

# **Approach of McGregor's X and Y Theory Associated with the Adaptive or Non-Adaptive Culture Construct of *Kotter and Heskett*: An Empirical Study in Goiás, Brazil**

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## **Abstract**

*This empirical research aimed to identify if there is an association between the organizational management model based on McGregor 's X and Y Theory with the construct of the adaptive and non-adaptive culture approach of Kotter and Heskett. The methodology of the research is exploratory and descriptive, based on bibliography and field research. The bibliographical revision was structured from classic compendia of the administration, with the objective of recovering the theoretical basis of the conceptualization of Theory X and Y, and the contemporary literature for the understanding of the current scenario of organizational culture. The survey was applied in satellite companies of the fashion, food and service segment in a Shopping Center established in the city of Anápolis-Goiás. To measure the data collected, the following statistical tools were applied: Alpha Cronbach, to evaluate the density of the questionnaire data; the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, to verify, through analysis of the correlation and linear regression between the data surveyed, if there is an association relationship between the adaptive and non-adaptive organizational culture approach and the McGregor X and Y Theory approach; and the F statistic to obtain the significance test of the hypotheses and make the decision to accept or reject the null hypothesis. The results of this investigation point to the existence of evidence that associates the management model based on McGregor 's X and Y Theory to the Kotter' s Construct and Heskett 's approach to non-adaptive and adaptive culture.*

**Key words:** Organizational Culture, Motivation, Organizational management

## 1. Introduction

From the earliest days of the school of human relations and its emphasis on the behavioral aspects of social groups, studied by Mary Parker Follet (1868-1933), George Elton Mayo (1880-1949) and Chester Barnard (1861-1961), to theories of Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), Douglas McGregor (1906-1964) Frederick Herzberg (1917-2002) and David Maclelland (1917-1998), seeks to understand the behavioral aspects of individuals and their issues related to human motivation in organizations. Therefore, there are extensive studies on the reciprocal interactions between human behavior and the work environment. It should be emphasized, however, that the emerging theories on the understanding of human motivation are still somewhat incomplete to explain this phenomenon in the context of organizations.

This humanistic perspective, focusing not only on the subject (psychology) but also on collective behavior (sociology), performs analyzes not only from the economic and technical perspective. This vision also aims at reaching aspects that arise in the sociocultural context, such as: the motivational desire of the individual in group; the human motive in function of its purposes, desires and impulses of the moment and their respective behavior in function of the alternatives of available choices.

In this sense, it was necessary to expand the concept of human motivation of the time. Thus, the understanding of the rationality of the man in relation to the alternatives of action and its adaptation of the behavior to the diverse situations, such as: the introduction of the importance to the processes of decision-making, relations of authority and development of norms within the organization, that is, if decisions are accepted by trust, identification, sanctions or legitimation (ALMEIDA, 2014). The precursor of this theory was Simon (1947) who argued that human behavior is intentional, considering the form that man decides about his participation and production.

The evolution of studies about the behavior of man, in view of the dynamics of organizations, is a continuous process of understanding the individual and his relation to the work environment. In this context, Macedo *et al.* (2011) point out as relevant the studies developed since the 60's of the last century. In this way, managers apply an effort to model human behavior through rules, norms and values in order to achieve organizational goals. These commitments, which are called "organizational culture", simply correspond to the routine management practice that comes from the manager's daily decisions and their interaction with the collaborators Lopez and Garcia (2010).

In this sense, corporate culture is a variable of organizational change insofar as a certain set of values (exogenous or endogenous) can influence the actors of an organization to the point of transforming them into agents of change in the levels of individual relationship-company. On the other hand, the organizational environment, under the leadership styles of its managers, also contributes to the formation of an organizational culture based on explicit (formal) and tacit (informal) values that can also guide the organization and its agents to a rationality organization in the organizational context.

Thus, the culture phenomenon associated with the organizational environment leads the actors in the organization to adjust to the set of values, attitudes and feelings and to model their behavior to the organizational environment in which it is inserted. Thus, this empirical research aims to identify if there is an association between the organizational management model based on McGregor's X and Y Theory with the construct of the adaptive and non-adaptive culture approach of *Kotter and Heskett*

## **2. Theoretical contributions on organizational culture and theory X and Y.**

### **2.1 Organizational culture**

The theme organizational culture is complex and requires caution since its breadth and scope promote discussions and divergences regarding its definitions. Araújo and Garcia (2014) understand that the organizational culture has formal (objective and clear) and informal (subjective and hidden) aspects.

