

Mapping the Holistic Impact of Realistic Job Preview— Pre-recruitment Phase, Post-recruitment Phase and Marketing Spillover Effect

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Realistic Job Preview (RJP) is a method of disseminating relevant information regarding job offers essentially allowing potential applicants to better evaluate their prospects. While this procedure is well-documented in industrial psychology, its application as a marketing tool remains neglected. Furthermore, its conceptualization, operationalization and evaluation are still widely debated. The current paper attempts to provide a more inclusive conceptualization of RJP and focuses on mapping its holistic impact through combining the effects of RJP during the pre-recruitment phase and post-recruitment phase as well as including its marketing spillover effect.

INTRODUCTION

Employees of an organization can be considered as its internal customers. For most organizations, the recruitment of employees is a constant involvement in a ‘matching process’ between individuals and the organization (Argyris, 1964). On one hand, new recruits to an organization possess individual skills, abilities and knowledge as well as important psychological needs. On the other hand, the typical organization can be viewed as having needs for talent pertinent to various jobs as well as its own particular climate characteristics and benefits for its employees. Thus, there are two important match-ups that occur during the recruitment process— (a) individual talents are matched with organizational needs and (b) individual needs are matched with the need-fulfilling characteristics of the organization (Wanous, 1973).

Industrial psychologists have traditionally studied the former context. Therefore, a wide array of literature exists, spanning over a hundred years, discussing a multitude of selection strategies specifically designed to systematically weed-out applicants and find the best possible match for a particular organizational need (Schmidt and Hunter, 1998). In the last few decades however, sporadic research (especially in organizational behavior) has expanded the scope of inquiry to include emphasis on the match between individual needs and organizational characteristics. Out of that endeavor, Realistic Job Preview (henceforth referred to as ‘RJP’) emerged as a method that could potentially address the requirements of organizations and individuals allowing for a better match between them. It is therefore no surprise that RJP has received more attention over the past three decades than practically any other recruitment topic (Rynes, 1991; Wright and Grant, 1995).

RJP essentially entails the dissemination of detailed information about a job allowing potential candidates to better evaluate how the recruiting organization will engage their talents and fulfill their needs. Yet, there is considerable disagreement regarding its definition, operationalization and evaluation

(Baur et al., 2014). Furthermore, most studies have assessed the impact of implementing RJP solely during the post-recruitment phase. As a result, its impact during the pre-recruitment phase, especially in terms of attracting the right candidates, has remained largely uncharted. More strikingly, while RJP is not the sole factor influencing job application and recruitment, it may bear striking potential as a marketing tool (to attract both internal and external customers) especially in entry level and sales related jobs (Randall and Randall, 2001). But RJP is yet to be studied from a marketing perspective.

The current research is an attempt to fill the gap in the literature pertaining to the definition and measurement of RJP as well as its marketing implications for entry level and sales related jobs. Following the arguments and results of past studies, the paper provides a holistic conceptualization of RJP and explains its psychological interpretation during both pre- and post-recruitment phases. It further exemplifies the holistic approach using a cost-based measurement model to capture the full set of impacts. Finally, the paper discusses the marketing implications of RJP. This broad evaluation of RJP is expected to have multifaceted impact on human resource, financial and marketing activities of organizations.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF REALISTIC JOB PREVIEW

A review of the extant literature reveals that many researchers (i.e., Breugh, 1983; Zaharia and Baumeister, 1981) essentially did not define what they meant by the term ‘realistic job preview’. On the other hand, the definitions offered in other studies tend to be quite generic in nature. But despite the considerable variation across studies, five key attributes of RJP can be identified— a) accuracy, b) specificity, c) breadth, d) credibility, and e) importance. (Breugh and Billings, 1988)

Accuracy

As emphasized by Popovich and Wanous (1982), RJP is a persuasive communication designed to change attitudes about the job and the organization (i.e., to make them more realistic). Therefore, the information conveyed through RJP must be accurate. Of the five key attributes, accuracy is the one that appears to have been most faithfully incorporated in RJP studies.

Specificity

The core idea of specificity in RJP is that the information needs to include specific and relevant details of interest unlike generic information often containing only an overview of the job. If an applicant is expected to make a cognizant evaluation of a job offer, s/he must receive information that is sufficiently detailed for such assessment. Roberson et al. (2005) demonstrated that recruitment message specificity leads to enhanced perceptions of organizational attributes, improved person-organization fit and elevated intention to apply.

