

Realistic Job Previews Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

What is a Realistic Job Preview?

A Realistic Job Preview (RJP) is a recruiting approach used by an organization to communicate the important aspects of the job prior to the offer of a position. Applicants weigh such information against their own preferences. For example, a fast-paced job with frequently changing conditions is seen by some applicants as desirable, while other applicants consider this an unattractive job feature. Such insight is very important, especially in occupations where people may have limited information about the tasks and responsibilities of the job. Applicants may know little about the job for which they are applying and/or have inaccurate expectations or perceptions. Consistent, standardized communication of both desirable and undesirable aspects of the job to all candidates is essential to protect merit system principles.

Providing a well-designed RJP to potential new employees during the application process can reduce turnover and enhance new employee commitment. This is because two match-ups occur when a new person is hired: The employer matches its job requirements with the individual's qualifications and the individual matches his or her needs with the organizational culture and the specific job's requirements. While the first match probably has the greatest impact on performance, the second match has the greatest effect on job satisfaction and tenure.¹

Why should an agency consider using a RJP? What is their purpose?

RJP methods provide the applicant with a more holistic picture of the job, thereby enabling the applicant to make an informed decision regarding whether he or she really wants the job and/or if he or she is suitable for the requirements of the position. As a result, the selection process is more efficient because people who will quit in the first few months (or are likely to be fired) are screened out, saving the agency the time and money required to refill the position. For the RJP to be successful, it must outline all aspects of the job. This information will allow applicants to determine if the job is a good match for them so they can decide if they should go forward with applying for the job.

Research has shown providing realistic job information to applicants plays an important role in the socialization process. What occurs early in the job-hiring process influences the subsequent attitudes and behaviors of new employees. A significant amount of research has been conducted over the past three decades on the impact RJP's have on job applicants' and employees' career decisions. The research can be divided into three distinct, but highly interrelated areas:

- Impact on Job Offer Acceptance

¹ Masternak, M. (2004). "Realistic Job Preview: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Michigan Family Independence Agency," available at: http://www.cps.ca.gov/ConsultingServices/HSRC/MIFIAAppendices/Append_G_FIA_CCHP_Realistic_Job_Preview.pdf.

- Impact on Turnover
- Impact on Job Satisfaction

The relationship between job offer acceptance, turnover, and job satisfaction is obvious. All are associated with the individual's perception of how his or her needs will be met on the job. Research also suggests a residual benefit of exposure to a RJP is greater job satisfaction resulting from fewer surprises on the job and positive perceptions of employer honesty in the recruitment process.

What should an agency include in a RJP?

Prior to developing a RJP, an agency should gather information about the features of the job, develop a job description, and identify other characteristics unique to the agency. This information will be used in the RJP. Overall, the RJP should:

- Include information applicants are unlikely to know or are likely to have unrealistic expectations about
- Present the agency image
 - How will people remember the agency?
 - What is unique about the agency?
 - What can the agency provide to new employees?
- Explain what is done on the job and why it is done
- Start with positive, exciting aspects of the job, but do not hide negative aspects
- Match something positive for every negative aspect of the job

How should an agency present the RJP?

Although the ideal situation involves having the applicant interact with the people he or she would typically be working with, this is not always possible, particularly if an RJP is being used early in the application process. In some cases, organizations videotape the work situation or produce informational materials. Regardless of the approach chosen, it is essential to inform prospective employees the reason they are participating in a RJP is to help them to decide if the agency and the job is a good match for them. Applicants who understand the purpose of the RJP will appreciate the effort and feel more positive about the agency. Ideally, the RJP will occur before a job offer has been made and should provide prospective employees with an opportunity to decide whether they wish to withdraw their application. This will save the agency time and money. The RJP should emphasize what makes the agency unique and why an applicant should consider working for them rather than another organization.

What are some methods agencies can use to conduct RJP's?

RJP's can be presented in a variety of formats, including videos, verbal presentations, job tours, and written brochures. Each method has advantages and disadvantages. Agencies should consider if certain formats will be more successful with particular kinds of jobs or with a particular audience. Also important to consider is where in the hiring process a particular RJP method might be most appropriate. Described below are some of the more

common methods for conducting RJPs. Agencies can use this information as a guide in determining the most appropriate method based on budget, time, and other considerations.²

Pre-application job preview: This type of RJP is usually made available to anyone who is interested in learning more about a job. Information can be posted on the organization's website, or provided when a person calls an agency or otherwise asks for an application. This RJP method is brief and designed to help the prospective employee ascertain if he or she meets minimal criteria and is interested in the type of work involved. These RJPs can be adapted to include basic information, such as pay scale, benefits, general job responsibilities and requirements, work hours, and job locations. As with any other RJP method, the pre-application job preview should be structured and consistent across applicants. In terms of cost effectiveness, if the job preview is brief and to the point, it will save the agency both time and money if people who are clearly mismatched for the position opt not to apply.

