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NAVIGATING FEW ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

Kauthami Sundresan[1], Chok Nyen Vui[2], Nurul Shafina Khairudin[3], Siti Haryani Mat Yusoff[4], Nur Zulaikha Mohamed Sa'dom[5*]

[1,3,4,5] School of Management and Business, MILA University, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia
[2] School of Business, GlobalNxt University, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

[*] nur.zulaikha@miu.edu.my

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to discover some of the challenges the airline industry faces particularly with workplace ethics and to investigate the recommendation for the organization to overcome these challenges and ensure long term profitability. The challenges consist of poor ethics in airlines, bribery, and misleading advertisement. This study used qualitative study method with a purposive sampling strategy. Four representatives of the Airlines company were selected with a range of year services between 2 years to 10 years' working experience from various departments. The result showed the airline industry faces a significant number of problems and roadblocks. Companies in the airline industry find it challenging to maintain a smooth flow of operations and activities. The findings from this study are expected to benefit the airlines industry, the travelers and the researchers that specialized in organizational behaviour study.

Keywords: Workplace ethics, ethical challenges, airline industry, qualitative method

Paper type: Empirical article

Introduction

Rules of ethics and behaviour that potential workers must adhere to is expected, but little is known about how these codes are being practiced in a real-life setting. Ethical behaviour in aviation and aerospace industries is the topic of this study, which aims to measure the success of these strategies in achieving their goals. The theft of sensitive information was the first scandal. Boeing hired a former Lockheed employee who had stolen critical material in exchange for a new position. But Boeing lied about the significance of the documents to Lockheed, who discovered them. Few studies have been conducted prior to the 1990s to examine the efficacy of corporate initiatives. Research and organizations dedicated to ethics have grown since Boeing's troubles (Ethics & Compliance Certification Institute, 2016). The

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fundamental goal of this investigation is to discover some of the challenges that the airline industry faces, particularly with workplace ethics.

Another important goal of this research is to provide some of the recommendations for the organisations to overcome these challenges and ensure long-term profitability. With the ever-increasing pace of business, globalization-related challenges have had a negative impact on the organisations that operate in the market. Because of worries about inadequate ethical standards, bribery, and misleading advertising, every company has begun to take corrective action in response to the issues they are facing. These concerns have a detrimental influence on the profitability and sales volume of enterprises. All of these difficulties are having a negative impact on the organization's performance, and they are raising questions about workplace ethics.

Literature Review

In the workplace, there is a set of conditions that are primarily intended to promote high levels of motivation and job satisfaction. Employee morale, productivity, job satisfaction, and general efficiency are all improved because of the use of these factors (Shaikh et al., 2019). The following are examples of accomplishments and progress, the opportunity for advancement, recognition, the work itself, and responsibility. When these prerequisites are not met, some job situations are created purposely to cause dissatisfaction among employees. When these factors are present, they do not have a significant motivating effect, when they are absent, they dissatisfy, which is why they are referred to as dissatisfies in the literature (Yang & Wei, 2018). Business policy and administration, technical supervision, interpersonal interactions with superiors, peers, and subordinates, salary, job security, personal life, and working conditions.

Issue 1: Poor Ethics

In October 2017, there was a problem when the airline's staff failed to inform the passengers about extra luggage fees during check-in and instead took their bags as they were boarding. Passengers found this disrespectful and considered it an unethical practice. Although the airline said it was for extra income, they could have handled it for free during check-in, but now passengers had to pay or have their luggage removed. Some passengers vowed never to fly with this airline again, despite the ticket price, and warned others to double-check their fees before boarding because the airline wouldn't tell them during check-in.

Issue 2: Bribery

Bribery is when someone gives money or something valuable to make another person change their behavior for personal gain. In this case, the CEO is accused of taking payments in exchange for helping obtain an international license, which breaks industry regulations. The airline does not meet international requirements because it lacks the necessary experience or aircraft, causing an ethical issue. In a separate incident, a flight attendant collected money from passengers to change their seats without their consent. When it comes to financial items, there are two types: monetary and nonmonetary. Monetary items have a fixed dollar value, while nonmonetary items change in value over time. In the context of the incident, the bribery is considered monetary because the flight attendant collected money from the passengers.

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Issue 3: Misleading Advertisement

The airline's ethical issue involves misleading ticket pricing advertisements. It is unethical to have deceptive advertising because it distorts and misrepresents a product. Ethical advertising should be truthful, positive, and supported by evidence and fairness (Tan, 2018). Misleading ads, like those used by the airline, are unethical because they distort a product's features and benefits. Ethical ads should be honest, upbeat, and backed by evidence and fairness. Companies cannot make false claims to deceive customers into thinking they are getting a good deal. This is referred to as "deceptive advertising" (Johan et al., 2021).