Breadth

Breadth is a severely undermined aspect in RJP literature as it appears that most RJPs, rather than being broad in scope, have been very narrowly focused (Breugh and Billings, 1988). Typically, RJPs have concentrated only on factors that tend to be common across large segments of an organization (i.e., overtime policy) while numerous important factors (i.e., supervision, layoff policies, grievance procedures) have remained unaddressed and it appears that more significant but subtle aspects of both the job and the organization have not been covered in most RJP implementations (Louis, 1980).

Credibility

If RJP is expected to generate positive attitude (or reinforce it), it must be credible. Credibility has generally not been assessed in RJP studies (Popovich and Wanous, 1982) with the exception of Colarelli (1984) and researchers have largely assumed that RJP was inherently credible. However, drawing upon the Yale Persuasive Communication Model (as suggested by Popovich and Wanous, 1982), it is clear that one needs to be concerned not only about the ‘sent message’ but also about the ‘received message’. Liu et

al. (2016) further demonstrated that the tone of the message can influence its credibility from the recipients' perspective. Ergo, credibility in the eyes of the recipients is a key attribute of RJP.

Importance

The final critical property of RJP is that it should contain information that the applicants consider as important. Given resource constraints, it is obviously impossible to convey everything about the job and the organization. But for the most part, information that is either established as common knowledge or already known to applicants (despite specificity) will not be perceived as important (Breugh, 1983; Dean and Wanous, 1984). Thus, material conveyed in RJP should largely include information that the applicants are not expected to gain otherwise and it should deal with aspects of the job that are vital to applicants.

Naturally, a specific set of RJP components cannot be prescribed given the wide variety of jobs and industries as well as varying applicant needs across them. But based on its key attributes, RJP can be conceptualized as,

'The dissemination of accurate and specific information regarding the job, the organization and its environment that is broad enough to include all aspects deemed important by a potential candidate in making an informed decision and that is deemed credible by its recipients.'

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF REALISTIC JOB PREVIEW

The context of job recruitment can be viewed as one of information asymmetry for both recruiters and applicants. But while applicants have more knowledge about their own skills and attitude, recruiters can rely on standardized applicant information (i.e., certification, reference, past work history) or assessment methods (i.e., interview) to evaluate the applicants' potential. On the other hand, recruiters have more information about the job and applicants are not sure whether they should apply or not (adverse selection) and whether they can handle the actual working conditions of the job once employed (moral hazard). The material disseminated via RJP is primarily expected to diminish the information asymmetry and aid applicants in making their evaluation. But applicants generally do not hold strict standards about their expectations. Rather, they conceive a range and threshold based on their requirements and the available information about the job. The psychological process in a RJP context, therefore, assists in developing expectations as well as in realizing them. As a whole, four distinct but not totally independent psychological interpretations of RJP have been hypothesized (Breugh, 1983; Dugoni and Ilgen, 1981; Reilly et al., 1981; Wanous, 1980) as possible outcomes of exposure to RJP— a) self-selection, b) met expectations, c) ability to cope, and d) air of honesty.

Self-selection

Self-selection refers to the tendency for a job candidate to evaluate a selection process and either include or oneself from it. If the job is perceived as not meeting their needs, candidates will tend to drop out from the selection procedure. In the past, this was typically expressed as a dropout rate difference between RJP exposed and control groups (i.e., Wanous, 1973; Meglino et al., 1993, 2000; Phillips, 1998). A more precise way to calculate self-selection though, would be to measure both a job candidate's expressed desires (needs) for a job and his or her perception of the organization's ability to satisfy those desires (Premack and Wanous, 1985). Self-selection in the pre-recruitment phase allows candidates to reduce their application to undesired posts rendering their attempts more efficient and fruitful. From a firm's perspective, it reduces the number of applications to sort through and allows recruiters to focus on fewer but more fitting candidates.

Met Expectations

The met expectations hypothesis suggests that, while initial expectations of job applicants tend to be unrealistically high, RJP lowers expectations and these lowered expectations are more likely to be congruent with what is actually encountered on the job (Wanous, 1980; Avner et al., 1982). Furthermore, it is assumed that individuals whose expectations are met are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and less likely to leave voluntarily. In a nutshell, exposure to RJP facilitates applicants' development of expectations during the pre-recruitment phase and allows a higher likelihood that actual experience will match expectations during the post-recruitment phase. The met expectation hypothesis can further facilitate self-selection since candidates can evaluate their core expectations against more realistic perceptions of the job. Interestingly, the effects of RJP in situations where applicants hold unrealistically low job expectations has not been studied.

