Getting Employee Buy-in to Quality Management

The importance of creating realistic expectations among job applicants

by
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IN THE 1960S, COLLEGE-AGE MALES WERE FACED WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF being drafted for the Vietnam War. One young man, Stephen, chose to take control of his life by joining the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC) at the university he attended. This also meant that upon graduation he was obligated to serve as a commissioned officer.

Instructors in AFROTC classes frequently showed films that had newly commissioned second lieutenants performing much like high-powered managers, commanding airmen and working with expensive equipment. One film in particular stood out in Stephen's memory. In it, the second lieutenant drove up to the base on his first day of active duty. The gate guard snapped to attention and waved him through. Upon being commissioned, Stephen's expectations were high.

Reality proved a rude awakening. When he was ordered to report for active duty, Stephen drove to his new assignment. The gate guard took one look at his old college car and yelled, "Get that piece of [classified] out of here. You're blocking the road."

It was not the welcome he was expecting. The first workplace lesson on the lowly status of second lieutenants proved prophetic. For the first three years of his tour of duty the only thing under Stephen was a desk chair. He commanded no one, nor was he allowed near any expensive equipment. Needless to say, his inclination to re-enlist was nonexistent.

Years later, when Stephen became a college professor, a recent graduate came back to visit him and a colleague. She was working as a management trainee at a local store, and she was irate.

"You know what I do?" she asked. "I work beside a part-time high-school stu-

dent building shelves." She went on to question why she had gone to college and invested all the time, effort, and money. To little effect, the professors explained the concept of starting at the bottom and paying one's dues.

The university and its curriculum, however, were partially at fault for not providing a more accurate view of what happens to many new graduates after leaving their sheltered academic lives and entering the harsh reality of the working world.

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Expectations of new hires

The incidents described here are common among new job holders. Organizational recruiters recognize the importance of managing the impressions of job applicants. Therefore, recruiters tend to paint rosy pictures of work life at their organization. They do so in hopes that the best candidates will choose their firm. Not surprisingly, the initial interactions that candidates have with organizations, particularly during the recruiting process, often create unrealistic job expectations.

According to John Wanous, author of *Organizational Entry: Recruitment, Selection, Orientation, and Socialization of Newcomers,* the consequences of these unmet expectations can be detrimental.

Unrealistic expectations caused by over-enthusiastic recruiting methods can create such high hurdles that when new hires start their jobs, reality produces an intensive shock.[1] Disparity between newcomer expectations and organizational reality tends to lessen job satisfaction and commitment. This, in turn, contributes to lower employee productivity and higher absenteeism.

FIGURE 1 Effects of Realistic Job Preview (RJP)

Wanous also suggests that high worker turnover during their first year of employment is partially attributable to the unrealistic expectations new hires bring to jobs. Moreover, organizations forfeit the unrealized potential of lost incumbents who might otherwise have proven effective contributors. Additionally, organizations lose their initial training investment in new hires.

To prevent these undesirable outcomes, Wanous and James Breaugh, author of *Recruitment: Science and Practice,* advocate realistic recruiting practices. Realistic recruiting practices offer an accurate portrayal of organizational reality.[2]

New hires are then able to begin their jobs with realistic expectations regarding their role within the company. Because the organizational socialization process unfolds more smoothly, newcomers avoid the reality shock due to unmet expectations. Their initial job satisfaction tends to be higher, and they are more apt to remain with the organization.

These experts recommend that firms expose candidates to realistic job previews (RJPs) prior to hiring (see Figure 1). RJPs describe what it is really like to work in the organization, including both high points and low points. RJPs can be communicated to candidates through conversations, pamphlets, or videos, but their message should be credible.

In essence, RJPs should present the satisfying aspects of working for the organization, as well as possible conflicts and frustrations. Then, when candidates begin their jobs, their expectations vs. actual workplace conditions should be more in balance.

Realistic expectations about quality management organizations

The ability to create realistic expectations among new hires is particularly significant to organizations practicing quality management (QM). The importance of employees buying into QM has long been documented. This process involves training and discussion about the importance of QM and taking a hard look at the advantages and potential problems. It is only then that doubts and fears can surface and be dealt with realistically.

For example, how will employees benefit personally under the new and seemingly different practices? What will happen to the old ways of doing things and the old relationships under this new philosophy? The end result is a strong quality culture that benefits both internal and external customers.

Individuals applying for jobs should receive similarly realistic views of what it is like to work in QM cultures. They will likely encounter an organizational culture different from previous experiences, one with an emphasis on teamwork, problem solving, customer satisfaction, and statistical methods. Recruiting information and materials should present the positive and

negative aspects of working in a QM culture (see Table 1).

Organizations following this prescription will benefit by hiring employees who more easily fit into QM cultures. New hires who have experienced RJPs will be more flexible in the face of QM's demands because they are more prepared to face changes. The training costs that QM requires of new employees will also represent a better investment when more new hires remain with the organization.

Techniques for RJPs

Several techniques may be used to deliver RJPs, including pamphlets, current employees, and videos.

