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# Enhancing Driver Retention Through Employee Engagement and Job Matching

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The problem of driver turnover is well known in the trucking industry and has been so ubiquitous over the years that it is often perceived as an inevitable and expensive part of doing business. The magnitude of the issue is obvious when one considers that the current industry turnover rate is approximately 89% (“Truck Driver Turnover Rate,” 2011), and it has been estimated that losing and replacing one driver can cost a company on average between \$5,000 and \$8,500 (Frost & Sullivan, 2006), and up to \$15,000 in certain industries (Harrison & Pierce, 2009). The negative business impact grows exponentially when one also considers the indirect costs such as lost productivity, lower employee morale, and loss of good will with customers. While many factors contribute to this high turnover rate, we can trace the issue at least as far back as the passage of the Motor Carrier Act of 1980 (MCA). This act led to significant market competition and benefits to consumers; however, many believe it has led to downturns in driver earnings and union membership rates. Regardless of any direct link, since this time driver turnover has been identified as a significant problem in the trucking industry (Harrison & Pierce, 2009), with the assumption that pay and benefits have been the primary factors in higher turnover rates. While pay and benefits are often important reasons that an employee may leave a company, a wealth of research suggests that employee turnover generally (e.g., Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010), and driver turnover specifically (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, 2003; Harrison & Pierce, 2009), are significantly affected by a number of nonpay/ benefits factors such as person-job fit, work-related stress, opportunity for advancement, managerial style, recruitment practices, realistic job previews, and dispatcher effectiveness.

In considering the non-pay/benefits causes of high driver turnover, one can look toward the more comprehensive concept of employee (driver) engagement. Research in this area strongly indicates that employee engagement is significantly related to employee turnover rates, as it has been found that engaged employees are as much as 87% less likely to leave the company than those who are disengaged (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004). The impact of employee engagement goes well beyond turnover issues and significantly affects both

individual and organizational performance. Engaged employees are much more likely to exert additional effort, provide exemplary customer service, and be generally more productive. Companies with consistently engaged employees tend to enjoy benefits such as enhanced customer loyalty, increases in profitability, and higher revenue growth rates. Employee engagement is a much more robust concept than the more traditional idea of employee satisfaction in that it encompasses a heightened emotional, intellectual, and behavioral connection that employees have with their jobs, the company, management, and the quality of relationships they have with co-workers and customers. This multidimensional connection significantly influences the employees' commitment to the company, their intention to remain in the company's employ, and intention to apply discretionary effort.

## Driver Engagement

**Caliper Corporation, a global human resources and organizational consulting firm, recently conducted a survey of 69 route (local) drivers to determine levels of engagement. This survey consisted of 34 items and was designed to assess the emotional, intellectual, and behavioral engagement of these drivers along three organizational levels:**

- Supervisor
- Work team
- Company

**In addition, this survey was used to assess the following engagement areas:**

- Role clarity
- Attitude toward role
- Motivation to perform role-related tasks
- Empowerment
- Opportunities for career development

**The following statements reflect the five highest-rated engagement statements:**

- Understand job responsibilities
- Education on proper conduct and driving safety
- Clear instructions on how to get the job done
- Enjoy customers
- Good co-workers

Based on these highest-rated areas, we can see that this group of route drivers feels that one of the most engaging aspects of their job is role clarity. That is, the participants report that they understand what is expected of them and are provided the information and education to ensure that the job is completed to the highest levels of quality. Another aspect of the work that this sample of drivers finds engaging is the interactions with customers and co-workers. Later in this article, we will cover how interpersonal relationships play a key role in maintaining the engagement of local drivers.

**The following statements reflect the five lowest-rated engagement statements:**

- Advancement opportunities
- Opportunities to work on new or interesting projects
- Employees contribute equally
- Job preparation – routes, equipment, communications
- Have a say in decisions that affect their job

These lowest-rated areas suggest that the route drivers in this study find professional growth, perceptions of fairness, and autonomy (some of the more important aspects of employee engagement) as lacking in their jobs.

Table 1 illustrates the statistical relationship between overall performance of these 69 route drivers and ratings that they provided in the five engagement categories. As can be seen, performance is statistically related to four of the five engagement areas as well as to overall engagement. This suggests that those drivers who have the highest level of engagement in these areas are those whose performance is also rated the highest.

