Let's Get Real: The Value of Realistic Job Previews in Recruitment Strategy

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Introduction

The current state of the Great Resignation (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022) and "quiet quitting" (Formica & Sfodera, 2022) is forcing organizations re-evaluate how they seek and retain top talent. Realistic job previews (RJPs) are relevant to organizational strategy as it relates to recruitment, specifically in job retention, job turnover, and job satisfaction. RJPs are typically used in the recruitment process to allow the candidate to gauge their person-organization (P-O) fit within the group the candidate is interviewing with. There are several modalities of realistic job previews that an organization may present during the recruitment process. Five groups of RJPs will be explored: oral and written, video, animated simulation, in-person, and self-assessment. A comprehensive background of realistic job previews is provided starting with Breaugh (1983); a study in which overall effectiveness of the RJP is evaluated. In these sections, there will be connections drawn to three industrial-organizational psychology theories: organizational honesty, self-selection, and signaling theory. Conclusion includes discussion of challenges and benefits across the five RJP deliveries, and suggestions are provided for organizational leaders to consider when assessing recruitment strategies.

Realistic Job Previews (RJPs)

The following sub-sections are to define what realistic job previews are, as well as provide landmark studies to illustrate their background. Different types of RJPs and their respective benefits are presented.

Definitions & History

There are three measurements of focus heavily observed surrounding RJPs: job retention, job turnover, and job satisfaction. Job retention is defined by Singh (2019) as the ability to keep employees for a longer period of time. Job turnover is defined by Mobley (1982) as when an employee willingly separates themselves from employment and their responsibilities. It may appear as though there is some redundancy between job retention and job turnover.

Though one may believe the percentage of employees who leave an organization naturally coincide with the percentage of employees who stay at an organization, this is not always the case. The calculation of job retention does not include new hires and are typically calculated spanning over a longer period than job turnover is. Similarly, many organizations do not include involuntary turnover, such as reductions in force (RIFs), when calculating overall turnover. Therefore, job retention and job turnover are not used interchangeably. Lastly, job satisfaction is the sense of fulfillment an employee gains from their job (Ali & Anwar, 2021).

The United States Office of Personnel Management (U.S. OPM) defines realistic job previews as "a recruiting tool used to communicate both the good and bad aspects of a job. Essentially, it is used to provide a prospective employee a realistic view of what the job entails" (2021). Examples of RJPs include a text brochure that details aspects of a job, or an employee testimonial video on a company's jobs website. Realistic job previews could also include interactive digital work simulations, such as an immersive game candidates could play prior to the interview stage. Realistic job previews have been recognized as one of the most efficient predictors an organization may use in their recruitment process by the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP), as the group notes their specific worth when considering process design of selection systems (SIOP, 2022).

Since initial studies researching their value in the 1980s, RJPs have correlated with increase in job retention, decrease in job turnover, increase in the rate at which a candidate self- selects out of job consideration, and increase in job satisfaction while in the role (Suszko & Breaugh, 1986; Phillips, 1998; Earnest et al. 2011; Latheef, 2021). Prior studies on RJPs have used mid-career level job applicants as subjects, and only test one of the several aforementioned performance measurements. However, the versatility of RJPs' has been examined within recent years in novel ideas, such as if RJP success hinges on the industry in which it is deployed (Ellis et al., 2017), or if timing and/ or framing of the RJP in the recruitment process is significant (Ward & Luong, 2016).

Foundations of Realistic Job Previews

James A. Breaugh contributed to two of the first landmark publications that examined realistic job previews. It can be argued that these two studies gave RJPs it's lift-off into business implementation as organizations were now able to put a name the practice. Breaugh's original work deduced that the effectiveness of RJPs were inconsistent. Additionally, it has been hypothesized that self-selection is only apparent in subjects when the candidates' expectations of a job were too high (Baur et al., 2014; Breaugh, 1983). After acknowledging that experimentation may have been conducted in environments where RJPs never had a chance to be effective in the first place, he partnered with Suszko (1986) to conduct further research. Twenty-eight candidates were considered for an inventory job in which both written and oral RJPs were distributed during the recruitment process. This small study showed that RJPs positively impact self-selection during pre-employment. In addition, it also showed a positive relationship with job retention, job satisfaction, and job demand coping while employed. Written and oral RJPs were then considered the traditional form of RJP.

