An Observation of Organizational Behaviour Differences Between White and Blue-Collar Transportation Roles

Thomas Beliveau

Abstract

This project aims to provide a detailed overview and observation of the organizational behavioural differences found between on-site, blue-collar, and off-site, white-collar workers within the transportation industry. The observation will be drawn from personal experiences found between the two industries and the use of researched articles. The differences found will include studies of communication, delegation and autonomy, morale, and ethics between the two fields. The observations draw from my own experience as both a residential and commercial mover to contrast the behavioural differences between one industry to provide variabilities found within similar blue-collar roles, and my current role as an international freight forwarder, a white-collar position coordinating transportation in a global scope. Researched roles include a 10-ton linehaul truck driver and a trucking company dispatcher—both roles I am not directly familiar with to provide further insight beyond my experiences.

Introduction

The technological revolution in the past decades has created a hyperbolical, easily accessible, vet underlyingly complicated structure of globalization. Consumer products worldwide can be ordered and delivered to a customer's door with as little ease as using a tap on a smartphone while simultaneously taking teams of hundreds of workers, rarely working in synergy in the products supply chain to create this reality. Such supply chains can involve processes of raw materials being transported overseas for manufacturing, sent to another country for sub-product assembly, transported to another region for final assembly, followed by being transported to an origin distribution centre for collection, to be transported to a destination distribution centre, then to a retail outlet, then finally delivered to the customer—either using a customer pickup or final mile delivery service. Such a supply chain would be inoperable without technology to streamline the communication and information regarding the manufacturing, distribution, and transportation processes. While it is hard to argue against the benefits of the vast implementation of technology in supply chain management, some observations can be made regarding the organizational behaviour within this modern system. Technology in the supply chain allows those who work in an office, or white-collar workers, to no longer directly interact with on-site, blue-collar workers, creating a divide in their organizational behaviour despite sometimes working for the same firm. One key global supply chain industry that can illuminate this office and on-site attitudinal divide is the transportation industry—one in which I have worked throughout my entire career and have sported both blue and white-collar roles. This observation aims to explore the fundamental differences in organized behaviour between white and blue-collar workers within the transportation industry by drawing from personal experience and research.

Topics of Observation

While organizational behaviour is a field with endless research areas, this observation will focus on five key areas to highlight the significant differences between blue and white-collar workers in transportation. These are chosen based on the premise that the areas have a high variability between the tasks they are subjected to. Each area of observation is listed and further defined how they will be studied below:

Communication

At its core, communication is defined as human interaction; however, within the context of this observation, communication will be examined using a list of chosen applications provided by Baden Eunson's *Communication in the Workplace*, stated below:

- Organizational Communication Skills
- Conflict Resolution Skills
- Interpersonal Skills (listening, assertiveness, questioning and giving feedback)
- Writing and Documentation Skills

(Eunson, 2007)

Delegation and Autonomy

This observation will observe the power and necessity managers possess to assign tasks to employees while presenting the power employees have to choose the tasks to assign themselves and work without instruction from their manager.

Teamwork

Teamwork will be examined within the context of employees collaborating on a task, handing a task to a colleague due to being occupied with another task, managers assisting employees with an assigned task, and the motivation employees have to assist with another's task when they see fit—for example when an employee finishes their duties early, and instead of moving onto another job or leaving work early, they instead help a colleague who has yet to finish their own duty.

Morale

To be examined as "feelings about the prescribed activities of the group" (Weakliem, 2006), meaning the positive and negative attitudes employees hold when presented, undergoing, and completing a workplace duty.

Ethics

While ethics is an ever-expanding topic of organizational behaviour study, this observation will focus on areas of acceptable ethical behaviours typically found in the industry of focus, including:

 Human Resource related faults: Frequency and reason of faults and disciplinary actions for unethical behaviour

- Allowance of sensitive subjects: Which unrelated and precarious subject matters can be attributed to joking amongst colleagues in a matter of comradery, and which are frowned upon in the workplace, if not forbidden.
- Acceptable management behaviours: How managers give disciplinary actions, converse with their employees, and determine and disclose sensitive information

Roles of Observation

This observation will draw from two matters to explore organizational differences: those found in my personal experience of both the blue-collar and white-collar transportation industry, and those found through researched scholarly articles and related reports.

