

FINANCIAL TIMES

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Dear Editor,

The recent [article](#) about Baidu PR boss' video warnings to employees exposes a really old-school way of managing that harks back to the 1950s-60s. At that time, business school faculty regularly taught about 'Theory X', which assumes that workers are lazy and have no options, versus 'Theory Y', which assumes that workers are not inherently lazy and will step-up when they understand why the work matters.

Research has shown over and over again that the vast majority of the workforce operates under Theory Y. Yes, there are a few Theory X workers out there, but most people just need to understand how what they do connects to something they care about.

Research also shows that workers are more motivated and productive when they are learning to get better over time, they see how their work connects to things they value in life (such as, helping others, saving lives, reducing suffering, etc.), and when they believe they are being treated fairly. Or as Deci and Ryan argue – Autonomy (I choose what to do), Belonging (being part of something that matters), and Competence (my skills and being used and developed). This example violates all three principles in favour of management through fear. Where people have any real option, they walk away from bosses like this, even in high power distance cultures like China.

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