Ability to Cope

According to Dugoni and Ilgen (1981), if employees are made aware of the job context and possible challenges to face, they tend to cope better when such situations arise, either because they feel less disturbed (due to the fact that they have been forewarned) or because they may pre-rehearse methods of handling the issues. Following the first explanation, Finkelstein and Glass (1970) found that job related stress was reduced if an event was predictable rather than unpredictable. The employee training literature, on the other hand, documents the positive effects of pre-rehearsing how to deal with job demands (Breugh, 1983). The critical information from RJP can support applicants to better prepare themselves for upcoming issues and help them to cope with the job conditions during the post-recruitment phase.

Air of Honesty

Implementation of RJP seems to communicate an 'air of honesty' to applicants who then feel a greater degree of freedom in their organizational choice. To the extent this occurs, dissonance theory predicts a greater commitment to the decision (Wanous, 1977, 1980). In other words, recipients of RJP should feel more committed to their organizational choices because they make a decision without coercion or strong inducement from others. Thus, RJP causes applicants to feel a greater commitment to the decision to accept the job which subsequently leads to more positive attitudes and lower probability of turnover (Reilly et al., 1981). Additionally, research shows that organizational commitment may be affected by judgements of procedural justice; as in people may accept less than desirable outcomes when they perceive that the process generating those outcomes was fair (Tyler, 1991) or when the reasons for those outcomes are conveyed in advance in a concerned and compassionate way (Greenberg, 1990, 1993).

It is evident from the discussion that while self-selection and met expectations have greater psychological influence in the pre-recruitment phase, all four interpretations affect the post-recruitment phase. Wanous (1980) suggested that self-selection and coping are alternative ways that RJPs increase job survival, while air of honesty and met expectations can influence both mechanisms.

MAPPING THE EFFECTS OF REALISTIC JOB PREVIEW

Framework

So far, the effect of RJP has been measured based on its impact on job expectation (Wanous, 1973; Avner et al., 1982; Phillips, 1998; Buckley et al., 2002), self-selection (Bretz and Judge, 1998), attrition from recruitment process (Phillips, 1998), job acceptance (Wanous, 1973; Meglino et al., 1993, 2000), job survival (Wanous, 1973; Wanous, 1978; Avner et al., 1982; Popovich and Wanous, 1982; Colarelli, 1984; McEvoy and Cascio, 1985; Premack and Wanous, 1985; Phillips, 1998), job satisfaction (Wanous, 1978) and performance (Phillips, 1998). But since RJP is designed to facilitate the matching process from the applicants' standpoint, the above measures may not represent such perspective in a holistic manner. Provided that RJP is carefully implemented with its five key attributes in mind, it is likely to influence at least two separate mechanisms— self-selection in the pre-recruitment stage and coping in the post-recruitment stage of the job. Job survival, satisfaction, performance and turnover then act as proxy measures of the coping mechanism, but they hardly capture the self-selection effect— partly because the

candidates who self-selected themselves to apply but were not recruited for the job cannot be included in the test sample and partly because external factors contribute to the measured outcomes masking the actual effect. Eventually, the true value of RJP remains underappreciated primarily because self-selection and coping are not assessed simultaneously and in a holistic manner.