Booklets or brochures: Booklets or brochures can be of varying lengths and levels of sophistication, but should include the essential components of an effective RJP (e.g., both positive and negative aspects of the job, information current workers report they didn't know but wish they had before accepting the job). The materials can consist of glossy agency brochures or even photo albums compiled by the employees working at a specific site. Quality brochures may be expensive to design, produce, update, and print.

Multimedia presentations: RJPs using multimedia formats, such as videotapes, CDs, or web-based presentations, demonstrate to an applicant what the position entails by showing people actually engaged in the job. The agency will have to assess what situations show the job more realistically and/or are the ones typically causing early turnover due to lack of information about the job. Multimedia presentations can be very expensive to produce. However, if they are well produced and content is not date-sensitive, they can be used for a long time, making them more cost-effective.

Group RJPs: This type of RJP involves informing groups of potential applicants about the job. The meetings can be divided into three or four, 5-10 minute segments. During each segment, information about the job is provided and questions are answered. After each segment, a break provides an opportunity to leave for those who decide the job is not a good match for them. Like other methods, a group RJP requires time to identify which aspects of the job to highlight and how. Development and implementation costs will vary depending on the materials/methods used.

Structured observations: Applicants can observe the work site to gain an overview of the job. In a structured observation, current employees may discuss the job with the observer, but it is more effective for the staff to simply perform their usual daily duties. Structured observations require thorough planning to ensure effectiveness and comprehensiveness. They are the least expensive RJP method because staff time is not required during the observation and any materials are generally inexpensive to produce and update. Typically, structured observations should be used later in the hiring process when fewer candidates are being considered for the position.

² The descriptions of RJP methods are based on an overview by Susan O'Neil, Sherri Larson, Amy Hewitt, John Sauer. (2001). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration. Funding was provided by the Partnerships for Success Grant funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. Information is available at the University of Minnesota "RJP Overview" website.

Meetings with current employees or customers: In RJP meetings, current employees and/or customers explain in their own words what the job entails in terms of potential rewards, challenges, and benefits, as well as discuss the applicant's needs and expectations. Current workers should be trained for RJP meetings. It is essential to clarify to all involved whether the meeting will be used only for RJP purposes or whether employees will also make recommendations about applicant fit. As for structured observations, the agency should establish guidelines for employees and customers who participate in this process. These meetings are very similar to structured observations in terms of costs. Implementing this method, however, requires staff time and training, making it more expensive to maintain.

Realistic Job Preview (RJP) Implementation Checklist³

- Develop an Implementation Plan with Timelines:** The plan will explain the need for a RJP and the major steps required to develop the RJP. A pilot test should be included if possible.
- Establish Work Team(s):** Identify the implementation team, including current managers, employees, and human resources staff.
- Assess Current Situation:** Determine if the RJP will be used to resolve a current problem (e.g., too much turnover among new hires) or to proactively avoid a future problem.
- Obtain Management Commitment:** Communicate to management the strategic intent of the RJP and the desired end results. Management support is necessary to ensure successful development and implementation.
- Identify Issues to be Addressed:** Identify relevant job duties and organizational characteristics and the ways the typical employee reacts to both. This information will help inform what should be covered in the RJP.
- Include “Judgmental Information”:** The RJP should include judgmental information (e.g., things that satisfy and dissatisfy employees) about the position to be filled. This information may be obtained through interviews or employee surveys.
- Focus on a Few Targeted Issues:** The RJP should ensure the most important job characteristics are readily understood by job applicants and are not lost among other information.
- Balance Negative and Positive Information:** The RJP should match something positive for every piece of negative information provided to the applicant.
- Select a Communication Medium:** RJPs are most often presented through brochures and/or audio-visual methods (A-V). Consider resource and time constraints in selecting a medium.
- Identify the Message Source:** Applicants identify with the message when it is conveyed by incumbents to whom the applicant can relate.
- Determine Where the RJP Fits within the Application Process:** An RJP may be used at various points in the hiring process. Consider presenting an RJP early to enable some applicants to self-select out of the process, minimizing organizational costs.
- Select an Implementation Approach:** Determine whether the RJP will be used for all positions, or for targeted positions.
- Create a Communication Plan:** The plan should ensure widespread knowledge of the goals of the RJP and implementation timelines.
- Provide Training:** If applicable, identify and train employees who will participate in the RJP.

Evaluate the Results: Monitor implementation and evaluate the RJP process on a periodic basis to ensure the plan is followed and the intended results are achieved. Make adjustments to the RJP as necessary.

³ Based in part on Wanous, J. P. (1989). Installing a Realistic Job Preview: Ten Tough Choices, *Personnel Psychology*, 42, 1, pg 117.