

Case Study of a Trucking Company

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## **Executive Summary**

Blue collar workers are tough people doing jobs that demand great physical labor. Few or no changes have been seen in most of the workplaces that employ blue collar workers and hence, these employees are barely used to changes. However, it does not mean that they don't like to change. The case study of a trucking company is analyzed to prove the same. Though blue collar workers have considerable amount of difficulty changing they easily adopt once the benefits of changes are seen. It is crucial that the managers of these employees and the various union delegates get along well to ensure that the employees are valued and the organization grows. Communication is a key aspect in all such issues and hence maintaining a clean two way communication can help in implementing change easily.

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## Introduction

The below report is a critical analysis on the case study of how workplace changes have affected the workers in a trucking company. The report aims to analyze how workplace changes impact the lives of the workers and the operations in the company, what would happen if changes once made are not sustained and why blue color unions in general are less likely to have workplace changes. The analysis is made by understanding the given case study in detail and researching similar case studies to comprehend how workplace changes directly impact the morale of the workers and how at a higher level changes the way a company works.

## The New Wollongong Yard

A manager is the point of contact for front line workers (Rees, 2012). He is the medium through which the organization speaks to its employees and the employee to the organization (Alfes, 2013). A manager hence has a key role in any given organization, especially one working with blue union employees. This is because these employees usually undergo a huge amount of physical labor and have occupational health hazards much more than those working in a white collar jobs. Hence, the feeling that the management fails to understand what these workers go through is a common negative feeling that prevails within. It is the manager that has to make sure that these feelings do not arise and the employees are in perfect sync with the organization.

Therefore the role of the manager as a communicator is crucial. In case of the Old Wollongong yard, the blue union workers indeed had a very strong union delegate, George Psaros. However, what they lacked was a manager that understood the workers (Northouse, 2015). Their manager did not have patience and has not tried to think from the workers point of view. He was more of a bully and had a poor form of communication. The new yard manager however replaced all these issues.

### Manager's workplace practices

The new manager was a good communicator. He understood that it is essential to talk to the workers to understand where and how improvement is required (Lounsbury, 2016). It is obvious that the actual workers knew where the problems existed and hence speaking to them would reveal the crux of several issues. At the same time, the manager also talked to the union delegate to ensure that he understood what the union wanted in general. He did not simply place trust in a single worker but rather in the union as a whole (Salaria, 2015).

When there was any issue instead of directly blaming the drivers, the manager analyzed what caused the problem. Was it the management's issue or the truck issue or any other technical issue or an issue with the information gap? (Opornsawat, 2015) He did not jump to conclusions and scream on the drivers, rather tried to find a solution to the problem. However, the manager did make sure that the "bad eggs" from the drivers left. He therefore, did not blindly believe or blame the drivers. He actually understood where the problem lies and accordingly took appropriate action.

The manager had been given a significant amount of power. Intelligently he chose to be a democrat rather than an autocrat (Williams, 2013). Instead of forcing his power on the workers, he proved to be a friend by understanding them. He also ensured that major health and safety issues are addressed by training the workers and also helped them develop a customer friendly attitude. This showed the workers were actually valued. Also, he made sure that the Union delegate understood that though the manager had all the power he did not intend to use to suppress the union but rather maintained an amicable relation with them. He spoke to George regularly and asked him for advice on matters with the workers. This made the manager employee friendly rather than management friendly.

The manager maintained a two way communication (Daft, 2016). First, he made sure that the workers are heard. Second, he made sure that the workers knew what the success and failures and the pressure points. If there was an issue with the worker the manager voiced his opinion to make sure that the worker had a chance to correct and realign himself. If a worker had an issue, the manager found ways to resolve the same. The true essence of a good manager has been seen through the new manager.

### **Post George-Manager Era**

One of the biggest risks with implementing changes according to a person is that if the person moves on, new changes may occur. It is obvious that every new manager has their own agenda, and have their own working style. Some prefer to command and get things done, while some prefer to communicate while there are few who just do not care about the happening. The new manager and George worked together for the welfare of the organization and both of them supported the interests of the workers. Changes in uniform and fleet and introduction of training were all a boost to the morale of the workers which helped them incorporate better lifestyle and changed their opinion about the organization. Having an autocratic manager earlier resulted in easier adaption of the new manager's attitude, given that he cared about the workers. The same may not be the case if the manager or the union delegate changes.