Methodology

Research Design

The qualitative survey method will be used in this study to investigate workplace ethics at airlines company and determine whether an encouragement of the ethical workplace culture increases overall productivity of the organization. In addition, qualitative research will include the interviews with Airlines company's Human Resource Department. Regardless of the merits and demerits, remote interviews can be a beneficial addition or alternative for traditional face-to-face interviews (Khan et al, 2022). Due to COVID-19 restriction, the interviews were performed remotely with the intention of understanding how people in certain situations acquire the ability to perceive, act, and cope with their everyday circumstances.

Sample and data collection

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to collect data from four individuals across various departments and job titles. The researcher successfully obtained responses from all four participants, which provided substantial information on workplace ethics and the airline's most significant. The data for the study is gathered using a various method, including both primary (interviews) and secondary sources. The researchers concentrates on developing and understanding themes based on participant responses from goals or interviews. The topic analysis method is used for in-depth research, assuring precise results. In this case, the approach was utilized to assess data from four Airlines employees' responses.

This study interviewed a small group of airline employees, all of whom had more than two years of experience with the company and were pleased with their jobs. Notably, the study struggled to achieve a high response rate due to the difficulty in reaching out to a larger audience for their perspectives on the mentioned concerns. The low response rate was attributed to the nature of the study, which made gathering varied opinions difficult.

Due to logistical restrictions, the study posed questions via email during the interview procedure. Despite these constraints, the questions were submitted in response to the original contact. Unfortunately, because of this method, the interviews lacked traditional face-to-face interaction. Because email communication is asynchronous, it allows for greater flexibility, but it also limits the depth of connection and real-time responses. The study recognizes the trade-offs involved in this technique, balancing practical issues with remote communication limits.

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Results

The interviews were conducted with 4 representatives of the Airlines company in Southeast Asia. The candidates were selected with a range of year services between 2 years to 10 years with various departments including customer service department, cabin crew, human resources department and marketing department.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis approach was utilized to analyze the data. A qualitative research method used to find and analyze patterns or themes within a dataset is thematic analysis. It entails arranging and evaluating written or visual material in order to discover relevant insights. Thematic analysis allows researchers to organize material into themes, providing for a full comprehension of the underlying patterns and difficulties in the data. The interview's responses and feedback can be further illustrated using a fishbone diagram, as shown below.

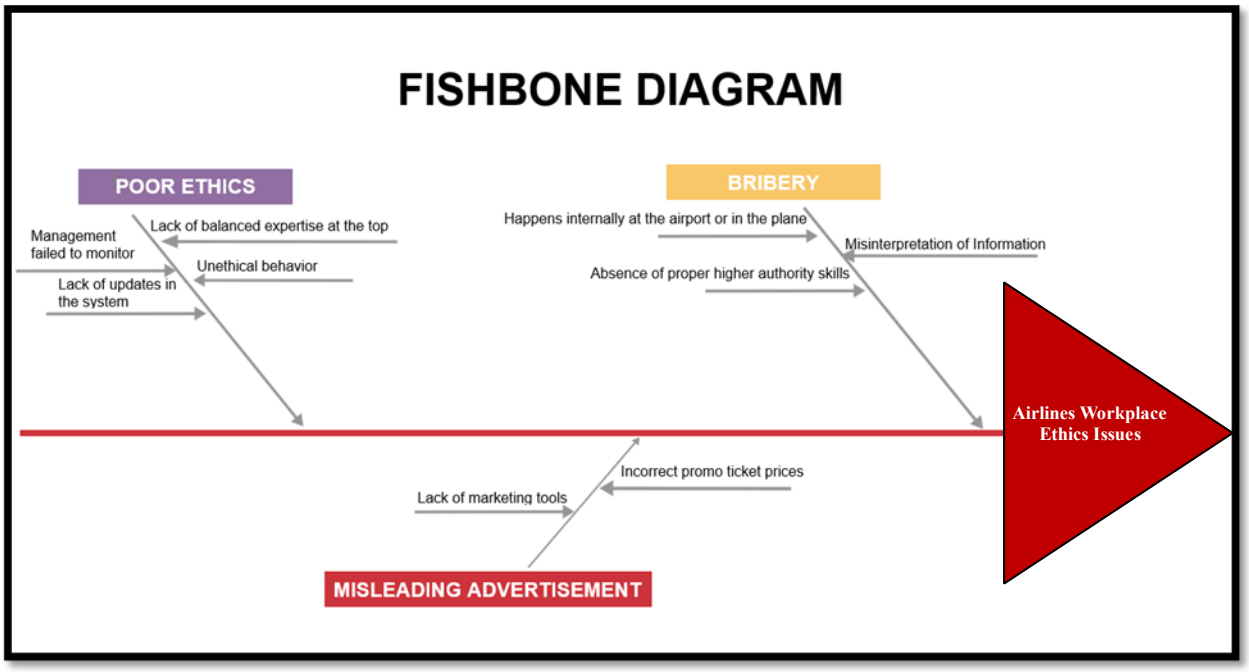


Figure 1: Airlines Issues – Fishbone diagram

Poor ethics

The primary root cause of poor ethics is a deficiency in well-balanced knowledge among top-level management leading to unethical behavior of the subordinates due to lack of monitoring and absence of system upgrades of workloads. The subordinates suffer due to ineffective leadership, hence contributing to negative relationships and increased stress among employees. Moreover, unethical behavior, becomes another point of emphasis for workers, causing them to disregard their job because of the stress they are experiencing because of these difficulties.

