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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF REALISTIC JOB PREVIEWS

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Field experiments have consistently demonstrated that Realistic Job Previews (RJPs) reduce turnover among selected applicants. However, there is a continued reluctance to use such previews in selection. This manuscript considers possible reasons for the lack of use of RJPs, addresses the psychological impact of them, and advocates their increased use in the selection process. This report is second in a 1975-1976 series entitled "Sources and Effects of Accurate Work Perceptions."			

The Psychological Impact of Realistic Job Previews

Following Weitz's (1956) demonstration that more objective information than typically given applicants during recruitment interviews reduced turnover, there has been strong empirical support for the benefits of such information (cf., Dunnette, Arvey, & Banas, 1973; Farr, O'Leary, & Bartlett, 1973; Ilgen & Seely, 1974; Katzell, 1968; Macedonia, 1969; Wanous, 1974). In spite of this support, organizations are still very reluctant to provide such information to potential employees. It is suggested here that this reluctance is due primarily to three factors, two of which stem from a faulty model of applicant responses assumed by recruiters. The third stems from a lack of knowledge about how the realistic preview affects individuals. Each of the three is considered in detail below, and a revised model is suggested.

Attraction vs. Realistic Job Previews

Applicants and organizations bring to the selection setting similar goals. Both seek to gather valid information for decision-making and to make themselves attractive to the other (Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975). These goals create conflict between the applicant and the organization. For example, the applicant's need to look attractive often conflicts with the organization's need for valid information about the applicant; likewise the organization's desire to look attractive conflicts with its willingness to provide valid information to the applicant (Porter et al., 1975). It is the recruiter's perception of this latter conflict which leads to a reluctance on his part to provide what Wanous (1974) has termed Realistic Job Previews (RJP). Yet the data indicate that the deleterious effects of RJPs on organizational attractiveness are overemphasized. Weitz (1956) found it was easier to fill insurance agents' positions with a RJP than without it.



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For Wanous (1974), practically all the applicants in his sample of telephone company employees accepted the job regardless of whether or not they had seen a film which realistically described their new job. The data of Farr et al. (1973) provide the only exception to this trend. They found that for those white applicants who took a sewing machine operator's job sample test, job offers were turned down more often than in a similar group which had not had the job sample test. However, no information was provided on the statistical significance of this difference. In addition, the difference did not exist for black applicants. Therefore, in general, the data support the contention that realistic job previews will not discourage qualified applicants from accepting a position with the organization. In fact, given the emphasis on more open and honest communication with members of work organizations (Argyis, 1964, 1974), RJPs may increase rather than decrease the organization's attractiveness.

Loss of Power

A second force against the use of RJP's is a perceived loss of power on the part of the organization to make the selection decision. In point of fact, RJP's do not shift the power away from the organization. The selection decision always has been a sequential one; the organization weighs the information it has available on the applicant, then decides to select or not select. Only if the decision is to hire is the applicant offered a choice to accept or reject the offer. Although the sequential decision model is modified, in practice, by legal constraints on organization decisions and by the applicant's frequently-exercised right to reject the organization prior to receiving an offer of employment, the basic nature of the organization's power in the decision process remains the same. The use of a RJP does not alter this sequence. The power to reach its decision first still remains with the organization as long as it reaches its decision through

the application of legally-acceptable standards. Control over the availability of less than positive information to the applicant may be misperceived as power. Even so, the data presented with regard to organizational attractiveness which showed that increased rejections do not occur when RJPs are used, suggest that the exercise of the "power" to control information does not bring about the desired end of increased acceptances.

Both the assumption of decreased attractiveness and the loss of power provide the bases for a model often assumed by those responsible for recruiting. The top half of Figure 1 presents this model. As is illustrated, a consideration of RJP leads to assumed negative consequences for recruitment and does not lead to a consideration of its effects on other systems beyond that of recruitment.

Psychological Effects of RJP

In spite of the strong empirical support for RJPs, there is a need to more fully understand the psychological processes which underlie the effects of this type of information. The lack of consideration for why RJPs work is a third factor which also may have led to a reluctance to apply them. Four underlying processes are discussed here under the topics of expectations, coping, commitment to decisions, and climate.