FIGURE 1
IMPACT OF RJP DURING PRE-RECRUITMENT AND POST-RECRUITMENT PHASE

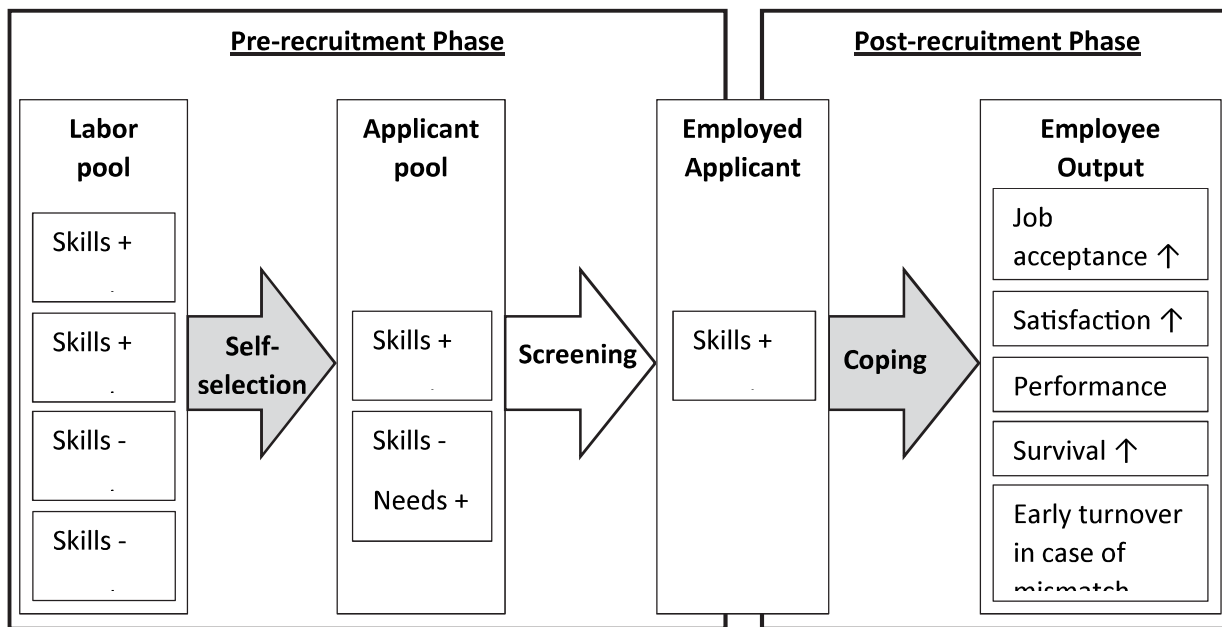


Figure 1 illustrates a model of the total impact of RJP. The entire labor pool consists of individuals whose skills either match (symbolized by '+' in the model) or do not match (symbolized by '-') the recruiting organization's requirements. Similarly, their needs can either be fulfilled (symbolized by '+') or cannot be fulfilled (symbolized by '-') by the organization. A mismatch can be the result of the skills/needs being either above or below the organization's threshold.

During the pre-recruitment phase, exposure to RJP allows potential candidates to evaluate the fit, primarily deterring candidates who believe that their needs cannot be fulfilled. Among the remaining candidates, some may not possess the skills required by the organization. Yet, they may decide to act opportunistically and apply for the job anyway. A conventional screening process (i.e., exam, interview) can further filter-out those candidates and identify the individuals possessing the right skills for the job. As a result, the combination of self-selection and screening process can help in determining the best candidate(s) more efficiently while promoting a better match of skills and needs. Although this is not necessarily an infallible process (self-selection is subjective and largely relies on the candidates' interpretation of RJP and their beliefs about needs and skills), it reduces the number of applications received and brings the range of skills and needs closer to what the job entails. With less candidates to deal with, the firm's administered screening process should be less costly and more efficient.

Research on post-recruitment impact of RJP (i.e., Avner et al., 1982; Dean and Wanous, 1984; Colarelli, 1984) suggests that among recruited applicants who received RJP, turnover is higher within the first few weeks but lower in the long run compared to applicants who did not receive RJP. This shows that applicants receiving RJP can evaluate their fit with the organization more concretely and they leave early in case of perceived mismatch. Early turnover in case of mismatch allows the organization to replace employees with minimal disruption to the rest of its operations. At the same time, the organization's investments in the employee (i.e., training, promotion and bonus) remain marginal since

the employee simply does not stay long enough for the organization to invest. Inversely, higher long-term job survival, increased satisfaction and increased performance (denoted by ‘↑’ in the model) yield positive value for the organization since experienced employees and the organization’s investments in them are retained. The increased satisfaction and performance may also lead to higher operational efficiency.

