

The People Behind the Wheel: Exploring the Policy Changes, Job Characteristics, and Social Stressors Driving Turnover Among California Truck Drivers

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Trucking is a critical physical link in today's supply chains and global economy, but the industry faces serious issues that continue to plague employees and companies that operate in this industry. Trucking companies have struggled to attract and retain drivers, but this problem continues to grow as demand for more truck shipments continues to increase. In order to help trucking companies in their quest to lower their driver turnover rates, it has become necessary to dig deeper into the psychological side of being a driver. Three related studies were conducted to look at the psychological processes of being a California truck driver.

Study Methods

This three-part study collected longitudinal data to investigate the ways in which truck driver perceptions of such things as policy changes, job characteristics, and identity issues change over time. The study also examined ways in which those perceptions influence both job performance and

retention decisions. Longitudinal survey data was collected from 100 owner-operator truck drivers based out of two California trucking companies in the San Pedro Bay Port Complex. Five different data analysis approaches were used. Participants were also able to share additional qualitative information with the researchers at the end of the survey.

Findings

National policy changes, such as Hours of Service (HOS) and Electronic Logging Device (ELD) Mandate are a significant source of stress for CA truck drivers in the form of job burnout. However, these stress levels can be lowered with support from supervisors. State level and possible future policy changes do not seem to be a source of stress for CA truck drivers. When drivers feel that they are not equipped to do their job well (professional inefficacy), they are more likely to leave their current organization.

Truck drivers perceive skill discretion as a challenge stressor, which is positively correlated with both job performance and citizenship behavior. Conversely, physical exertion, time pressure and work difficulty, and exposure to hazards are perceived by truck drivers as hindrance stressors, in that each is positively correlated to different aspects of burnout. Whereas hazardous exposure has a negative indirect effect on citizenship behavior, time pressure and work difficulty appears to be most severe since it exhibits a direct negative effect with intent to remain at the company.

Truck drivers identify more strongly with their profession than with their company, yet neither of these identifications was on average very strong. However, drivers who identified more strongly than others with either their company or their profession were likely to perform less citizenship behavior due to increased burnout. These results suggest that the drivers who are most strongly identified with their organization and profession, may be at the greatest risk for burnout, and in turn, reduced helping behavior toward others in their company. This suggests that truck drivers who emotionally and personally invest themselves in their profession work more diligently, but also experience greater stress and reduced pro-social behavior towards others in their company.

Policy Recommendations

1. We recommend that supervisors and managers of trucking companies should offer support to drivers in order to help lower job burnout stress related to national transportation policy changes. Companies should encourage them to watch for feelings of professional inefficacy in their truck drivers and to respond to them constructively (e.g., via training and support).
2. We recommend that transportation companies closely monitor working conditions of their drivers, and take action to either improve them or offer drivers means of coping with them. Also, allowing truck drivers to have some influence on operational decisions, responsibilities, and/or independence while at their workplace is likely perceived by the drivers as rewarding.
3. We recommend companies respect truck drivers' attachment to their profession and offer them ways to feel positive about their work.

Encouraging their drivers to feel pride for their profession and develop their abilities in that domain, will in turn, boost driver performance.

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For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1867



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