The study on organizational culture manifests itself in a wide and multidisciplinary way. In this sense, culture can be understood as: a symbolic system composed of values, beliefs and attitudes. The phenomena that make up the culture are investigated by sociology, anthropology, organizational psychology and organizational theory, as advocated by Bennis (1976), March and Simon (1966), Etzioni (1976), Rabelo et al. (2001), Tronpenaars (1994), Gelfan, Erez e Aycan (2006). Pires e Macedo (2006), Carvalho (2007), Araújo and Garcia (2014), Schein (2010).

Organizational culture presents formal aspects that are clearly perceptible, such as: policies and guidelines, methods and procedures, objectives, organizational structure and technology adopted. However, it includes informal aspects, such as: perceptions, feelings, attitudes, values, informal interactions, group norms, among others. In this sense, the culture of an organization cannot be understood only by objective elements, but also by the degrees of subjectivity essential for its improvement and preservation. (ARAÚJO AND GARCIA, 2014; SCHEIN, 2010; AHMED AND SHAFIQ, 2014).

Such objective and subjective aspects of culture are implications of organizations being perceived as micro societies, embedded, influencing and interacting in a larger social context. In this way, one takes into account the symbolic and imaginary systems combined by a structure of values and norms that condition the behavior of its participants, directing their behaviors (SCHEIN, 2010).

In this sense, Almeida (2014, p.3) states that,

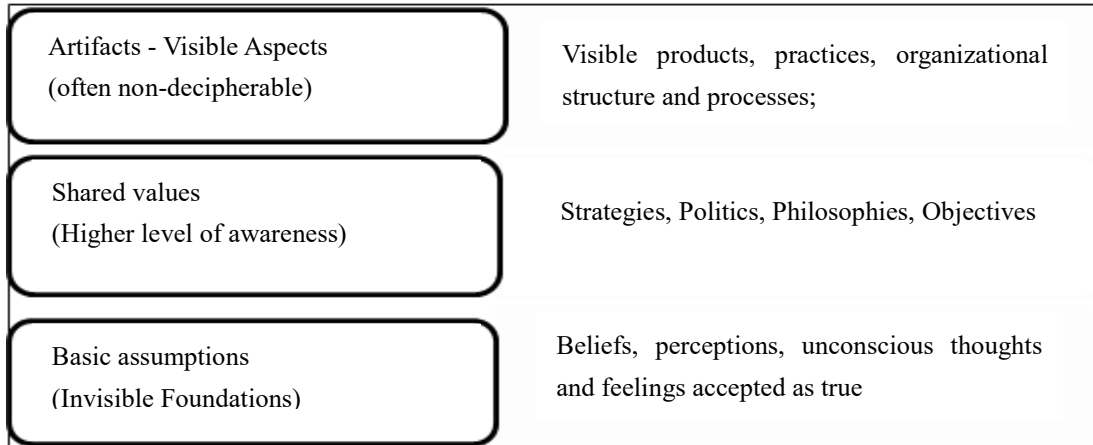
Structure and functioning of an organization occur through the knowledge of the formal and informal relationships that the actors consolidate over time. Informal relationships are represented by the links of the organizational social system and constitute a continuum of cultural dissemination - beliefs, attitudes and values. These informal relations form over time the phenomenon known as organizational culture.

Regarding the relationship with the transformations of the environment in external adequacy and internal integration, culture can be understood as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions, which was learned by a group as it solved their problems of external adaptation and internal integration. This pattern has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel about those problems.

(SCHEIN,2010, p.16)

Schein (2010) emphasizes that organizational culture has different levels of depth that encompass formal and informal aspects, as can be observed in Figure 1:



**Figure 1:**  
**Levels of organizational culture and their interrelationships.**

Source: Adapted from Schein (2010).

Although in the basic presuppositions the values and beliefs remain on a more "hidden" basis, which offers greater resistance, they are subject to the adaptations of the environment. Kotter and Heskett (1994) argue that organizational culture can be classified in two distinct ways: adaptive and non-adaptive. Cultures that are more inclined to emphasize innovation, integrity, enthusiasm, teamwork, open communication and the ability to take risks are cultures that are considered adaptive. While cultures that do not promote willingness to take risks, innovation and change, on the contrary, focus on efficiency and orders have non-adaptive characteristics.