Modalities of Delivery

An essential decision HR professionals make when they consider implementing a RJP into their recruiting processes is the method of distribution in which the candidates will receive it. Realistic job previews are generally presented in a written, oral, animated simulation, or in-person format. The content of the RJP includes the good, bad, and ugly aspects of job responsibilities and day-to-day tasks. This benefits the candidate as it allows them to engage in self-selection; the theory that candidates choose to withdraw themselves from consideration of a job after determining that they would not fit in the organization. This is an example of person- organization (P-O) fit (Premack & Wanous, 1985). RJPs, in theory, influence job retention, job turnover, and job satisfaction. The war on talent continues to be a pain point for many organizations, business leaders, and HR professionals. As the unemployment rate in the United States continues to trend down (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021), difficulties in attracting and retaining talent are trending up. Attracting talent poses as an especially difficult hurdle as what job seekers value in a job and in an organization continually develop as new generations are introduced to the workforce (Kalleberg & Marsden, 2019). Thus, it is advantageous for organizations to implement realistic job previews that yield the most efficacy while actively engaging candidates through their evolving desires.

Modern RJPs

The following sub-sections will delve into various forms that RJPs can take shape in. The traditional assumption of RJPs is disclosed, and more recent adaptations of the concept are assessed. Each model's effectiveness is also highlighted.

Oral and Written

Suszko & Breaugh (1986) established oral and written RJPs have been conventionally

known as the original form of realistic job previews. Examples of such modality include brochures or pamphlets (written), or something as simple as spoken expectations during an interview (oral). Seeing as they have been the more heavily researched modality of RJP, Earnest et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 52 studies to streamline a breadth of written and oral data collected since Suszko & Breaugh's (1986) study.

Organizational honesty was identified in both studies as being of high value to the candidate when considering their P-O fit with the organization in the process of self-selection (Premack & Wanous, 1985). The oral and written RJP were also found to be most effective when administered post-hire as it showcases organizational honesty via signaling theory (Earnest et al., 2011). Information signaling happens through seemingly subliminal communication as organizations try to attract talent during the recruitment process (Rynes, 1991). Using Earnest et al. (2011) as an example, candidates view organizational honesty as a by-product of the utilization of the RJPs.

Videos

RJPs taking the form of videos have gained popularity in the 21st century. Corporate career websites and landing pages (such as a company's LinkedIn page) often utilize testimonial RJPs of current employees to draw in a candidate even more if they were considering applying. It is also important to note that the cost of video RJPs, especially when employed in this manner, are marginal compared to the price the organization would pay for the cost of turnover (Torres et al., 2021). Video RJPs became even more popular after the COVID-19 pandemic. When travel restrictions and a global outbreak prevented organizations from bringing candidates physically on-site for interviews, many organizations relied heavily on video RJPs to replace the in-person splendor, such as a facility tour. However, while video

RJPs successfully show a candidate what a day in the life looks like, it is vital to the recruitment process that the organization-oriented components are not lost (Smith et al., 2016). Just as an efficient RJP demonstrates the good, bad, and ugly aspects of the job, the RJP also gains value when the role is examined from an individual level as well as an organizational level.

In contrast, Latheef et al. (2021) observed how video RJPs gauged "readiness" for students to transition to their new roles as online learners as class instruction moved to a virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also compared self-assessment RJPs to videos RJPs, but the effectiveness of self-assessments will be reviewed during the later sub- section titled "*Self-Assessment*". After 146 participants received both modalities of RJP, video RJPs were found to be significantly more engaging than the self-assessment. Videos provided better information of expectations, clearer expectations of basic skills needed to work in the role, and ease of use (Latheef et al., 2021). Additionally, a majority (70%) of participants indicated that they would prefer "both" RJP modalities presented in the study if given the option. This was primarily due to both demonstrating organizational honesty. Thus, there was no significant finding in this study that video RJPs were ultimately more successful than self-assessments, but rather videos scoring higher in different components of overall satisfaction that self-assessments could not meet.