Change management can be a very challenging task (Hayes, 2014). Implementing changes that a manager believes are better can be risky if the workers do not have the same opinion. Even in case of the new yard manager, the workers initially were not comfortable with the changes. It was only after they saw the benefits of the changes they have adopted. People in general are not comfortable with change. Employees get used to their workplace after a certain period of time and may become rigid to changes (Hwang, 2012). They may outright not accept it or accept it

with great reluctance. It takes a great communicator and a trustworthy person to lead the workers into change (Nastase, 2012). It depends on the attitude of the replacement of how the workers will receive the same.

If the replacement is positive and believes in the beliefs of his predecessor change can be easily seen. However, it is crucial for the employees to trust the new person. Gaining trust takes time and needs a lot of patience. Enforcing power may back fire and hence the new manager would have to be slow and calm. One of the biggest issues is the constant comparison that workers would make between the new manager and the old manager. The new one would have to live up to their expectations. Taunts like “The old one did not do things this way” is usually seen when employees are comfortable with their old manager. This would not only be a challenge but a frustrating insight every time the new manager tries to do things according to his way. The employees may not cooperate till the manager gains their trust.

If the new manager is different from the old one, changes would be extremely difficult. The employees are now used to facilities such as training, new fleet and new uniforms. They are also used to being communicated to. They have the ability to bring up issues and get them resolved. They started believing that their issues are addressed. Also, the old manager had made sure that the employees feel motivated and valued in the organization. A negative manager in such circumstances would be land mine in the crowd. The chances of going on strikes is high given that the new manager is not employee friendly. The demand to change the manager or the chances of employees getting fired grows exponentially. If the manager overpowers the employees, the employees would feel demotivated and would not be ready to work (Kruse, 2013). They negative treatment would be magnified given that they are used to positive treatment.

A change in the union delegate would also have similar issues. If the delegate is selfish and has very little regard for the employees the problems become obvious. In such condition the communication between the new manager and the union delegate should also be cordial. They should be able to work with each other. If this is not the case, it does not matter if the Union delegate or the new manager is good at their job because they would ultimately not be able to coordinate with each other.

### **Blue collar unions and workplace changes**

It is a common myth that tough blue collar workers do not engage in workplace changes. However, I believe it is these workers who want things to change most. The life of any blue collar worker is outright difficult. These are the people who do major labor and are responsible for the smooth functioning of various organizations (McCann, 2013). Their efforts are barely recognized and they are not as valued as white collar workers. This is the reason that blue collars do not engage in workplace changes. They believe that the organizations do not value them and hence they do not expect changes. And this is true. There are very few organizations who place importance in blue collar workers as they place in white collar workers. This is also the reason why blue color have unions as they need a louder voice to be heard.

Blue collar workers prefer workplace changes. Being communicated in a proper manner, being heard, getting proper wages, proper timings, increasing the number of labor, request for health and safety measures, need for housing amenities are the usual demands of any strike. An analysis of the strike demands of any of the recent strikes suggest the same. The recent quarantine workers strike in Australia, Verizon workers strike, Southern rail strike in England are all resemblance of the same. However, these changes are barely seen (Okechukwu, 2013). There are

companies such as BHP Billiton that do place importance in the life of a blue collar worker. However, this is rare.

At the same time, educating these workers on changes is difficult. The life of a blue collar worker is predictable and it has been this way since decades (Du, 2013). The expectation of these jobs is set and changing the same can be challenging. Most of these workers have minimum education and very little exposure to new technologies. They are also used to be treated in one way and are used to harsh, loud managers and strong unions. Getting past this barrier is tough. Explaining the need for change from a workers point of view is required to change them. These workers have simple expectations. And when implementing changes it is necessary to see that these expectations are fulfilled (Van, 2012).

The simplest way to prove the same is by going through the life of a blue collar worker. Speaking to any worker will tell us that they don't expect much, but they expect the minimum. Also, there have been huge number of strikes all over the world, demanding simple changes that are entitled to every human. Going through their demands will show us that the blue collar workers are indeed waiting for things to changes in their work environment.

## **Conclusion**

Workplace changes can be challenging when not implemented in the correct manner. Every manager has their own style of work but the one that can be a true liaison between the management and the employees is the ideal manager. A manager should be able to communicate both ways with his workforce. He should make sure he is on the employees' side and is working for the growth of the organization. A manager should be able understand his employees and find amicable ways to resolve any issues. A new manager should be able to create a better workplace

than the one earlier to him. Only by doing so will he be accepted and respected. The life of a blue collar worker is tough and hence it is the manager that has to make sure that he inculcates changes that makes work a happy place for these employees.

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