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The responses received from respondent are.
(..) *Absence of proper higher authority skills. My colleague and I faced this issue together when we found out that our Reporting Manager, has very less skills in the field and came in by recommendation. It was clear as day as he suffered to perform his tasks on the first day, from the second day onwards, all his tasks were passed on to us and any problems were to be dealt with by ourselves. It was a tough 12 months.*

(..) I have seen the failure of the management in not monitoring their employees effectively. The management do not pay much attention to the crew's needs and only prioritize the sayings of the pilots. Favoritism is played a lot where the crew always loses, where they end up leaving airlines for other companies.

(..) Lack of balanced expertise at the top. It is very disappointing and tiring to compensate when we have less to no experienced leaders to guide us. They would take a lot of time to solve one random issue and would just ignore other issues as they have no time to handle those.

Bribery

Bribery only exists with ulterior motives, thus crumble the work of ethics in which occurs in Airlines company that may be seen both at the airport and in the aircraft involving either airlines officer and passengers or cabin crews and passengers.

The responses received from respondent are:
(..) The corporate must step up their efforts for more publicity and advertisements as the outreach is not enough where the money poured into these investments are coming out as losses and no one seems to be interested I am handling this issue.

(..) "During one of my flights, I saw that one of the cabin crew was taking money from a passenger for serving him extra food. I have also heard from other cabin crews that some of them take money for taking pictures with them".

Misleading Advertisement

Misleading advertising has been added to the list of issues concerning airlines ethics where 2 issues have been discovered. Lack of marketing materials limits their advertising activities, leading to failures to adequately consider the impression customers may derive from their advertisements. In addition, the misleading fares or known as "fat finger fare", were caused by a human error, specifically highlighted due to mistake on the part staff airline or travel website who accidentally pushed the incorrect button or keyboard key.

The feedback received is:
(..) I have observed this specific issue, that is incorrect promotion ticketing prices. Not only that, the terms and conditions in the policy note of the website were also changed without prior notification".

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(..) Lack of marketing tools. There are not many tools for marketing our advertising on various platforms that also don't support double verification. Airlines provides a competitive advantage in terms of customers where they know how to capture the human heart to their attention.

Discussion

Workplace ethics issues at Airlines encompass various aspects, ranging from leadership challenges to unethical behavior, bribery, and advertising discrepancies. Addressing these issues is crucial for maintaining a healthy and ethical work environment.

Poor Ethics in airlines

To strengthen ethical practices within airlines, a clear operational procedure must be implemented to enhance employee knowledge through continuous training, establish effective reporting mechanisms, and create management review boards. These measures will contribute to a workplace culture that prioritizes ethical behavior and provides robust systems for prevention and response.

Bribery in airlines

To safeguard against bribery, airlines staff should carefully assess the situation, maintain their composure, and obtain vital information when presented with an offer. It is critical to promptly report the situation to a supervisor or authorized person to maintain honesty and integrity and to ensure rapid and effective action against bribery attempts.

Misleading advertisement in airlines

Misleading advertising is also known as deceptive advertising where is neither deceitful nor unlawful; rather, they violate the moral standards of human conduct in respect of their poor aim and consequences. Airlines must avoid exaggerating a product's potential or performance for a better product's potential image conveyed. The airlines also need to pay close attention to the issues that customers have about the product advertisements as well as maintaining openness within the organization and process is essential.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it is reasonable to conclude that businesses engaged in the airline company face a significant number of problems and roadblocks. Companies are increasingly finding it challenging to maintain a smooth flow of operations and activities throughout all of their departments. Many different types of obstacles have been created for businesses in order to achieve their intended aims and aspirations because of the issues and problems that have arisen. Because of the present working environment in the aviation business, organizations are required to make changes to their strategies and overall action plans on a regular basis. Employees must work together and put out the necessary effort in this situation to cope with the fast-changing corporate environment.

The purpose of this research was to increase awareness of ethical issues that arise in the workplace at Airlines industry. The enterprises acknowledge the need of workplace ethics for a firm to remain in business for the long term. The researcher has highlighted a few ethical characteristics of the workplace that, in our opinion, have a direct impact on the profitability of a firm. According to the research, when it comes to working environment management, the under research airline industry is now grappling with several workplace ethics issues, including poor ethics, bribery, and misleading advertising. Each of these issues is a significant factor in why employees in the organization choose to resign or leave their jobs when they are unsatisfied with their positions**.**

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests in relation to this study and its publication.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics Declaration

Although formal ethical approval was not obtained, the study was conducted in accordance with recognised principles of ethical research and good research practice. Appropriate safeguards were implemented to ensure informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, privacy, and responsible handling of research data.

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