Animated Simulation

The use of realistic job previews is beneficial regardless of the recruitment stage it is deployed in. Animated simulations are typically used less due to the higher production costs (Richardson et al., 2021). However, they can be distributed to candidates at any stage in the recruitment process. For example, Rolls-Royce gives candidates their animated simulation RJP

immediately following the submission of your application. Their philosophy is that the candidate's brain will be primed with a real-life example of a typical day during the interview stage. Similarly, the candidate has a sense of understanding for the hiring team's required competencies. This utilization of the RJP is not exclusively beneficial to the candidate, though. The organization may then analyze the applicant's score on the simulation RJP and determine whether they would like to proceed with the candidate further.

Klassen et al. (2021) directs focus to the stage of attracting talent as they provided an animated simulation RJP to 111 students studying STEM fields with no prior identified interest in a teaching career. The simulation provided real-life conditions in which the students had to respond in open-ended text. Then, they were provided with real-time feedback from current teachers on how they would respond to the circumstance. Although there is admittedly a lack in studies observing animated simulation RJPs, a significant, positive correlation was established as those who received the RJP expressed increased interest in one day pursing a STEM teaching career (Klassen et al., 2021).

In-Person

In-person RJPs have been traditionally considered to be a simple "briefing" of sorts, typically taking place in an interview. Perhaps they may even take a group format if a hiring manager designates an allotted amount of time where candidates can ask them general questions about the role. The traditional in-person modality is challenged by Srivastava et al. (2019) as the concept of internships are explored. Internships are considered a form of in-person RJP because of the prolonged exposure an intern and an organization have with one another.

Several organizations regardless of size or organizational function offer internship

programs at a minimum of once a year to college and university students. The program itself benefits the organization, but the value grows significantly when leaders begin to adapt the idea that internships could be viewed as RJPs (Srivastava et al., 2019). The findings indicated that while internship programs benefit both the intern and the organization, the significance of the impact hinges on the quality of information being shared. Srivastava et al. (2019) suggests that higher information quality come from the managerial level as it would not only benefit the intern directly, but allow the organization to invest in their employability as well. The value in-person RJPs hold of being mutually beneficial is shared with the potential of animated simulation RJPs, with both contingent on how they are deployed.

Self-Assessment

As referenced earlier, this sub-section is to function as an extended analysis of self-assessment RJPs employed in Latheef et al., (2021). The specific benefits of self-assessment were noted as helping soon-to-be online learners identify their areas of improvement, determining if online learning was right for the student, and improving students' performance. However, these were identified as they compared to the study's use of the video RJPs. While most of the participants signaled that they would prefer "both" RJP modalities presented in the study, the self-assessment RJP could not stand alone in distribution to candidates as a video RJP could. The video was engaging and provided the expectations of what skills are needed to succeed in a virtual learning environment. Without the video RJP's preface, the self- assessment would simply be completed in the student's own self-speculation. The student's "realistic job preview" is based solely on how *they* think they are ready for online classes with no scenario to compare it to. Therefore, the self-assessment RJP holds little to no value if not supplemented with another RJP modality.

Discussion

The following section is intended to examine the specific challenges and benefits presented by realistic job previews as they were offered. Positive and negative commonalities are drawn between the five different RJPs discussed. Finally, the three industrial-organizational psychology theories mentioned throughout the different RJP delivery methods are categorized as a challenge or benefit.

Challenges to Effective RJPs

As realistic job previews began to be studied more heavily, it was originally believed that there was no significant difference in applicant experience with or without the use of RJPs (Breaugh, 1983). However, it is vital that study setting be held in mind when evaluating results, as the setting could skew a participants' experience of the RJP (Earnest et al. 2011). Whether the study is performed in a lab or in the field (especially a field that has previously lacked RJP research) contributes to how the participants are influenced by the RJP's efficiency (Latheef et al., 2021).