Personal Experiences

Commercial Moving Company

My blue-collar experience in the transportation industry revolves around the moving and delivery industry, beginning in the middle of high school. My first transportation job was a summer position at a commercial moving company, where I assisted in moving office furniture and office-related contents between buildings by loading and unloading 5-ton trucks, disassembling and installing furniture, and removing and correctly placing the furniture and contents in their respective staging areas within the office buildings. A typical job-site crew at this job ranged from 3-10 workers, within an age range of 25-40; on average, 90% were males and 10% were females. The size of the company was owner-based, with one location, and had between 10-20 movers, one owner, a sales representative, an accountant, and a job-site manager. I worked for this company for two and a half years before switching to another role.

Residential Moving Company

My second job in the transportation industry was a mover for a household moving company, which prided itself on hiring high school and college students. Similar to the commercial moving company, I assisted in moving all household goods and furniture between a customer's location, along with disassembly, reassembly, and loading and unloading a 5-ton truck; however, unlike the commercial moving company, I was trained to drive the 5-ton truck in this role along with becoming a team lead. The average crew demographic for this position was between 2-5 male workers, ranging from 17 to 25 years of age. The size of this company was smaller, with one location, ten movers employed at a maximum, an operations manager, and an owner. I was employed at this company for three years before finding another role elsewhere.

International Freight Forwarder

After working at four other moving and delivery companies not mentioned, consisting of similar responsibilities mentioned, I had secured a position in a white-collar transportation role—my current position as an International Freight Forwarding company owned by large a transportation corporation. My responsibilities for this job consist of arranging the trucking, airline, and ship line transportation, along with customs brokerage, costing and quoting, and customer relations for large commercial companies seeking to move their cargo in and out of

Canada. Being a relatively more profitable and larger organization, this company holds offices in almost all capitals of Canada, with between 6-20 employees at an office. The demographics of this company maintain a healthy variety. Given the international scope of the industry, this company employs people who originate from around the world: India, China, Hong Kong, Ukraine, Argentina, Australia, and Brazil—to name a few, along with boasting a nearly equal mix of genders. After working here for three years, I have undertaken more responsibilities with regard to more essential customers and have gained experience in technical knowledge of the transportation industry as a whole and upstanding customer service within my role. Humbly speaking, I am a highly valued member of this organization, and I plan to join the sales team after graduation from university.

Researched Roles

Although my experience as a mover, driver, and freight forwarder has provided me with a broader range of understanding of roles and their behaviours in the industry, there are some I have minimal direct experience with that will be researched further in this observation, including:

- Class 1 10-Ton Line-Haul Truck Driver: A blue-collar role where an individual is responsible for transporting commercial freight over long distances using a 10-ton Tractor Trailer.
- **Truck Dispatcher:** A white-collar role responsible for coordinating pickup and deliveries using the available trucks and drivers available for given shipments.

Observation: Blue-Collar

Commercial Moving Company

Communication

The organizational communication skills of this company had a face of professionalism, but underneath, were substandard. The company had presented itself to be dedicated and meticulous, but within the employee's relationship were biases towards employees based on their personal relationships with one another were shown. When conflict arose, the crew lead attempted to resolve issues themselves, but often escalated to the job site manager due to a lack of resolution experience. The conflict resolution would conclude with a dismissal for a swift solution, or a slap on the wrist, depending on the personal relationship. The interpersonal skills ranged from a place of comradery to a cold and upfront conversation, depending on the social relationship between two colleagues. This skill was highly dependent on if one liked someone on a personal level, creating an arguably unprofessional atmosphere. The writing and documentation skills of this company were standard to other companies with subtle differences. The job-site manager created the documentation, where the crew leads were responsible for filling out required sections—often in a hassled manner.