**Table 1: Relationship between Overall Performance and Engagement Driver Ratings**

Engagement Area	r	p
Role Clarity	.37	.01
Attitude Toward Role	.26	.05
Motivation to Perform Role-Related Tasks	.28	.04
Empowerment	.34	.02
Opportunities for Career Development	.14	.32
Total Engagement	.35	.01

**Another point of interest was to identify the specific elements of the work environment that are most related to overall engagement. Out of the 34 engagement-related statements rated by the route drivers, the following were most related to overall engagement:**

- I have a say in decisions that affect the team or company’s success.
- I feel valued by the company.
- I find my work fun and challenging.
- I feel that my job is secure.
- I believe in the company’s mission.

**Those drivers who rated these items the highest tended to exhibit the highest level of overall engagement, while those who rated these items lower tended to exhibit the lowest levels of overall engagement. These results are consistent with previous research that has focused on employee engagement and suggest that Route Drivers' level of engagement, much like the level of employees' engagement across many other industries, is highly dependent on:**

- The amount of autonomy or input they have regarding work procedures, scheduling, etc.
- The level of respect the company shows for the drivers as people and for their contribution to the company
- The meaningfulness or importance of the work, as perceived by the drivers
- How well the drivers' personality, values, and motivational factors are matched to the role

## **Driver Job Fit**

A consistent finding across all companies, industries, and job types is that there is a strong relationship between the personal characteristics of the individual (e.g., personality traits, motivational factors, personal values) and factors related to retention (e.g., work satisfaction, engagement, successful performance). This relationship is often referred to as person-job fit and is typically assessed via personality assessment such as the Caliper Profile. The Caliper Profile is an employee assessment tool that measures 23 different personality traits and motivational factors that are highly predictive of job performance across many different jobs and industries. Employees who consistently perform at high levels are those who work in environments and jobs that are congruent with their personality and motivational strengths. Each individual's personality and motivational dynamics are directly related to the work behaviors that lead to job success. In short, this type of assessment measures the consistency between an individual's personality and the tasks, work environment, management style, culture, and expected outcomes the individual will experience on the job. Once this consistency is assessed, one can make much more informed predictions related to such issues as how likely the individual will remain motivated and engaged, be satisfied with the work experience, perform at high levels, and be retained by the company.

**Of course, understanding the personality dynamics of a driver is only one half of the person-job fit equation. One must consider that there are at least three distinct types of driving jobs, each of which has its own set of performance expectations, task requirements, work environments, advantages, and stressors:**

**Local Drivers** work only within the limits of their hometown or nearby towns. This type of job typically allows the driver to return home nightly.

**Regional Drivers** may work over several states near their homes. They are usually away from home for short periods of time.

**Long-Haul Drivers** cover distances of thousands of miles and are away from home for a week or more.

**Generally, local drivers have a significant amount of interaction with customers as they make local deliveries. Those who are most likely to remain motivated with respect to the day-to-day tasks of this type of role are individuals who exhibit dynamics in which interpersonal traits are prevalent, such as:**

**Sociability** – The desire to be with and work with people. Individuals who exhibit higher levels of this quality tend to enjoy being with and working with others. More specifically, they relate well in one-on-one and group situations. They are likely to have a large circle of close friends.

**Gregariousness** – The level of comfort one exhibits with people and crowds. Individuals who are gregarious are apt to be extroverted, ebullient, and optimistic. They tend to be outgoing and enjoy working with large groups and have a genuine enjoyment of social interaction.

**Given the higher percentage of time in customer service-related activities, local drivers who remain engaged, successful, and retained should exhibit the following traits as well:**

**Empathy** - The ability to accurately sense the reactions of another person. An empathic individual is able to accurately and objectively perceive another person's feelings without necessarily agreeing with them. This highly valuable ability to obtain powerful feedback enables an individual to appropriately adjust his or her own behavior in order to deal effectively with other people.

**Accommodation** - Friendliness and openness in personal interactions; this is a willingness to be accommodating and helpful. Individual who exhibits higher levels of this trait tend to be service oriented. With a greater desire to be liked by others, these individuals respond to recognition and work hard to please others.

**Thoroughness** - An individual's attention to detail and the degree to which he or she is likely to come through for customers. Individuals who exhibit higher levels of this trait tend to be careful and will take ownership of the jobs assigned to them.