Expectations. The most common explanation has suggested that the RJP's influence the applicant's job expectations which in turn influence his job satisfaction (Farr et al., 1973; Goversall & Meyers, 1966; Ilgen & Seely, 1974; Katzell, 1968; Macedonia, 1969; Porter & Steers, 1973; Weitz, 1956). Porter and Steers (1973), in an extensive review of the recent turnover and absenteeism literature, concluded that realistic expectations affect job satisfaction by lowering initial expectations. Satisfaction with any job facet (e.g., pay) is viewed as a function

Figure 1: Two Models of the Effects of Realistic Job Previews

Model I. Assumed Model

Realistic Job Preview

Selection Effects

- 1. Lowered attractiveness of the organization
- 2. a. More difficult recruitment.
- b. More frequent reaction of employment offers by applicants.
- 3. Decreased power in selection decision

RJP



Post-Selection Effects

Not considered

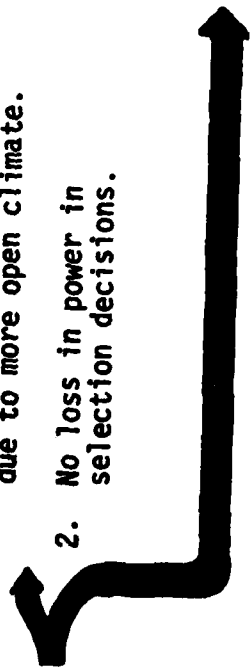
Model II. Expanded Model

Realistic Job Preview

Selection Effects

- 1. Increased attractiveness due to more open climate.
- 2. No loss in power in selection decisions.

RJP



Post-Selection Effects

- 1. Lowered expectations
 - a. Higher job satisfaction
 - b. Lower turnover.
- 2. Greater commitment to decision to join, therefore, lower turnover.
- 3. Easier adjustment to job: Lower stress
- 4. More open climate
 - a. Greater satisfaction
 - b. Improved recruitment through word-of-mouth

learning to work with new people. The uncertainty created by any or all of these events often creates stress which may interfere with the employee's ability to cope with the new job.

Finkelman and Glass (1970) found that stress was reduced if an event was predictable rather than unpredictable. Since RJPs describe what will be encountered on the job, they should make the job setting more predictable and, in turn, less stressful than if unrealistic descriptions were provided.

Commitment to decision. Lewin's (1947) work with the food purchasing behavior of housewives during World War II demonstrated that increasing commitment to a decision increased the probability of behavior in line with that decision. A similar conclusion is implied by dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) demonstrated that the greater the amount of felt responsibility for a behavior, the greater the amount of dissonance experienced by the individual when his behavior was not in line with his beliefs. Reversing the logic of this argument, if the individual holds some belief about an act (the belief that he has accepted a job), then the greater the degree to which he feels responsible for that act, the less he should be willing to behave in a manner which would create a state of dissonance.

Applied to the selection process, the presentation of a RJP should increase the applicant's commitment to his decision. Rationally, he must accept responsibility for his behavior of accepting the job if he believes that he made the decision on the basis of accurate information. On the other hand, the applicant who based his acceptance decision on overly-positive information made available to him by the organization can more easily deny responsibility for his decision and reverse it by resigning.

Climate. At a more global level, the presentation of RJPs may lead to the perception of a particular organizational climate by the applicant. This

of the difference between what is expected and what is received. Therefore, lowering the expectations should increase job satisfaction.

Although all investigators have assumed that expectations were lowered by RJPs, only Wanous (1974) measured expectations following the administration of the information treatment. One group was shown a standard film describing the job of telephone operators with emphasis primarily on the positive features of the job; the other group viewed a film which emphasized both positive and negative job aspects. Not only did job expectations differ in the predicted direction on those job dimensions covered in the films, but, as predicted, on those job dimensions not covered by the films, no differences in expectations were observed between groups.