Silva *et al.* (2007) argue that from the perspective of behavioral norms, managers' posture in adaptive cultures advocates focusing on all aspects and initiating change, even if it means taking risks. On the other hand, in non-adaptive crops, managers behave politically and bureaucratically in isolation, not modifying their strategies for the adjustment of competitive advantages. From the perspective of shared values, adaptive managers look to clients, investors and employees in order to assign high values to people and processes that can create favorable changes. Other than that, non-adaptive managers focus on themselves and their immediate group of work or product / technology associated with their work group. They attach greater importance to order and risk reduction than to leading initiatives. "Based on these characteristics, adaptive cultures may be more conducive to the emergence and effects of charismatic leadership compared to non-adaptive cultures" (JUDGE, 2008, p. 344).

Although some large organizations can assimilate new rules, it is often easier to develop cultural change from the start in small and new businesses than in large organizations. (AMAH, 2012). Sørensen (2002) sought to understand how strong corporate cultures can affect company performance. He realized that this type of culture tends to achieve a higher level of performance. But when the environment becomes

volatile, the company will only succeed in a changing environment if it is able to learn from new situations rather than rewarding the ability to maintain organizational routines.

The work of Sørensen (2002) shows that the longevity of the organization depends on the development of a culture that is strong (not adaptive) but at the same time flexible (adaptive). This implies the existence of administrators who adopt "adaptive" positions and managers who opt for "non-adaptive" positions. Thus, it becomes possible to relate McGregor's Theory X and Y and organizational culture. This relationship makes it relevant to analyze how the interpersonal competences of these managers influence the beliefs, values and other aspects of the organizational culture.

## **2.2 McGregor's theory X and Y**

The concepts of Theory X and Theory Y were proposed by Douglas McGregor (1960) in his work "The human aspects of the company". In this book he presented a series of opposing assumptions concerning human motivation and behavior. This classification, called theory X and Y, presents a set of aspects of cultures, beliefs and values that influence the behavior of the human being in the organization.

Assumptions of Theory X	Assumptions of Theory Y
<p>a) The human being in general has an essential aversion to work and avoids it whenever possible - thus, it is expected that managers must act in a way that neutralizes this tendency to flee from work.</p> <p>b) Because of this human characteristic of job aversion, most people need to be coerced, controlled, directed, threatened with punishment so that they strive to achieve organizational goals. It is believed that aversion to work is so strong that even promises of rewards cannot stimulate work, so only the threat of punishment will take effect.</p> <p>c) The human being, in general, prefers to be directed, or to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition and guarantees above all else.</p>	<p>a) Employees may find work as natural as resting or having fun.</p> <p>b) People will demonstrate self-direction and self-control if they are committed to the goals.</p> <p>c) The average person is able to learn to accept, or even seek, responsibility.</p> <p>d) The ability to make innovative decisions can be found in any person and is not the exclusive privilege of those who are in hierarchically superior positions.</p>

**Figure 2**  
**Assumptions of McGregor's X and Y Theory**

Source: Adapted from McGregor (1980)

A visionary thinking by McGregor (1980) referred to the impact of social and psychological needs on man's behavior. The author's perception was that in deprivation of these needs man could adopt hostile, passive and refusal behavior in accepting new responsibilities. Recommendations for developing a

motivating environment included: employee involvement in decision making, inclusion of challenging tasks, assignment of responsibilities, and good group relationship.

For Drucker (2002) the evidence for Y-theory is impressive, because even when hostile to managers and the company, employees seek to appreciate their work and perform in it. However, it expresses a strong criticism of Theory Y:

Management based on this theory does not allow "doing what you want". On the contrary, directing the worker and his work by giving him responsibility and aiming at accomplishment is something that charges the worker and the leader himself too heavy taxes, a circumstance that only later McGregor would realize ... it does not mean the liberation of the worker in relation to the restrictions imposed on him. He does not close his eyes before him, much less pampers him. The Theory Y assumes the airs of a severe foreman, in many aspects much more than the Theory X that it replaces. It needs to do what Theory X does and much more (DRUCKER, 2002, pp. 272-273).

