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FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION OF A MAJOR MIDDLE EASTERN AIRLINE

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ABSTRACT

Employees' job satisfaction plays an important role in strengthening their relations with an organization. This phenomenon carries more significance in the aviation industry due to the involvement of heavy investment and high competition. The present study aims to identify critical factors that affect the satisfaction level of employees' at major Middle Eastern airports. Data were collected from 406 respondents with the help of a questionnaire comprised of thirty questions, divided into seven major categories. Respondents were responsible for providing ground services to passengers at the airport. A Likert type scale was used to evaluate answers varying from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Validity and reliability tests were applied to ensure the suitability of data and authenticity of responses. Data were analyzed with the help of independent sample T-tests, ANOVA and Regression analysis. Results of the study are beneficial for leadership of the aviation industry, who can use these factors to develop improvement strategies. These strategies will not only enhance the satisfaction level of their employees, but also improve the productivity and profitability of their respective organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction shows the contentment level of a person from his/her job. Organizations face challenges due to the dynamic business environment of the 21st century and employees' job satisfaction is one of them. It not only affects the motivation level of employees but also serves as a major driving force behind their performance (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012). The phenomenon of job satisfaction depends upon physical, psychological and environmental factors that employees' face in their workplaces. However, most business organizations pay little attention to improving their work environment, which adversely affects the performance of their employees. On the other hand, successful organizations understand the importance of employees' satisfaction and its impact on their performance.

The phenomenon of work engagement has more significance in the airlines industry due to the enormous diversity of customers on many (Ilkhanizadeh & Karatepe, 2017). Under these circumstances, employees' satisfaction gains are more importance due to its direct relevance on customer dealing and customer satisfaction. This study measures the satisfaction level of employees' working in a major Middle Eastern Airlines (MEA) and identifies factors affecting their satisfaction level. For some time, airline management has observed a sharp decline of around 10% in the satisfaction level of its customers. This decline could reduce their market share and profitability. As evident from previous studies, the importance of customer satisfaction increased due to additional availability of low-cost carriers coupled with higher customer expectations. Preliminary surveys were conducted by Middle Eastern Airports (MEA) to identify reasons

behind customers' dissatisfaction. Customers expressed major dissatisfaction from experiences prior to boarding their flight.

Based on these earlier survey results, the ground services staff (GSS) including 406 people were selected for the study. They are the first major contact point with passengers before boarding. The objective was to explore the satisfaction level of employees. Results of the study can add to the existing body of literature regarding factors which can produce dissatisfaction among customers of the airline industry. The remaining sections of the article are organized into brief literature review, which is followed by data collection. Then, analysis is conducted, and the results are discussed. Finally, summarized findings of the study are presented in the conclusion section that are followed by a list of references at the end.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aviation industry jobs have always been demanding and stressful due to the involvement of substantial workload and diversified customers. Providing services to a broad range of customers from different socio-economic and multi-cultural backgrounds requires motivational involvement of their employees. Therefore, any slackness on behalf of employees during this process can result in dissatisfied customers (Cheng-Hua & Hsin-Li, 2012). Under these circumstances, organizations face an uphill task to create an environment, where employees feel satisfied and perform their work with dedication and commitment. Employee performance is directly linked with organizational performance, thus, it creates a challenge for commercial airlines to reduce the turnover intentions of its employees (Karatepe & Vatankhah, 2014). The aviation industry faces tremendous pressures due to rising expectations of customers coupled with decreasing costs of low-cost carriers (An & Noh, 2011). This phenomenon gains more significance at airports, where ground staff handles a number of tasks starting from passenger check-in to their final boarding. Any slackness during this process can lead to dissatisfaction among customers (Cheng-Hua & Hsin-Li, 2012). On the other hand, their creative performance and emotional competence helps them in dealing with both rude and troublesome passengers (Lages & Piercy, 2012).

Any direct linkage between airport staff and airline customers emphasizes the psychological and behavioral aspects of employees more than objective and cognitive aspects (Lee, An, & Noh, 2012). However, employees' give more importance to factors like organizational culture, workplace values, fairness of policies, decentralization of authority and available opportunities for their future growth (Liang & Hsieh, 2005). They feel more satisfied when organizations attach employee interests with their own interests and create a win-win concept for both (Nahar, Islam, & Ullah, 2017). Numerous researches address the issue of employees' job satisfaction in aviation industry. However, most are context specific and more applicable for the situations in which they are done. This study identifies crucial factors related to airlines employee job satisfaction in the Middle East.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present study examines the role of factors that critically affect the satisfaction level of employees in a major Middle Eastern Airport (MEA). Data were collected from the staff of ground services, who were the first major point of contact with passengers. In total, there were 3,317 employees of Ground Services Staff (GSS), who were primarily responsible for ground operations in three major airports of the country. Out of them, 406 employees were randomly selected as a sample of the population with 95% confidence interval. These respondents were selected from four major airports of the country as: A (128), B (128), C (85), D (50).

An online survey form was used for the purpose of data collection to provide respondents the flexibility of both time and place. This was beneficial as most were working in shifts making it impossible to administer the forms in one combined sitting. However, survey questions were explained in detail by two surveyors to

their respective team leaders for authenticity of responses. Furthermore, validity and reliability tests were applied to ensure the credibility of data.