Finally, local driving jobs are most likely to keep drivers in contact with direct supervision and other company-related structure. Therefore, we would expect those who are most likely to thrive within this work environment to exhibit a high level of External Structure, which is sensitivity to structure. Individuals who exhibit this trait are especially sensitive to externally defined rules, policies, and procedures. They tend to operate with some sensitivity to authority and will generally prefer a working environment in which direction is set.

Taken together, this profile represents a driver who enjoys social interaction, is motivated to provide exemplary customer service, has a conscientious approach to the job, and is comfortable with following set rules and direction. While there will be some variance in performance expectations and work environment between local driving jobs, this model is likely to represent motivational factors and tendencies that align with higher satisfaction, engagement, and performance at the local driver

level. As part of the driver engagement study, we conducted an analysis to identify which personality traits were statistically related to overall engagement.

**We found a lot of consistency with this model, as the following traits were strongly related to engagement in our sample of 69 route drivers:**

- Accommodation
- Sociability
- Thoroughness
- External Structure
- Cautiousness

Contrast the requirements for local driver success with those for long-haul driver success. The longhaul driver typically covers thousands of miles and can be away from home for weeks. While the local driver tends to interact with individuals who live in close proximity to him or herself, social interaction for the long-haul driver occurs with much more geographically diverse individuals with differing backgrounds and tendencies. An engaged and successful long-haul driver must embrace diversity more, so we would expect those who are most engaged and successful to exhibit higher levels of the following traits:

**Openness** - Receptiveness to new or alternative ideas. People who exhibit a high degree of this trait are willing to consider others' points of view with an open mind.

**Flexibility** - Individuals who exhibit this quality are generally willing to modify their approach as changing conditions or circumstances require. They can easily change gears to respond to the input and feedback of others. Those who exhibit lower levels of this trait may be more tenacious in holding on to their views and less willing to modify their position.

Also unlike local drivers, long-haul drivers do not have contact with direct supervision and other company-related structure. While this is appealing for those who enjoy more autonomy and selfdirection, it can be detrimental to engagement and performance for those who do not like a lot of ambiguity and who are more comfortable working within a structured environment. It is also important for long-haul drivers to understand early in their careers that one needs to be selfgoverning, that it is their own responsibility to avoid distraction and not to let lack of self-discipline affect performance. Therefore, we would expect that those who are more likely to be engaged and successful exhibit higher levels of Self-Structure, which is an individual's desire to determine and direct his or her own priorities. Individuals exhibiting higher levels of this trait in this area are selfdefining. They typically establish and manage their own agendas. Those scoring low in this area tend to enjoy variety, can be distractible, and may require some direction to gain focus.

Of course, there are going to be some common elements of the job across all driver types (local, regional, long-haul). For example, safety should be a considered a critical element of any job type. Therefore, we would expect higher levels of engagement and success in those drivers who exhibit Cautiousness, which reflects the degree to which a person is thorough and careful in making decisions. This characteristic relates to the speed and care with which one evaluates situations or materials and takes action. Individuals who show higher levels of this trait are likely

to be analytical decision makers and action takers. Those who exhibit lower levels of this attribute could be more impulsive or intuitive in their approach to decision making.

We used a generalized understanding of the different types of driving jobs in describing the personality dynamics most likely to lead to success. While these generalizations will account for a large amount of the variance we see in job fit with different driving roles (and thus the variance we see in driver engagement, retention, and success), many elements of the performance expectations and work environment will differ from company to company and from region to region. Therefore, it is recommended that each company engage in a thorough analysis of their various driving roles to identify the personal dynamics that are most likely to lead to driver engagement, retention, and success within their unique situation.

## Summary

This article is our first attempt to address the issue of driver turnover within the context of leadingedge research findings in the areas of employee engagement and job fit. As level of engagement and intent to leave a company have been shown to be strongly related in previous analyses, the results of the driver engagement study suggest that we should be taking a much broader view of the turnover problem. Our results suggest that issues related to role clarity, autonomy, respect, meaningfulness and significance of work, and an understanding of how performance contributes to overall company success, in addition to pay and benefits, drive engagement and will lead to better performance and retention. This article also points out the importance of matching individuals' personality traits, motivational factors, and personal values with job roles and indicates that engagement and success in different driving roles (i.e., local, regional, long-haul) require different personality dynamics. It is strongly recommended that research and practice continue to focus on these broader motivational issues as they relate to driver success and retention.



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