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## Research Findings – Realistic Job Previews

A significant amount of research has been conducted over the past three decades on the impact that RJPs have on job applicants' and employees' career decisions. The research can be divided into three distinct, but highly interrelated, areas:

- Impact on Turnover
- Impact on Job Acceptance and
- Impact on Post-Employment Job Satisfaction.

The relationship between applicants' job acceptance, turnover and post-employment job satisfaction is obvious. All are associated with the individual's perception of how his/her needs will be met on the job. The research suggests that RJPs have an impact on the decision of job seekers to accept or reject job offers based on their belief that the offered jobs will meet their needs. If those research findings are valid, one would expect turnover to be lower among those exposed to RJPs because the borderline uncertain candidates have weeded themselves out. Research also suggests that a residual benefit of exposure to a RJP is greater job satisfaction resulting from fewer "surprises" on the job, and perceptions of employer honesty in the recruitment process.

### *Impact on Turnover*

The primary reason why employers use realistic job previews is because it is assumed that the RJP will result in employees having greater job satisfaction, and consequently lower turnover. In attempting to explain why RJPs have an impact on employee satisfaction and turnover, James A. Breugh theorizes that there are four distinct, yet interrelated, basic psychological processes that influence the effectiveness of RJPs. He characterizes them as met expectations, ability to cope, air of honesty and self-selection (Breugh 1983).

With regard to met expectations, Breugh believes that exposure to an RJP may give the prospective employees a more realistic picture of the job. When their experience on the job matches their expectations, they are more likely to be satisfied and less likely to leave voluntarily.

Another way in which RJPs may influence satisfaction and turnover is by improving the new employee's ability to cope with the demands of the new job. The assumption is that employees who are made aware of the problems to be faced on the job are better able to cope with them when they arise, and thus, less likely to leave.

A third explanation for the impact of RJPs is that they communicate an "air of honesty" to applicants. New employees are likely to feel more committed to their decision to accept a job because they made the decision based on perceived honest representations. Conversely, those feeling misled by recruiting strategies designed to "sell the organization" do not feel committed to their decision to accept a job and are more likely to leave.

Finally, with regard to self-selection, Breugh points out it is assumed that jobs that are realistically portrayed will not be perceived by all applicants as meeting their needs. Those who realize that their needs will not be met will presumably withdraw from the application process while others, perceiving that their need will be met, will accept a job offer.

A major finding in a 1985 meta-analysis of 21 RJP studies supports Breugh's theories that the RJP lowers the new employee's initial job expectations (Premack and Wanous 1985). Although this finding in itself may not seem particularly significant, a major purpose of an RJP is to lower the expectation so that the new employee doesn't become dissatisfied when the overly inflated expectations are not met. Because RJP's bring about a greater alignment between expectations and reality, they can have a significant impact on the reduction of early turnover and can lead to substantial employee-replacement cost savings (Wanous 1989).

In his most recent review of published RJP studies to date, Wanous found that job survival increased in 11 of the 13 private sector experiments he reviewed. When comparing the survival rate for the RJP group to the control group in the 13 experiments, he found that the RJP resulted in an average gain in job survival of 12 percent. The survival rate ranged from no gain to an increase of 48 percent (Wanous 1992).

In one of the most recent research studies, A. D. Martin conducted research on the impact of the RJP on turnover frequency, turnover functionality, and cost effectiveness. Her work involved the study of newly recruited real estate agents, a job with very high turnover within the first six to twelve months. The job is often misunderstood by the applicant, and is characterized by low pay, weekend and evening hours, and a number of other undesirable characteristics. In Martin's experiment, turnover within the first year was 15 percent for the RJP group and 35 percent for the control group (a group of similarly situated real estate job applicants who were not given the RJP). Furthermore, her work suggests that the RJP had a positive effect on turnover functionality, meaning that the turnover which did occur was more frequently with the poorer performers. She also showed the RJP to be cost effective, with an estimated return on investment ratio of approximately 5:1 (Martin 1996).

Another finding from the above-mentioned meta-analysis is that the value of the RJP increases as the severity of the turnover increases (Premack and Wanous 1985). In other words, the impact of using a RJP will be greater in those occupations or organizations where turnover is high than in those where turnover is relatively low.

An additional review of the literature suggests that RJP's are most effective where the job being recruited for is: a) complex or difficult; b) experiencing high rates of early turnover; or c) has important aspects that are unknown or misunderstood by the applicant (Martin 1996). Based on these findings, the Child Welfare position seems to be ideally suited to the use of the RJP because it is certainly a complex and difficult job: it experiences a high rate of early turnover, and applicants often have a total misunderstanding of what the job is really like.

### *Impact on Job Acceptance*

One would expect that a well designed RJP would have the desired effect of causing some job applicants to reconsider their career choices and withdraw from the application process. PETsMART, the Phoenix-based chain of over 300 pet supply stores has successfully used the RJP in its selection process. They show job applicants a 10 minute RJP video, which

they believe screens out about 15 percent of those applicants who are most likely to leave within the first three months (Lifson 1996). Martin's research also provides empirical evidence that more job candidates in the RJP group declined the job offer (36.1 percent) compared to the control group (9.2 percent) (Martin 1996).

Breaugh suggests that one significant variable in determining the impact of the RJP on job acceptance is whether the applicants have opportunities for alternative employment. In order for the RJP to be effective, the applicant must feel free to turn down a job that is perceived as not meeting his or her needs (Breaugh 1983). One critical variable might be the local rate of unemployment. Applicants may accept a job, knowing that it will not be a good fit, simply because any job is better than no job. A second important variable is the perceived freedom of choice faced by the applicant who has spent considerable time and energy preparing for a specific career (e.g., teaching, nursing or social work). Even upon learning about the negative aspects of the job through the RJP, applicants may not yet be emotionally capable of accepting the fact that they have prepared for the wrong career. Wanous' 1989 finding that energy expenditure increases commitment supports this theory.

### *Impact on Post-Employment Job Satisfaction*

Several studies show that the use of the RJP does affect the ability of the new employee to cope with the stresses found on the new job:

- Breaugh suggests that employees are better able to cope with problems about which they have been forewarned, perhaps because they have developed methods for handling them (Breaugh 1983).
- Pitt and Ramaseshan (1995) suggest that the RJP helps new employees cope with the demands of the new job by better preparing them for what to expect. The underlying theory is that employees who are aware of the negative aspects of the position before accepting it have perhaps subconsciously decided how to handle the stresses and internalized that into their decision to accept the job or not. Those who are caught by surprise after accepting the job are often incapable of adapting.
- Meglino, DeNisi et al. (1988) show that job satisfaction is increased when the new employee believes that the employer has been honest and forthright in its recruitment efforts. As stated above, job satisfaction may be associated with, but necessarily predictive of, turnover. Dissatisfied employees remain on the job because they lack other opportunities and satisfied employees must leave jobs for a variety of unrelated reasons.
- Baker (1985) shows that when a new employee's job expectations are not met, the employee may exhibit their disappointment through higher absenteeism, lower productivity and job termination. Related research on the effects of "met expectations" (though not specifically related to RJPs) supports the notion that having accurate expectations leads to increased job satisfaction, greater organizational commitment, a stronger intent to remain in the organization, and slightly improved job performance (Wanous 1992).

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