managers may consider the broader impact on employee morale, job satisfaction, and organizational culture. They may take proactive measures to identify and address the underlying causes of the incongruence, such as revising policies or providing additional support and resources to meet employees' needs.
- **Mutual Respect:** Theory Y managers emphasize mutual respect and empathy in their interactions with employees. In cases of incongruence psychological contract violations, these managers are more likely to acknowledge employees' perspectives and validate their concerns. By treating employees with dignity and respect, Theory Y managers can foster a sense of trust and collaboration, even in challenging situations where expectations are not fully met.

Limitations and Suggestions for future research

- There is a lack of study solely focussed on the explanation of concepts of psychological contracts, their violations and its types. Attention needs to be given to these areas of study.
- This study is providing a basic linkage between McGregor's framework of Theory X and Theory Y. There is a great need for further study on these concepts.
- Employees do not always respond to the concepts of psychological contracts, their violations. So, taking these concepts to be facts is not possible.
- Employees may not fit into two categories of Theory X workers and Theory Y workers. Once again, taking these concepts as facts is not advised.
- The relationship between theory X and Theory Y and psychological contract violations may not always be linear and positive.
- There is need to develop a more advanced study showing linkages between these two concepts. There is need for practical data collection and its analysis before conclusive results can be given.

Conclusion

This paper elucidates how McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y influence psychological contract violations. Theory X fosters transactional, control-based relationships, often resulting in reneging or incongruence violations. Conversely, Theory Y promotes relational, collaborative dynamics, mitigating the risk of violations through open communication and mutual respect. However, the relationship between McGregor's theories and violations is nuanced, demanding further research for a comprehensive understanding. By exploring this interplay, scholars and practitioners can develop strategies to foster healthy employee-employer relationships while enhancing organizational effectiveness and employee well-being.

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