Measurement

A limitation of the recruitment literature is the lack of economic measures capturing the impact of RJP. Although such evaluation may seem to be only a cross-disciplinary appraisal method at first, in essence, it may be considered as a more practical tool for business entities focused on cost assessment. An example of such assessment is the use of a cost to company approach, through which recruiters can assess the full impact of RJP on a single scale that reflects the monetary value of both self-selection and coping mechanisms. As such, an organization can measure its ‘average-cost-per-employee’ by combining the costs of recruitment, training and retention.

$$\text{Avg. cost per employee} = (\text{recruitment cost} + \text{training cost} + \text{retention cost}) / \text{number of employees} \quad (1)$$

Since RJP ideally maximizes the applicant-organization fit, it should be able to successfully reduce the average cost per employee compared to when it is not implemented. The net amount saved would then be representative of the total effect of implementing RJP. Therefore,

$$\text{Net effect of RJP (avg. savings)} = \text{Avg. cost per employee (without RJP)} - \text{Avg. cost per employee (with RJP)} \quad (2)$$

Measuring the net effect of RJP within an organization may be relatively difficult since organizations usually conduct a single method of recruitment (either with or without RJP). Furthermore, the cost for each employee tends to differ (due to variance in skills, negotiation of benefits, actual performance, etc.). But if the cost is measured as an average and a comparison is made across organizations (with and without RJP) in the same industry, the net effect of RJP would emerge as a meaningful value.

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

The most important implication of RJP is in attracting potential internal customers (applicants). While its application may be useful across all jobs, some contexts benefit from RJP more than others. For example, entry level jobs usually have a high employee turnover rate since applicants (usually fresh graduates) are often unsure about their expectations and have more difficulty coping with their new environment. Similarly, sales related jobs are often commission-based and the work-environment may seem more competitive than cooperative, essentially leading to difficulty in coping with it. The information disseminated via RJP allows applicants to better evaluate their options and apply for jobs accordingly.

A negative aspect of RJP, as pointed by Rynes et al. (1991), is that more qualified applicants may self-select themselves out and move on to opportunities they believe would better satisfy their needs given their qualifications. The counterargument is that in the absence of RJP, such applicants may apply for the job, but they would also be more likely to leave for the same reason as soon as they realize the mismatch. As described in the above model, applicants with skills and needs both above and below the organization’s threshold are likely to self-select themselves out. The remaining candidates have better fit and their screening becomes more efficient. Furthermore, selected candidates are more likely to stay for longer periods as a result of increased job satisfaction.

A negative image related to even a minute aspect of an organization can be detrimental to its operations. An applicant-organization misfit despite RJP generally results in applicants leaving shortly after recruitment, hence reducing the cost-to-company. But candidates leaving due to mismatch are also less dissatisfied with the recruitment process and less likely to generate negative word-of-mouth about the

organization. In its implementation of RJP, an organization appears to have disclosed all relevant information in good faith. Any mismatch is then attributed to misinterpretation or mis-expectation in the applicant's part. Hence, RJP can serve as a barrier against negative word-of-mouth associated with recruitment failure.

RJP also generates perceptions of greater organizational transparency and honesty which, is then transformed into positive attitude (by all stakeholders). Several studies (i.e., Roberson et al., 2005; Allen et al., 2007) demonstrate the effect of disseminating additional and specific information to result in increased positive organizational image, trust and brand recognition. An organization can therefore utilize its recruitment process as an additional branding tool and elevate its position in the minds of relevant stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

It is evident from the literature that RJP has not been well defined nor has its entire effect been adequately measured. The five key elements of RJP (accuracy, specificity, breadth, credibility and importance) can be a starting point of agreement in its conceptualization and operationalization. Such agreement would not only allow for validation of interrelated constructs in an RJP setting but also permit generalizability across contexts.

The impact of RJP should be measured in terms of its effect during both pre- and post-recruitment phases. While a narrow focus may help in evaluating specific effects, adherence to such limited assessment seriously undermines the true impact of RJP. Calculating the average-cost-per-employee by incorporating recruitment, training and retention expenditures may only be a limited example of measurement, yet it can act as a simple but meaningful method of capturing the total effect of RJP.

RJP is not the sole factor prompting the more suitable candidates to apply for a job and ensuring better fit, nor is it necessarily the most prominent one. Other factors, such as network effect, may play an equal, if not more, important role as well and essentially wash away some of the benefits attributed to RJP. Yet RJP is significant since it acts not only as a marketing tool to attract potential internal customers, but it also offers spillover effect to other dimensions (such as improved organizational image in the eyes of external stakeholders). Unfortunately, isolating the true impact of RJP from other influencing factors requires further study in this field.

Finally, the spillover effects of implementing RJP— reduced risk of negative word-of-mouth and improved organizational image, should receive greater attention. As a whole, RJP is not a concept limited to its human resource applications. Ergo, its potential as a marketing tool needs to be recognized and honed for inclusion with other marketing activities.

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