Delegation and Autonomy

The delegation within this role was of course nature—tasks were delegated up front to a level of demand. Shifts were announced the night before via a phone message by the owner, where the

job-site manager would then tell each crew which job they would be fulfilling the morning of. From there, the crew lead, with minimal professional leadership experience, would delegate tasks in their own style. Their style ranged from positively influential to a negatively toned demand. Autonomy was minimal, where if a crew member was delegated a task, they had to fulfill it, with no option of style or manner to do so, and were told when breaks would be by the crew lead. The crew lead had a minor level of autonomy, where they could choose when breaks would be, which employee would fulfil which task, and depending on their relationship with the job-site manager, could choose which employee would be on their job.

Teamwork

Teamwork within this company was mixed and dependent on the relationship between colleagues. Overall, the tasks for this role were straightforward and often one-person tasks. As long as someone was completing their duties, there was synergy in an operation; however, if someone was not keeping pace with other movers, they were frowned upon. Overall, teamwork relied on the comradery and capabilities within a job site crew.

Morale

Morale held a wide range, from high to low, on a given day. Reasons for high morale on a given job included a crew where everyone got along, and easy and short to average work, while reasons for low morale were the opposite—a crew where others did not get along or a hard and long shift consisting of 10-15 hours.

Ethics

The ethics of this company were some of the lowest I have seen. Some employees had poor attitudes towards their colleagues and their job, some showed up with alcohol on their breath, and all sensitive subject matters were for game within the conversation. The managers determined unacceptable behaviour to be "being caught" with substances, which resulted in dismissal, while other undesirable actions were met with a slap on the wrist. Sensitive information was guarded between the owner, job-site manager, and sometimes select crew leads, which created a "boys club" within the organization.

Residential Moving Company

Communication

While this company has a similar structure to the commercial moving company, it has key behavioural differences. The organizational communication skills were professional and open, where beneficial, and relayed with a positive attitude. Conflict resolution consisted of the operations manager sitting down with the disagreeing parties for resolution and often concluded with a consensus understanding. Interpersonal skills were acceptable, and most employees communicated professionally and rarely spoke from a negative perspective. The writing and documentation skills were similar to those of the first moving company, but they held a high restandard, and paperwork was rarely incorrectly documented. Overall, this company held a high degree of communication.

Delegation and Autonomy

Delegation was similar to the first moving company, as the tasks required were of a concrete and orderly nature; however, they were handed to others in an influential manner instead of demanding. The operations manager provided the crew lead with the job paperwork in the morning; however, they advised the whole crew at once of the necessary actions. The crew lead then delegated tasks to the crew in a positive manner accordingly.

Teamwork

Teamwork was higher than the first moving company as well. While each task a mover held was isolated, there was a consensus to switch roles between movers often to allow one undertaking a more physical role a break and switch to a less demanding task. The teamwork of this company was rooted in the organization's beliefs and values, creating a consistent synergy in the workplace.

Morale

A high morale was created through the company's values, as well. Besides complaints from employees of a lower wage compared to other moving companies, it was rare for a job site to hold low morale—even on overtime days. Overall, the crew got along with each other with ease regardless of personal relationships.

Ethics

The ethics of this company were held to a higher standard than the aforementioned as well. Human Resource faults were taken seriously, with no bias of the faulted employee seen. Dismissals were rare due to the company's higher hiring standards; however, dismissals were used when necessary. Sensitive subjects were seldom discussed and highly frowned upon if they were, as typically most employees considered most of such subjects to be forbidden; however, there was a difference of conversation between the customer and the crew, considered "shop talk." Acceptable management behaviours were within an acceptable standard as well. Management took disciplinary action in an ethical manner, conversed with the employees transparently regarding the company's operations, and used appropriate descriptions of sensitive information.

Class 1 10-ton Line-Haul Truck Driver

Communication

To examine the organizational communication skills of a line-haul truck driver, Tread offers 9 ways a truck driver can improve communication as listed below, which presents essential communication skills to become an exceptional driver in this role:

- 1. "Get to know your drivers
- 2. Use SMS for driver-dispatcher communications
- 3. Communicate in more than English
- 4. Don't abandon CB radios
- 5. Eliminate industry jargon

- 6. Never (communicate) when you're angry
- 7. Optimize dispatching with digital solutions
- 8. Use free video chat apps
- 9. Listen to your drivers"

(Alvarez, 2022)

As a line haul driver typically only needs to communicate with their dispatcher, the conflict resolution tends to be low, and as per the previous roles examined, can range from each employee and company they are associated with. The interpersonal skills of this role also reflect this topic; however, it is pertinent to note that listening to shipping instructions provided by the dispatchers is a must, and although it may be frowned upon, a level of questioning can be beneficial. For example, if a driver is given a pickup address they know is incorrect, it could save them from a dead run and time lost.

