13.0: Prelude to Industrial-Organizational Psychology

Skills to Develop

- Explore industrial and organizational psychology

In July 2012, Yahoo!, one of the largest and oldest web companies, announced the appointment of Marissa Mayer as CEO. Yahoo! had struggled to define itself and excel in the industry for several years, and the appointment of Mayer, a top Google executive, made big news. Among her many decisions, in February 2013, Mayer announced that employees would no longer be allowed to telecommute. Telecommuting is representative of many management innovations that have been made in recent years, largely by tech companies. Telecommuting reflects a belief on the part of companies that employees are responsible, self-motivating, and perhaps work best when they are left alone. It also has an impact on work–family balance, though which way is yet unclear. And telecommuting reflects the more general trend of increasing overlap between workers’ time spent on the job and time spent off the job.

Figure 13.1: What does an office look like? For people who telecommute, their workspace may be adapted to fit their lifestyle. (credit: “left”: modification of work by Cory Zanker; credit “center”: modification of work by @Saigon/Flickr; credit “right”: modification of work by Daniel Lobo)

The reversal of this policy at Yahoo! brought controversy and a lot of questions about what it meant. Mayer has stayed largely quiet on her reasoning behind the decision, except to say that it was meant to better the company. She finally
addressed her decision briefly at the 2013 Great Place to Work conference (Tkaczyk, 2013) by saying, among other things, that while “people are more productive when they're alone, they're more collaborative and innovative when they're together.” Interestingly, shortly after the Yahoo! change, consumer electronics retailer Best Buy also eliminated telecommuting as an option for their employees. Will the change make Yahoo! more innovative or more productive? How has the change affected employees at the company, particularly working parents and those taking care of elderly relatives? Was the change introduced in the most effective way? These are questions that are commonly studied by a branch of psychology called industrial and organizational psychology.

References


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