In this sense, Drucker (2002) states that the discussion about the scientific validity of Theory X or Theory Y, constitutes a false combat. What was to be questioned would not be which of these theories would be correct but rather "what is the reality of my situation and how can I perform my task of directing the worker and his work in the present situation?" (DRUCKER, 2002, p. 274)

Although the formulation of Theory X has received numerous criticisms and provided its complementation and / or opposition to the Theory Y, this initial perception of McGregor remains today in the concept of a relative share of managers. Almeida *et al.* (2014) in a survey applied to managers of small and medium-sized companies identified organizational culture clues related to both theory X and theory Y, but with a percentage of 52.41% of respondents framed in the fundamentals of theory X.

Drucker's questioning, (quoted above) directs managers to reflect whether the X or Y posture is the employee's own or a reflection of the leader's interpersonal skills. Or, to question how such manager skills and organizational culture influence the posture of this worker. In this same reasoning it is important to consider whether the non-adaptive business culture leads employees to "behavior X" and whether the adaptive culture leads to "posture Y".

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology of the research is exploratory and descriptive, based on bibliography and field research. The bibliographical review was structured from classic compendia of administration with the purpose of recovering the theoretical base that bases the conceptualization of Theory X and Y. The approach to corporate culture is based on contemporary bibliographies and articles.

Field research was carried out through the application of a structured questionnaire, with 23 questions, with closed questions based on the Likert scale, with a score value of 1 to 5. Respondents could answer only one of the alternatives for each question. The questions were organized in three blocks called:



Company Characteristics, X and Y Theory and Organizational Culture, and classified as control variable, independent variable and dependent variable, respectively.

The research was carried out in a Shopping Center established in the city of Anápolis, Brazil, in satellite companies of the fashion, food and service segment. Thirty-six printed questionnaires were delivered, of which 32 were answered. Therefore, the sample meets the measurement requirements at interval level using Pearson correlation as a measure of association between two or more variables (LEVIN, 1987).

In the first block the profile of the companies interviewed was determined according to the classification of the companies by their size. In this, 63% of the respondents had from 0 to 9 employees, being classified as micro enterprises; 22% had 10 to 49 employees, then classified as small enterprises and there were no companies classified as medium-sized enterprises and 16% above 100 employees. Therefore, 85% of respondents are within the parameters established by SEBRAE (Brazilian Service of support to micro and small companies) to classify and distinguish micro, small and medium enterprises by the criterion of number of employees. In relation to the segment surveyed, 56% of respondents belonged to the fashion sector in the footwear, clothing and accessories segment; 22% in the food and leisure segment; 13% in the service sector and 9% in other sectors such as home appliances and optics.

In order to identify if there is a corresponding association between the adaptive and non-adaptive organizational culture approach, according to the classification of Kotter and Heskett (1994), in relation to the focus of McGregor's X and Y theory, two hypotheses were defined:

H1 - There is an association between the independent variable approach of Theory X and the dependent variable non-adaptive organizational culture;

H2 - There is an association between the independent variable approach Y theory and the dependent variable adaptive organizational culture.

The following statistical tools were applied to measure the collected data:

1) Alpha Cronbach, to evaluate the density of the questionnaire data, based on the mean correlation of its items together with the Pearson correlation coefficient, to gauge the degree of association between the components grouped in each question;

2) Pearson's Correlation Coefficient to verify, through analysis of the correlation and linear regression between the researched data sets, if there is an association relationship between the adaptive and non-adaptive organizational culture approach and the X and Y theory of McGregor;

3) Statistic F to obtain the test of significance of the hypotheses and make the decision to accept or reject the null hypothesis;

The research data were treated using the Sphinx statistical software and the Excel spreadsheet

## **4. Analysis of empirical research results**

### **4.1 Consistency analysis of the data collection instrument**

The numerical set expressed by the Pearson correlation coefficient for the assumptions of the Theory X approach (0.97), assumptions of the Y theory (0.88) and Adaptive and non-adaptive Culture (0.97) approaches have a degree of association classified as positive strong by the terms analyzed. Alpha Cronbach has a degree of consistency measured as excellent, for the set of grouped components of each analysis variable. Therefore, by the results presented by Alpha Cronbach and Pearson's correlation coefficient, the questionnaire data can be verified as consistent.