Delegation and Autonomy

The delegation of this role can be described as straightforward. Shipments are given to drivers through dispatchers, where it is the driver's responsibility to deliver the shipment to the destination within a given time frame. The autonomy of a driver is minimal due to this reason as well, where the autonomy they possess consists of when and where they take their breaks.

Teamwork

The teamwork of a linehaul driver is marginal, as they may communicate with one or two other employees of an organization. Typically, they only need to communicate with a dispatcher; however, in the case of team drivers, where two drivers are assigned to one truck to expedite a long-haul shipment while meeting maximum driving hour requirements, some teamwork can be involved. Similar to the previous cases, the nature of the teamwork in this role can vary from each individual within each organization.

Morale

Given the demanding nature of this role, the morale of a line-haul truck driver can be understood to be low. As Drivewyze reports, "a long-haul driver turnover rate averaging 94%." They further state the factors that contribute to this turnover rate, listed below:

- Extreme driving conditions
- High stress levels
- Isolation and loneliness
- Limited personal time
- Physical and mental health challenges
- Sleep deprivation
- Strict regulatory requirements
- Unpredictable schedule and long hours

(Patel, 2023)

Given these factors, it is evident that high fatigue is found in this role, causing low overall morale.

Ethics

The fundamental ethic of this role revolves around safety. This ethic is a must, as swaying from safety in this role leads to injury and death of others on the road. Outside of safety, the ethics of a line-haul driver vary from each driver to each company; however, given the lack of demand for them to possess a desirable personality, some drivers can hold lower personal ethics regarding discussing sensitive subjects and acceptable behaviours. As long as their cargo is delivered in a safe and timely manner, their behaviour has a lower tolerance of arguably unethical behaviours than other roles.

Observation: White-Collar

International Freight Forwarder

Communication

Communication as a freight forwarder is vital, as the whole role revolves around this area. As it is a remote role, most communication is done through email, with occasional phone calls. Since freight forwarders communicate with fellow employees, vendors, and customers, they must maintain a high level of professionalism within their correspondences. Given the high standard of professionalism, there is a minimum amount of conflict within this role; however, when it does arise, it is typically resolved first as one-on-one between the parties; otherwise, a manager may become involved. If a serious incident occurs, it will be reported to the company's corporate human resource department, with fair and potentially severe consequences. The interpersonal communication skills of this role remain high as well, where listening, assertiveness, questioning and giving feedback are vital; otherwise, mistakes that can cost a shipment and the company time and money can occur. While assertive communication is present, it rarely becomes aggressive. The writing and documentation skills of a freight forwarder are a key asset. It is their role to communicate with all parties involved in a shipment, typically through email, and they are responsible for creating and coordinating all documentation for a shipment, from pickup to delivery on an international level.

Delegation and Autonomy

Delegation is done through a manager designating a freight forwarder, either a zone, a mode of transportation to handle, a customer assigned to them, or all of these. For example, I handle all air import and export shipments within Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and a portion of less than container load import. Once their area is assigned, a freight forwarder acts as their own manager, with little managerial intervention as they are responsible for coordinating and managing each shipment assigned to them, providing this role with high autonomy.

Teamwork

Given the nature of autonomy of this role, employees in a freight forwarding company rarely need to work together, except if there is an issue for a particular shipment, where fellow employees then help each other to problem solve for resolution. The essence of teamwork is found in the theory of diagonal integration in freight forwarding, where shippers, consignees, freight forwarders, transportation companies, customs brokers, and warehouses from separate

companies all work together to transport a shipment, all through the coordination and communication of a freight forwarder. A successful person in this role will create high teamwork between these parties.