- **Pamphlets.** Some companies distribute pamphlets describing the pros and cons of working for their organization. One advantage of this approach is that creating large quantities of pamphlets is cost effective. Another advantage is that the pros and cons are listed side by side for easy comparison. On the downside, some candidates, such as younger applicants who have been raised on videos and personal computers, find such pamphlets dry and boring.
- **Current employees.** Current employees can be used to deliver realistic job previews to job candidates. Candidates have the opportunity to converse with frontliners who are in the know. They can also solicit opinions about the workplace, co-workers, and the organization's philosophy. But potential problems can arise because firms cannot control what employees say. Selecting the wrong spokesperson could prove disastrous; he or she could be having a bad day, a bad week, or even a bad year. There is, after all, a fine line between delivering a realistic portrayal of life in the organization and airing dirty laundry.
- **Videos.** RJPs can also be effectively conveyed through videos. An advantage of videos is that organizations can control what the actors say and do. And, of course, videos are highly involving, particularly for younger candidates. Many young job applicants were weaned on videos and find them engaging and entertaining.

  An RJP video for a QM organization could describe a typical work day in that company. The video could first present an employee helping an irritated customer resolve a problem.

  The employee could then be shown attending a QM meeting where team members from different departments (and hence different perspectives) argue about the best approach for solving a quality problem and eventually agree on a solution. The employee in the video could next attend a workshop on using statistical process control (SPC), a concept he or she finds difficult to understand but eventually masters.

  The employee could then attend a reward and recognition ceremony where employees receive training certificates. Finally, the video could show the employee at home that night watching a QM video from the company library for continuous self-improvement.

  The only drawback to using videos is the cost of production. The cost, however, is relatively small considering the large number of candidates who will view the video.

TABLE 1 Realistic Job Preview for a Quality Management Organization

Topic	Positive features	Negative features
Empowerment to help customers	Creating customer satisfaction	Dealing with angry customers
Working in cross-functional teams	Member diversity producing new, innovative ideas	Member diversity producing arguments, conflict
Using statistical tools	Getting direct feedback on actions	Dry and frustrating learning of statistical methods
Continuous training	Reward and recognition ceremony giving out training certificates	Time spent on training both on the job and after work at home
Culture of quality	Good reputation, well-run firm	High expectations for success

Quality team interviews

A device unique to employee selection within QM organizations, but one that can be adapted to an RJP setting, is the quality team interview. Several QM organizations, such as 1992 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award winner Granite Rock, use quality teams to interview potential members.[3]

Granite Rock team members interview job candidates to evaluate their aptitude for working in teams, as well as their experience, motivation, and compatibility with the company's quality philosophy. Other organizations use tell-it-like-it-is sheets, where the interview team describes the positives and negatives of the job, department, organization, and plant location.[4]

If the quality team interview is viewed as an exchange process, both parties (the applicant and interviewers) should exchange information about

what they have to offer.[5] Quality team interviewers seek a certain skill mix, and the team can offer various organizational rewards.

Candidates, on the other hand, bring certain skills and experience to the interview while desiring various organizational rewards. Organizations can use quality team forums as mechanisms for exchanging realistic information about their needs and the rewards they give to candidates who satisfy those needs.

Quality team interviews offer advantages over talking with individual incumbents, since candidates are unlikely to encounter an entire team of employees who are having a bad day. Additionally, candidates can ask questions and gain different perspectives from the cross-functional membership of the team.

Benchmarking RJPs

Benchmarking has typically been used by QM organizations to identify best practices of other organizations.[6] QM organizations can also benchmark best practices regarding RJPs. For example, Wanous has described a successful RJP pamphlet for bank tellers that describes interacting with customers as requiring constant courtesy and occasionally dealing with rude people. In addition, work loads are presented as variable with peak periods on Mondays and Fridays.[7]

Breaugh describes some innovative alternative RJPs. For example, Merrill Lynch uses a simulation exercise for hiring stockbrokers where the candidates spend time in the office after hours with a tape recording of background office noise.

Candidates must work through an in-basket filled with correspondence and attempt to rectify time conflicts on their calendars. In the midst of the simulation, they receive a call from an experienced broker posing as an angry client who has just lost a large amount of money because of a broker recommendation.

Breaugh also suggests job tryouts where applicants work for a short time as interns to experience actual working conditions before they are hired permanently.[8]

One hallmark of QM is extensive and continuous training in job skills and QM tools, such as cause-and-effect diagrams, flowcharts, and SPC. RJPs could be adapted to provide job candidates with mini training experiences, such as learning to use a particular quality tool.[9] Not only will the candidate get a feel for QM training, but the organization will have an indication of how well the candidate reacts to a training experience (i.e., an evaluation of the applicant's trainability).

QM organizations or industry groups could expand their benchmarking efforts to RJPs as well as best practices in manufacturing and service delivery. They could create a clearinghouse of best practices in RJP that would delineate the pros and cons employees encounter when dealing with total quality management concepts, such as customer service, continuous improvement, and problem solving.

Benefits of RJPs

RJPs have been used in employee recruiting and hiring for some time. QM organizations can benefit from adopting RJPs as quality previews in several ways.

First, job applicants who would not fit well into the organization self-select themselves out early in the hiring process before either party makes any commitments.

Second, the culture shock of working for a QM organization can be reduced, resulting in lower turnover and a better return on training costs.

Third, satisfaction with working for a QM organization is established on a firmer, more realistic basis, which leads to a stronger, long-term commitment to the organization.

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