Changes in Job Seeker Perceptions of Sport Jobs Following A Realistic Job Preview in Video Form

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Employees are a defining feature of most business organizations (Schneider, 1987), and it should therefore come as little surprise that one of the most important features of successful business organizations is the ability to recruit individuals who can best help them achieve key organizational objectives (Barney, 1991; Becker & Huselid, 1998; Rynes, 1991). Recruiting is a time- and labor-intensive process that can be prove costly for organizations if it is poorly executed (Barber, 1998; Galvin, 2001). Especially in some segments the Sport Industry where attraction to particular jobs is elevated, this critical Human Resource function has strategic implications to firm performance (Todd and Kent, 2009). Unmet expectations among new employees, for example, can lead to employee dissatisfaction and distrust, counterproductive work behaviors, and a decrease in organizational performance levels (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schmike, 2002; Barksdale, Bellenger, Boles, & Brashears, 2003; Hom, Griffith, Palich, & Bracker, 1998). Thus, because of the financial and nonpecuniary costs involved with recruitment, organizations have a strong motivation to ensure they entice and ultimately hire the best available job candidates (i.e., individuals possessing the requisite personality and skill sets for the open job position as well as realistic expectations about the advertised work).

As a means to recruit premium talent, organizations employ numerous recruitment activities in order attract superlative individuals for vacant job positions. Of these activities, it has been argued that “no recruitment issue has generated more attention than realistic job previews (RJPs), the presentation by an organization of both favorable and unfavorable job-related information to job candidates” (Phillips, 1998, p. 673). Much like a medical immunization, RJPs have been argued to be a beneficial recruiting tool for business organizations because they give potential employees a small dose of “organizational reality” (Popovich & Wanous, 1982). In other words, prior to being hired, a RP may better enable job candidates (recruits) to self-select. Self-selection is the method by which job candidates assess their abilities in relation to the organization and a specific job (Premack & Wanous, 1985). By having realistic information about the job position and business organization, these individuals can then make a more informed decision about their future (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Bretz & Judge, 1998; Miceli, 1985). Specifically, if job candidates perceive a strong fit (for the job and/or organization) they will be more likely to accept the job; however, if they believe they are not a good fit for the job or organization, they will be more likely withdraw their name from further consideration (Saks, Wiesner, & Summers, 1994).

RJPs can be delivered at various times in the recruitment process (e.g., prior to the job interview, upon completion of the job interview, after an employee is hired). They can also be administered to job candidates in a variety of different mediums. These include but are not limited to the following forms: (a) videos (Meglino, 1993; Reilly & Brown, 1981), (b) written descriptions (Thorsteinson, 2004), (c) site visits (Reilly & Brown, 1981), (d) verbal presentations (Dugoni, 1981), and (e) job simulations (Lent, 2007). Overall, regardless of the form, scholars are generally in agreement that the balanced presentation of information that RJPs provide can have a significant and positive impact on employee job expectations, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions (Buckley, Fedor, Veres, Wiese, & Carracher, 1998; Dilla, 1987; Phillips, 1998). Interestingly, scholars in sport management have discussed possible attitudinal differences between applicants seeking sport / non-sport jobs and noted that sport job seekers often have heightened elements of social identity present in their career selections (Todd & Kent, 2009). This lends support to the notion that job seekers in sport may use somewhat distinct heuristics when considering whether or a not an advertised job opening is satisfactory (Andrew et al., 2006; Todd & Andrew, 2006; Todd & Andrew, 2008). To that end, what served to guide this study was an underlying interest in better understanding how a video RJP influenced thoughts Sport Management students had about job fit, possible job acceptance intentions, and overall attraction to the position.
With this underlying purpose as a start, an experiment was orchestrated in the following manner. First, two students fulfilling internships for course credit each separately developed a 25 minute video of a Game Day Operations job in college athletics. Students were asked to develop a video in real player software that would essentially be a realistic preview of the actual work he/she was doing. The video shows the intern completing typical, day-to-day set up and break down of athletic events. Two videos were used to control for the effects of a single producer and the videos were not completed as part of the same academic term (i.e., the students were not working in that job at the same time and did not know each other).

Next, three graduate research assistants independently coded the videos and produced a written job description. These three job descriptions were combined to properly align the material in the video with the job description. We then developed a survey instrument consisting of two Job Acceptance Items (Harris & Fink, 1987) scored on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from “Definitely Not” to “Definitely”, four Person Job Fit items (Saks & Ashforth, 1997) scored on a 4 point Likert-type scale ranging from “Not at all” to “Very Much”, and three Applicant Attraction items adapted from Rau and Hyland (2002) and scored on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

The study procedures were as follows. To start, each group of students was given a packet that contained the written job description. They were asked to read it carefully, and then complete the survey items representing the three dependent variables. The survey administrator then played the RJP [video] for the class for at least 25 minutes and the dependent variables were collected again using a survey instrument. Overall, there were three separate groups in this study from a total of two Universities. Group 1 (n = 44) was at University A and watched Video A. Groups 2 (n = 48) and 3 (n = 53) were from University B and watched Video B. The dependent variables were collected on the same day for Group 1 and Group 2, but there was a delay of four days for Group 3. A significant [intra-student] change occurred in two of the three dependent variables after the video was presented to the participants. In particular, the means for both applicant attraction and acceptance intentions decreased from time 1 to time 2. Acceptance Intentions time 1 mean dropped from 3.71 to 3.41 (t = 4.54), while 25% of the participants reported change greater than 20% from their former level. Time 1 Applicant Attraction dropped from 3.42 to 3.06 (t = 5.18), and 20% of the participants scored at least 20% lower after the video was seen. These findings collectively imply realistic job previews in the form of videos play a significant role in perceptions and intentions applicants have for specific jobs.

Implications of the study will be directed first at Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to explain why certain students viewed the video positively and others perceived it negatively (as far as it pertained to their career interests). Specifically, we see the digital video as a forced mechanism that “requires individuals to engage in high levels of elaboration by carefully examining the content in the information presented” (Larsen & Phillips, 2002, pg. 349). As such, ELM could play a pivotal role in guiding further inquiry.

We will also initiate a discussion of how this research could ultimately impact practitioners in the sport industry who screen applicants for jobs (e.g., human resources personnel). It is possible that a video RJP would pre-screen the applicant pool and assist with what is an already arduous process. Implications will also be directed at Future research ideas concerning RJP and sport organizations will be presented as well.