



Umbrella Summary

Realistic Job Previews

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is a realistic job preview?

A realistic job preview (RJP) is a strategic organizational communication designed to provide job candidates with positive and negative information about the job and the organization, for the purpose of influencing employee perceptions, attitudes, job performance, and ultimately, retention. Although the first published examples of organizations providing realistic information to job candidates or new employees appeared in the 1960s, Wanous (1973) is credited with popularizing the term. An RJP should be based on a thorough diagnosis of the job and the organization, so that the content of the preview targets the relevant information that drives employee attitudes and subsequent behaviors (Premack & Wanous, 1985). RJP's can be delivered to candidates using such methods as in-person meetings, written brochures, or video presentations. Although RJP's are often presented to job applicants prior to the hiring decision, some organizations have more recently opted to present the RJP shortly after hire, during the new employee orientation period. The potential advantage of administering an RJP post hire is that the realistic messages, which tend to reduce the attractiveness of the organization, won't unduly reduce the number of job applicants (Earnest et al., 2011).

Why are RJP's valuable?

There have been many published field experiments testing the effects of RJP's in a wide variety of occupational settings. These field experiments have compared the reactions and outcomes of individuals who were randomly assigned to view an RJP to individuals in a control group who did not view the RJP. In these studies, RJP's result in small improvements in job retention under certain conditions, such as when job tasks are complex (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985). The results of field experiments demonstrate that RJP's yield modest improvements in job candidates' perceptions of role clarity, increase perceptions of organizational honesty, reduce new hires' initial expectations about the job, and reduce perceptions of organizational attractiveness (Earnest et al., 2011; Phillips, 1998). In addition, employees who have viewed an audiovisual RJP have been found to have slightly higher levels of job performance than those who did not receive an RJP or had an oral or written RJP (Phillips, 1998; Premack & Wanous, 1985).

RJP's presented orally in face-to-face meetings are more effective than other presentation methods (such as written or video) in reducing overall (i.e., voluntary plus involuntary) organizational turnover, but not enough studies have been conducted at this time to assess the effects of an oral RJP on voluntary turnover alone (Earnest et al., 2011). Video RJP's produce

higher levels of applicant acceptance and higher perceptions of organizational honesty than oral or written RJPs (Earnest et al., 2011). Longer length RJPs (i.e., those lasting more than one hour) are slightly more effective than shorter length RJPs (Earnest et al., 2011). Post-hire RJPs are slightly more effective than pre-hire RJPs at impacting voluntary and overall turnover (Earnest et al., 2011). The conclusion from the most recent meta-analysis is that the most effective RJP is delivered orally or in a written format and provided to new employees shortly after hire (Earnest et al., 2011).

How do RJPs work?

There have been four published meta-analytic summaries of the RJP literature (Earnest, Allen & Landis, 2011; McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; Philips, 1998; Premack & Wanous, 1985). Each has carefully built upon the prior reviews and added new studies published since the last review. Early meta-analytic summaries suggested that RJPs work by lowering new employees' initial job expectations (Premack & Wanous, 1985) and that the context in which the RJP was provided resulted in differential impacts on turnover and job performance (Philips, 1998). However, the most current meta-analysis suggests that an RJP increases viewers' perceptions that the organization is honest, which signals to new employees that the organization cares about and supports them (Earnest et al., 2011).

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Numerous experimental (as opposed to correlational) field studies of RJPs have been conducted in a wide variety of occupational settings outside of child welfare.
- ▶ RJPs have only a very modest effect on job retention and job performance.
- ▶ RJPs improve role clarity and reduce new employees' initial expectations about the job.
- ▶ An RJP increases the viewers' perceptions that the organization is honest, which signals that the organization cares for and supports them.
- ▶ Development of an RJP should follow a thorough diagnosis of the job and the organization, to ensure that the content of the preview targets the specific drivers of employee attitudes and behaviors.
- ▶ Organizations choosing to implement an RJP should be aware that an RJP will reduce perceptions of organizational attractiveness, and thus care should be taken when considering the use of RJPs in situations where there are insufficient numbers of job applicants to fill the open positions. Offering an RJP post hire is an alternative strategy that may ameliorate the decline in applications due to reduced organizational attractiveness.

References

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