Morale

While burnout in this role can be an issue, similar to other office jobs, the morale of this organization's office is high. All employees are satisfied with their jobs and are happy to work for this company. While there is some deviation of morale throughout the company's offices in other regions, overall, they maintain this status quo. Good work is celebrated with praise, company lunches and barbeques are frequent, and birthdays and Christmases are typically celebrated with a party, creating a healthy camaraderie and morale.

Ethics

Like the other topics, this company maintains a high level of practiced ethics. Although they are bureaucratic to a degree, minimal unethical behaviours are shown; human resource faults are held to a high standard, allowance of sensitive subjects is prohibited to a standard where politics are not discussed, and acceptable management behaviours are a model of other office jobs.

Truck Dispatcher

Communicate

Truck Dispatcher Training states 12 Tips for Communication as a dispatcher, listed below:

- "Respect
- Clear Communication
- Active Listening
- Open Dialogue
- Honesty
- Frequent Communication
- Use of Technology
- Positive Reinforcement
- Problem Solving
- Training
- Adapt to the Driver
- Acknowledge Personal Milestones"

(M., 2023)

This list provides insight into the communication skills a successful dispatcher should possess. Overall, they should approach organizational and interpersonal communication promptly, concisely, and positively. Conflict resolution would vary between companies but would begin with resolving issues one-on-one and then asking for managerial intervention. Their writing and documentation skills would be similar to freight forwarders, as they are responsible for ensuring they receive correct information for a shipment and creating bill of ladings with accurate information.

Delegation and Autonomy

The delegation of this role consists of the dispatcher receiving notice to transport a shipment from a customer or freight forwarder, then directing a driver to pick-up and deliver the shipment, along with receiving update requests from customers. Given the straightforward nature of the delegation, there is little autonomy available as a dispatcher, similar to a line-haul driver.

Teamwork

A successful dispatcher will work alongside their drivers to coordinate transporting shipments and implement diagonal integration with those from whom a dispatcher receives orders to share information regarding transit times and related shipment information. Utilizing technology in a trucking company can create drastic benefits for a dispatcher. For example, with automated system tracking, they would not need to contact a driver directly for location updates to provide customers.

Morale

Given the demanding nature of this role, where customers and freight forwarders are asking for updates while requesting and providing truck drivers with information, a truck dispatcher is one of the most stressful roles in transportation. Mizanur Rahaman elaborates on this in their article, How Stressful is Being a Truck Dispatcher? with some factors described below:

- "High-pressure Environment: Truck dispatchers operate in a fast-paced, high-pressure environment. They must coordinate numerous factors simultaneously, from scheduling deliveries to managing unexpected issues like roadblocks or weather disruptions.
- **Responsibility:** They hold a significant responsibility for ensuring timely deliveries while adhering to stringent regulations and client expectations. A single mistake can lead to significant delays or financial losses.
- (Demanding) Availability: Dispatchers often work round the clock to handle emergencies, queries, and scheduling changes, leading to irregular work hours and potential burnout.
- **Communication Challenges:** Coordinating with drivers, clients, and other stakeholders demands strong communication skills. Miscommunication or misunderstandings can escalate into major issues.
- **Emotional Toll:** Dealing with unforeseen circumstances, upset clients, and demanding schedules can take an emotional toll, leading to stress and anxiety." (Rahaman, 2024)

Ethics

With a role this demanding, it is evident that it holds a high burnout rate within the industry, creating an overall low morale, with deviations in mind depending on the company and individuals involved in this position. Dispatchers hold a power of which drivers receive favoured and unfavoured shipments in a trucking company, which can be abused if not used correctly. Some trucking-related forum posts provided by drivers elaborate on this:

- "It feels like (there is) almost daily battle from sending me on difficult runs to assigning
 me bogus tractors that were either not suited for the job at hand or in need of repair,
 therefore I've been subjected to an even tougher job than necessary." (2015)
- "if you were not in that inner circle, you were always left with the bottom of the pile runs, the short runs and the low paying runs." (2014)

While these may be exceptions, these cases demonstrate that dispatchers can practice unethical behaviours in their organization. Allowance of sensitive subjects and acceptable management behaviours can also vary between each individual in each company. DispatchPrep.com provides insight into the key factors a dispatcher must practice to remain ethical. "The industry must prioritize environmental sustainability, worker welfare, safety, social responsibility, and fair competition. By embracing these values, freight dispatchers can contribute to a more ethical and sustainable supply chain" (2023). With a high power available in a position, ethics holds a high variability within a role, and it is up to the individual to uphold ethical standards.