Coping. Ilgen and Seely (1974) hypothesized that RJPs may aid the individual in his new job environment by improving his ability to cope with it. Awareness of problems he may face on the job would allow him to consider alternative courses of action prior to actually encountering the difficult situations. When difficult, but anticipated, events occur, the individual who had been forewarned may have prepared himself for them. It was the improvement in the ability to deal with new environments that Campbell (1971) had in mind when he reviewed the personnel training and development literature and stated that job previews certainly deserved further research in light of their value as a training device.

RJPs also may aid new organizational members in coping with the new job through a reduction in the stress initially experienced on the job. The transition into a new job is often very stressful. Frequently, taking a new job involves relocation, transition into a new career, or a major change in roles as one moves from a student to an employee. At the very least, it involves

climate may influence his decision to join the organization as well as his perception of the organization after he reports to work. It has been demonstrated that individuals who are not actually members of the organization detect differences in climate between organizations (Schneider, 1973). To the extent that the presentation of a RJP creates common perceptions of the organization across applicants, the process itself contributes to the organizational climate perceived by the applicants. Since the process advocated is one of more openness toward the applicant, it is reasonable to assume that this climate would tend to be viewed as attractive by a large number of applicants. It is unlikely that such a climate would decrease the applicant's willingness to accept a job offer.

The climate created during selection could either aid or hinder the individual once he is on the job. If we assume that the process created a climate for greater openness and honesty, the new employee may tend to perceive the climate of his own work group as more open and honest. It is well accepted that perception is a function of properties of the stimulus and of the perceiver. Furthermore, the more vague the stimulus, the more the perception relies upon the set or other characteristics possessed by the perceiver. Since it is difficult to think of a more ambiguous stimulus than that of the climate of an organization, it is likely that a positive set created during the interviewing process would favorably influence the perceived organizational climate.

If, on the other hand, the open and more participatory climate created during the selection process contrasts sharply with the climate of the new employee's work group, this very likely will lead to greater dissatisfaction than if the original climate had not been established. The work with participatory decision-making has clearly demonstrated that the return to little participation after having experienced the increased involvement is worse than never having had the opportunity to participate (Bavelas & Strauss, 1961; Lawler & Hackman,

1969; Scheflen, Lawler, & Hackman, 1971). Therefore, any decision to rely more heavily upon realistic information should consider how such information fits into the practices to be experienced by the new employees once they have joined the organization.

Extended Model

The data suggest that, not only is the assumed effect of a RJP on recruitment incorrect, it also is extremely limited due to its failure to consider the impact of a RJP beyond that of selection. Therefore, an expanded model is presented in the lower half of Figure 1. This model summarizes the effects of the literature reviewed and emphasizes the impact of RJP's once the individual has joined the organization. Furthermore, Model II points up the interdependency between selection and work behavior on the job ignored by Model I.

Wanous (1974) pointed out, there is a "crucial need for an integrated conceptual view of the entire 'joining-up' process, one which approaches this from both sides - from that of the individual and from that of the organization" (p. 332). This need is accentuated by the increased legal power of the individual to demand that he receive consideration and by a more rapidly changing organizational environment (Korman, 1971). The data suggest that the use of RJP's can benefit both the organization and the applicant and that RJP's represent a step in the direction of considering individual as well as organization needs in the selection process.

The development of an integrative conceptualization of the joining-up process within this broader view need not search blindly for a course to follow. A good precedent for research in this area has been set. Many of the reported studies employed experimental field studies; such research should be continued. However, the general effectiveness of the presentation of realistic job information has

been demonstrated. It is now time to turn our attention to the psychological processes involved in the observed behavior. The most immediate concerns involve a better understanding of the effects of selection practices on the applicant's performance, satisfaction, and eventual adjustment of the job. In addition, little is known about what are the most salient dimensions of the job to the applicant; on which job facets is it necessary for him to be well informed? Finally, there is a need to investigate how best to present the applicant with information (e.g., booklets, films, interviews, etc.) (Wanous, 1974). These are all researchable issues which should be pursued as we attempt to more fully understand the joining-up process.

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