Applicant expectations also contribute to the effectiveness of RJPs. When expectations are unrealistically high, RJPs ground the candidate by indicating the actual day-to-day tasks. RJPs lead to reduced job turnover and increased job satisfaction (Earnest et al., 2011). However, RJPs used exclusively in the attraction stage of recruiting may support the opposite outcome: higher job turnover and lower job satisfaction (Klassen et al., 2021).

Signaling theory lends itself to serve as yet another hurdle that organizations face in the pursuit of attracting talent. What does an organization say about themselves when their job site only includes pictures of white men and women? Though the casting for the site media may not have been intentionally excluding those of other races, ethnicities, genders,

disabilities, etc., the site presents to potential applicants as not being inclusive of all identities. If signaling theory principles are not intentionally aligned with an organization's values, then the lack of attention has the potential to drive candidates away from an organization instead of towards it.

Lastly, quality of information provided during the RJP hinges on the overall success of the RJP use. This was specifically referenced as posing to be a challenge during in-person RJP models, but one may argue that the same significance is shared with the use of animated simulation RJPs. In this case, perhaps the quality of information presented in a RJP, and the RJP's ability to be mutually beneficial to both an organization and a candidate may positively correlate. While quality of information poses as a greater challenge during in-person and simulation RJPs, it is not only limited to these two methods.

Benefits of RJP Models

The five RJP methods explored were all able to produce at least one benefit that is unique to their modality. Oral and written RJPs flourish most, even when presented in the post-hire stages of recruiting. Video RJPs are cost-effective and easy to distribute. Similarly, animated simulations are also easy to distribute (both in reach and in agility across all stages of recruiting) while simultaneously being beneficial to both employer and candidate. Animated simulations share the mutual benefit factor with in-person RJPs as well. Self-assessment, while not very effective on its own, is able to supplement another RJP delivery method to strengthen the recruitment process overall.

The general use of realistic job previews offers a safe platform for any applicant or candidate to self-select out of the process at any time. The use of RJPs promotes an honest environment for not only the organization, but for the applicants as well. If the potential role

does not match their perceptions, then they may withdraw from consideration. This saves both the organization and the candidate time and money. Even if the candidate chooses to keep being considered, the organization may then benefit from the longevity that employee will have in the role they are hired for, and in the organization entirely. Self-selection theory is a long-term benefit of realistic job previews.

Suszko & Breaugh (1986) was the first RJP study to identify organizational honesty as being significant to job applicants. Organizational honesty continues to be a trait of employers that job seekers hold in high value. Earnest et al. (2011) noted that "perceptions of honesty play a far more important role in understanding the effects of RJPs than previously realized" (p. 887). Data from meta-analyses since have supported the organizational honesty theory via an observed trend in which organizational honesty presence is significant in mechanisms that support a negative correlation between use of RJPs and turnover (Earnest et al., 2011). Even if a study's participants lacked a sense of organizational honesty from the environment, it was certainly provided in feedback that honesty of organizational struggles would make for a more effective RJP (Smith et al., 2016). Latheef et al. (2021) also observed that the participants sensed higher organizational honesty in the students' academic institution after they received the video RJPs.

Conclusion

Realistic job previews that are narrow in job scope deter candidates from proceeding further in the recruitment process. RJPs' great details are a large attribute to what makes them successful in recruitment. Thus, implementing an individual-oriented perspective as well as an organizational-perspective gives candidates a better sense of their own P-O fit within the organization (Smith et al., 2016). Candidates also have a higher likelihood of self-

selecting out of a role's consideration if they no longer think the job is right for them.

   Realistic job previews are relevant to organizational strategy as it pertains to job retention, job turnover, and job satisfaction. Organizations who have employed RJPs into their recruitment process have been perceived to be more honest to their applicants and have a higher likelihood to benefit from the aforementioned aspects of recruitment that RJPs can influence. Supplementing organizational honesty even further using factors outside of RJPs can be of additional advantage to the organization as well. Realistic job previews project organizational honesty to candidates and constitute a strong recruitment strategy for corporations.

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