**Table 1**  
**Consistency Analysis Test of the Data Collection Instrument**

Technical Approach	Analysis Variable	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Degree of Association	Alpha Cronbach	Degree of Consistency
Theory X	Assumptions of the Mechanistic Approach	0,97	Positive Strong	0,96	Excellent
Theory Y	Assumptions of the Organic Approach	0,88	Positive Strong	0,98	Excellent
Organizational Culture	Adaptive and non-adaptive Culture	0,97	Positive Strong	0,96	Excellent

Source: authors

**4.2 - Analysis and discussion of data**

At this point we sought to assess the degree of association between the explanatory variables of the assumptions of the Theory X approach and the assumptions of the Y theory approach and the explained variables of organizational culture with non-adaptive characteristics and organizational culture with an adaptive characteristic. Therefore, the objective was to infer the influence of explanatory variables in relation to those explained, as an element to understand the phenomenon of the individual - organization relationship, in what concerns the approach of management approach (theory X or Y) and the formation of organizational culture (adaptive or non-adaptive).

**4.2.1 - Analysis of the non-adaptive organizational culture correlation**

There is a strong positive association between the indicators of the variable explained non-adaptive organizational culture and the grouping of indicators of the explanatory variable presupposed by the approach of Theory X. Therefore, by the data verified, it can be affirmed that there is evidence that the grouping of indicators assumptions of the Theory X approach has a direct positive influence on the individual - organization relationship. In this context, it can be deduced that a traditional management based on the indicators that support the approach of Theory X fits the typology of the non-adaptive organizational culture, that is, typified by managers with normative and prescriptive characteristics focused on efficiency and focused on values and behavioral behaviors aimed at not taking risks to new processes of change.



**Table 2**  
**Matrix of multiple correlation of the dependent variable non-adaptive organizational culture for the elements of the independent variable presupposed of the approach of Theory X, level of significance of 5%.**

Culture Standards	Technical Approach						
	Organizational Culture	Assumptions of the Technical Approach X					
		At work, most people seek to save effort, using parsimoniously their own potentialities		It is natural for people to feel aversion to work, if they could well avoid it		The people in general have little creativity when it comes to solving the problems of organization	
		Pearson correlation coefficient	Degree of association	Pearson correlation coefficient	Degree of association	Pearson correlation coefficient	Degree of association
Organizational culture with non-adaptive characteristics	I see the partnership between companies to promote business expansion as a great risk, so would not adopt as.	0,90	Positive Strong	0,92	Positive Strong	0,80	Positive Strong
	The company in which you work is not prepared to run the risk of partnering with another company, even if it is to increase its competitiveness or consolidate its market share.	0,86	Positive Strong	0,92	Positive Strong	0,79	Positive Strong

Source: authors

**4.2.2 - Analysis of the adaptive organizational culture correlation**

From the analysis of Table 2 - Correlation matrix of the dependent variable organizational culture adaptive to the elements of the independent variable approach theory Y, it is verified that most correlation coefficients have a strong positive association degree and only one indicator presents a moderate degree of positive association. In this way, it can be inferred that there is a direct influence of the explanatory variables in relation to those explained, that is, the assumptions of theory Y have a direct influence on the individual-organization relationship in what concerns the formation of an organizational culture with adaptive characteristics. Therefore, a management with characteristics centered in the approach of Theory Y presents an organizational culture forged in values and attitudes directed to the assumption of risks, shared values, innovation and also to organizational changes and the valorization of the people.

**Table 3**

**Matrix of multiple correlation of the dependent variable adaptive organizational culture for the elements of the independent variable presupposed of the approach of Theory Y, level of significance of 5%.**

Culture Standards	Technical Approach						
	Organizational Culture	Assumptions of the Technical Approach Y					
		Assumptions of the Technical Approach Y		The reluctance of people to self-direction and new responsibilities is usually only a consequence of their previous experiences		There are times when it is only possible to achieve the objectives of the organization if there is control	
		Pearson correlation coefficient	Degree of association	Pearson correlation coefficient	Degree of association	Pearson correlation coefficient	Degree of association
Organizational culture with adaptive characteristics	The managerial culture in the company that works has strong business cooperation as an important management tool for its cult growth	0,95	Positive Strong	0,92	Positive Strong	0,88	Positive Strong
	Information and data on the development of new technology are secrets that must be shared without restriction between business partners when creating a new product together3	0,81	Positive Strong	0,69	moderate positive	0,91	Positive Strong

Source: authors

**4.2.3 - Hypothesis Testing**

The calculated Fo coefficients of the hypotheses H1 and H2 were larger than the critical Fc. Thus, at the significance level of  $P \geq 0.05$ , we can reject the null hypotheses H0 and accept the experimental hypotheses. Thus, it is possible to infer that there is evidence of association between the explanatory variables of approach of Theory X and Y to their corresponding variables explained of non-adaptive organizational culture and adaptive organizational culture, respectively.

