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REALISTIC JOB PREVIEWS VS. TRADITIONAL JOB PREVIEWS: EXPERIENCING THE DIFFERENCES AND UNDERSTANDING THE CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

One way of illustrating the concept of 'Psychological Contract' while simultaneously discussing recruitment procedures is to demonstrate the effects of Realistic Job Previews (RJPs). The exercise provides a useful basis for discussions of employer honesty, employee expectations, organizational fit and self-selection in the context of the "Psychological Contract".

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the "Psychological Contract" may be addressed in a number of Management courses (e.g., Introduction or Fundamental of Management, Organizational Behavior, Organizational Change and Development, Human Resource Management, Supervision). One approach to this topic is through the use of "Realistic Job Previews (EJPs), which provide job applicants with a clear description of the duties, expectations and requirements associated with the job (Wanous, 1973). It includes the potentially less attractive features of the job, such as the need to work overtime, the demands to meet tight deadlines and an accurate (versus optimistic) assessment of the opportunities and timing of promotions. This is in contrast to 'Traditional Job Previews (TJPs) which tend to describe the job in positive, glowing terms, in an attempt to attract applicants to the organization (Wanous, 1989).

The RJP research has been consistent in its support for the hypothesis that using Realistic Job Previews results in lower turnover amongst those who accept the job (Premack and Wanous, 1985). However, a number of studies have suggested that using RJPs may result in a lower number of applicants accepting the job than when TJPs are used (Fisher, Ilgen, & Iowey, 1979; Reilly, Tenopyr, & Sperling, 1979; Wiesner, Saks, & Summers, 1989).

To demonstrate this in the classroom, combinations of Realistic and Traditional Job Previews were developed and distributed to the students. They were asked whether they would accept the job and their likelihood of leaving the job after one year. Two conditions were created. In condition one students were provided first with a Traditional Job Preview (TJP) and then with a Realistic Job Preview (RJP). They were asked whether they would accept the job offer; and then finally, they were asked to indicate the probability that they would leave the job if, after one year, it was as described in the LIP. In condition two students were given only a TJP and asked whether they would accept the job offer. Subsequently, they were given a description of actual working conditions (based on the RJP); and they were asked to indicate the probability of leaving the job after one year.

In condition one the RJP is preceded by a TJP in order to heighten student awareness of the accuracy and usefulness of the RJP information and thus enrich the discussion, which is to follow at the end of the exercise. Condition one, therefore, leaves the "applicant" with a relatively realistic picture of the job (i.e., it is an RJP). Condition two represents our attempt to duplicate the situation in which applicants receive only TJPs and eventually learn what the job is actually like by being on the job.

We hypothesized, based on previous research, that job acceptance would be greater following an optimistic presentation (i.e. a TJP) than following a more realistic presentation (i.e. a RJP). Thus students in condition two (TJP without RJP) would be more likely to accept the job than students in condition one (TJP, then RJP). We also hypothesized that the probability of turnover would be greater in condition two than in condition one.

Both conditions were distributed to the students without them knowing that they were completing different questionnaires. After the questionnaires were returned the two conditions were explained, the research findings were discussed and the hypotheses were reviewed. Subsequently, the students' results were compiled and discussed.

The exercise, which required from ten to fifteen minutes to complete, resulted in an involved and interesting discussion on the pros and cons of Traditional vs. Realistic Job Previews.

As predicted, students were more likely to accept a job if it was accompanied by a TJP (condition 2) rather than an RJP (condition 1) ($X^2 4.8, p < .05$). The percentage accepting was 89% with the TJP, vs. 73% with the RJP.

Directional support was also obtained for the turnover hypothesis. As indicated below, when the students were given a Traditional Job Preview (TJP) and then a Realistic Job Preview (RJP) (condition 1), their mean probability of leaving the job was lower at 29.0%, when compared with a mean of 34.2% for those in revised condition 2; (those given the Traditional Job Preview, who accept the job and learn about its realities on-the-job). The probability of leaving the job was measured in five (5) increments of twenty percent (20%) each.

The exercise generated a high degree of interest and involvement in the subject areas of Realistic Job Previews, employer honesty, employee expectations, organizational fit and self-selection and psychological contracts. In future application of the exercise, the use of conditions 1 and 2 should generate considerable interest and provide results consistent with the literature.