Comparison of Similarities and Differences

With the above roles all examined in their respective areas of observation, we can now identify the key attributes white-collar and blue-collar roles in transportation share and deviate from each other.

Communication

Overall, communication between white and blue-collar roles holds more differences than similarities. White-collar roles hold a constant professional level of communication. They are typically done via phone calls or email, while blue-collar roles can potentially hold less professional correspondence, with primarily face-to-face communication due to blue-collar jobs. Conflict resolution and interpersonal communication skills are held to a higher degree with white-collar roles due to the roles requiring professional communication with more customers or industry professionals. Writing and documentation skills can be similar as both blue and white-collar roles require attention to detail with documents; however, given that white-collar roles usually involve creating documentation, blue-collar roles can be of a lower standard.

Delegation and Autonomy

While delegation can hold similarities within each field, autonomy between white and blue-collar jobs holds more differences. Ultimately, delegation is decided through customers awarding orders to transportation companies for each field—it is, however, up to managers and coordinators to decide how each job is completed. For example, from my personal experiences in each field, when an order is requested for moving and freight forwarding, it will typically be delegated to the same individuals with specialized experience with the order. Autonomy, however, holds differences. In freight forwarding, when I am coordinating multiple orders a day, I can choose which shipment to work on first and have leniency on when I take my breaks, while with moving, a team takes breaks together and are assigned one task at a time with minimal choice.

Teamwork

While teamwork is vital in both fields of the industry, the way it functions can differ. White-collar roles usually interact with two to three individuals at a time, being a shipper, consignee, and carrier, communicating virtually. In contrast, blue-collar roles can work on shipments with up to ten people at a time, usually including their coworkers, face-to-face. Given this, teamwork is more essential in blue-collar jobs than white-collar roles.

Morale

Like any industry, morale can differ in how each company treats its shareholders within a socially sustainable context. However, the shared idea of transportation in both roles can be observed. With the demanding and repetitive nature of transportation and supply chain as a whole in mind, it is little surprise "that one in three supply chain professionals show symptoms of a burnout" (Wagenvoort, 2023). While it can be mitigated within each company, overall, white and blue-collar roles in transportation share similarities in low morale due to the nature of the industry.

Ethics

Similar to morale, companies hold different internal levels of their ethics; however, overall, blue-collar and white-collar roles hold more differences than similarities. As blue-collar roles typically do not require interacting with customers or professional contacts directly, some leniency can be given with regards to allowance of sensitive subjects and potentially human resource related faults. Acceptable management behaviours differ as well as managers must uphold higher standards with white-collar roles for the same reason mentioned. White-collar roles as a whole maintain a higher level of professionalism in any job field, creating a higher level of ethics, and the transportation industry is not any different.

Conclusion

This observation has highlighted the key similarities and differences in organized behaviour between white and blue-collar workers within the transportation industry by drawing from personal experience and research. With the implementation of technology in the industry creating an environment where they no longer require personal interactions, a divide can be seen between blue and white-collar workers concerning their communication styles, morale and ethics. While autonomy and teamwork hold differences as well, they are primarily due to the demanding and straightforward nature of the transportation industry; however, on the same topic, out of the studied areas, delegation and morale hold the most similarities for the same reason. Because of the differences in the roles themselves, it would be inadvisable to create an industry where blue-collar and white-collar workers hold similarities in all of these fields, as some of the differences serve a purpose; however, in the purpose of lowering the industry's high burnout rate, areas including lower ethics, and scopes of communication in blue-collar roles could reflect white-collar roles to increase morale and social sustainability. In contrast, white-collar roles must continuously increase ethics to do the same. The transportation industry is demanding on its workers, and it is up to the industry's management to mitigate burnout

through continuous implementation of organizational behaviour practices to increase social sustainability in supply chain management.

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