**Table 4**  
**Test of Hypothesis Significance**

Hypothesis	F Coefficients			Decision
	Fo coefficients	Critical Fc	Significance	
H1 – There is an association between the independent variable approach of theory y and the dependent variable non-adaptive organizational culture	109.71	2,95	Fo≥Fc	Accept the experimental hypothesis H1# 0
H2 – There is an association between the independent variable approach of theory y and the dependent variable non-adaptive organizational culture	29.06	2,95	Fo≥Fc	Accept the experimental hypothesis H1# 0

Source: authors

**4.2.4 - Descriptive analysis of the attitude of the respondent managers**

Although the hypothesis test is sufficient to reach the proposed goal, it is worth noting some data regarding the management posture, characterized by McGregor's X-Theory and Kotter and Heskett's non-adaptive culture pattern: 87% of respondents shared the view that most people would rather be led than to assume new responsibilities; 79% of managers believe in the need for direct control and rigid supervision over subordinates to reach organizational goals, and 79% believe that there is generally little creativity and initiative in solving problems.

Regarding the aspects that denoted the characteristic of a management vision based on the MacGregor Y Theory and adaptive culture of Kotter and Heskett, the results related to the aspects of motivation, commitment and self-control in the pursuit of the objectives of the work stand out: For 91% of managers, self-control is fundamental to the achievement of organizational goals; 87% believe that committed people become creative and self-directed in the pursuit of personal and professional self-fulfillment. The belief that people work for affiliation satisfaction, personal and professional self-fulfillment is pointed out by 82% of those questioned.

Regarding the cultural traits, the data pertinent to managerial vision with a focus on business cooperation lead to the identification of significant signs of a trend towards cooperation between companies, among those surveyed. To 68%, they emphasize a managerial culture that is prone to business cooperation. Still 56% of respondents say prepared to share data and information with other companies. However, 59% indicate that they have restrictions on sharing information when creating a new product together. However, 59% of the respondents do not consider the risk of adopting a partnership as a cooperation strategy. However, there are strong indications of a lack of strategic insight on the part of the managers of the companies surveyed, as 72% indicate that the company should be oriented first to the internal environment, even before developing marketing strategies.

**5- Conclusion**

The management compendiums have explored the issues related to human behavior in organizations over the last decades, as already pointed out in this paper. In this sense, the theoretical advances on the

subject are expressive as well as a long universe of questions to be answered in the face of the dynamics of political, socioeconomic and cultural changes to which the organizations are submitted. The individual - company relationship agreed in the management models and dimensioned and forged in the explicit and tacit values of an organizational environment. This transcends boundaries, guides the actions of its actors, modeling and framing values, attitudes and feelings, as a way of adjusting the behavior of the individual to the environment of the organization.

This fact is verified in the results of this investigation, when there is evidence that associate the management models based on McGregor's X and Y Theory and the Kotter and Heskett Construct of a non-adaptive and adaptive culture approach. In this context, the results obtained from this investigation are as follows:

- a) Organizations with an emphasis on Theory X present an organizational culture not susceptible to changes in the organizational environment, so they fit into the construct of a non-adaptive culture;
- b) Organizations with an emphasis on Theory Y present an organizational culture susceptible to changes in the organizational environment, so they fit into the construct of adaptive culture;
- c) As a basis for the validation of the hypotheses H1 and H2 it is argued that there is evidence that the organizational culture with non-adaptive characteristics has a direct association with Theory X and the organizational culture with adaptive characteristics has a direct association with the Theory Y.

Thus, it is possible to infer that the application of management models based on the assumptions of McGregor's X and Y Theory can directly influence the formation of organizational culture in companies.

This relationship between managers' posture and organizational culture was not only supported by the hypothesis test, but also by the descriptive analysis obtained through the questionnaire. For the authors of the research, it was surprising the behavioral emphasis based on the Theory X and the non-adaptive Culture (corroborated notably by the focus on the internal environment to the detriment of the external environment) by the managers of the stores studied.

Therefore, this research brings as a contribution a new horizon for the understanding of human behavior in organizations from the perspective of management models based on the concepts and fundamentals of theory X and Y and the questions related to the set of values, feelings and attitudes that form the culture of organizations. Hence the relevance of this study, whose contribution may foster new reflections on the subject, as well as awaken new interests in deepening studies on many still misunderstood gaps in human behavior in organizations.

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