Results of the tests were found to be 0.947 and 0.973, respectively, while the response rate of the survey was 100 % due to the involvement of team supervisors who reminded their staff members to complete the survey. Collected data were analyzed with the help of independent sample T-test and ANOVA. A total of thirty questions were asked which were divided into seven broad categories. These questions were designed based on a literature review and preliminary surveys from the local stakeholders to identify related job factors. A Likert type scale was used to elicit replies from respondents. The scale varies from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The first part of the survey consisted of demographic factors followed by thirty questions divided into seven main categories. These major categories of the surveyed results are as follows: 1. Job Satisfaction, 2.) Compensation & Benefits, 3.) Work Environment, 4.) Management Style, 5.) Work Colleagues, 6.) Job Stability, and 7.) Learning & Development

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability tests were conducted to determine reliability and consistency of the data. Table 1 indicates the data is reliable and can be used for further analysis. High values in reliability and validity columns gives credence to the authenticity of responses. It shows that all questions are understood in the same manner by respondents and variation in the responses is original. Also, it depicts that the collected data is credible and fulfills the purpose for which it is collected.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Test Results

Section	Description	No. of Questions	Reliability	Validity
1	Job Satisfaction	5	0.883	0.94
2	Compensations & Benefits	7	0.839	0.916
3	Work Environment	6	0.806	0.898
4	Management Style	4	0.878	0.937
5	Work Colleagues	2	0.74	0.86
6	Job Stability	2	0.892	0.945
7	Learning & Development	4	0.82	0.906
Total		30	0.947	0.973

Table 1 indicates the reliability and validity of data. Results shows the data is reliable and can be used for further analysis.

Table 2 shows the age distribution of respondents. The largest demographic ranges between 30-39 years with 154 respondents. The lowest number of respondents occurred for the 50-59 years age group. Employees with moderate levels of job experience constitute the largest respondent group followed by employees between 40-49 years of age. Similarly, employees with the minimum amount of job experience comprised 16.7% of the surveyed population. Out of the total sample population, 112 were managers, while 294 worked on non-managerial positions.

Table 2: Frequencies by Age

Age	Frequency	Percent %
20-29	68	16.7
30-39	154	37.9***
40-49	118	29.1
50-59	66	16.3
Total	406	100

Table 2 shows the frequencies of these respondents according to their age groups. Maximum number of population ranges between 30-39 years (**), while minimum number ranges from 50-59 years.

Table 3 shows the categorization of employees based on their educational qualifications. Respondents with high school qualifications constitute 39.4% of the sample, while respondents with Bachelor qualification comprises of 39.2%. Employees, who did not finish high school were 4.4% of the sample. Individuals with qualifications higher than the bachelor level make up 17 % of the population and mostly occupy managerial positions. Results | shows that most respondents are qualified enough to understand the theme of questions and give their responses in the best possible manner. In addition, their qualifications also reflect their suitable candidacy to serve customers in a satisfied manner.

Table 3: Frequencies by Educational Qualifications

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percent %
Below High School	18	4.4*
High School	160	39.4
Bachelor	159	39.2
Above Bachelor	69	17
Total	406	100

Table 3 indicates the categorization of employees based on their educational qualifications. Most respondents had high school or above qualifications, while only 4.4% did not finish high school (*).

Table 4 shows the general satisfaction level of employees in seven broad categories. Respondents show the highest level of agreement in sections 1, 5 & 6, which corresponds to job satisfaction, working with colleagues and job stability. Similarly, they have average level of agreement in 2, 3 & 4 that are related with compensation, work environment and management style, respectively. However, they expressed disagreement in category 7, which is learning and development.

Table 4: Trend Identification for Survey Sections

Section	Weighted Average	Trend
1	3.44***	Agree
2	3**	Average
3	3.01**	Average
4	3.16**	Average
5	3.82***	Agree
6	3.59***	Agree
7	2.5*	Disagree
General Trend	3.22	Average

Table 4 shows the general satisfaction level of employees in seven broad categories. They expressed disagreement in category 7(*), average agreement in category 3,4 &5 (**) and maximum agreement in category 1,5 & 6 (***).

This finding indicates that employees are neither satisfied with their learning opportunities nor are they are happy with their career development plans. This phenomenon not only hampers their future promotion and growth, but also cultivates dissatisfaction and lack of motivation among them. On the other hand, they did not express strong agreement in any category, further showing their lack of satisfaction. Finally, an independent sample t-test was conducted to identify difference in responses between managers and employees.

Table 5 shows a value of 0.289, which is not significant implying the null hypothesis is not rejected. The hypothesis was established on the premise that there is no significant difference in the satisfaction level of managers and employees. The result indicates that both tiers of employees expressed the same level of dissatisfaction despite their different job levels. Even though the surveyed airports operate in different regional zones, the responses are generally the same. Similarly, there exists a significant difference between job positions and job responsibilities between managers and workers. However, the null hypothesis was not rejected highlighting the need to investigate this factor. To accomplish this tack, we conduct ANOVA to verify difference in responses due to demographic factors, such as airport, age and educational qualification.

Table 5: Independent Sample t-Test

Independent-Sample t-test	Sig	Evidence Level
General Trend for Employees Satisfaction	0.289	There is no evidence of change

This table shows the value of 0.289, which is greater than 0.05. This implies that the null hypothesis is true and there is no significant difference in the satisfaction level of managers and employees

Table 6 shows the impact of age, airport and education on the satisfaction level of employees. The values of age and airport are 0.023 and 0.000 respectively, which are less than 0.05. This implies the null hypothesis is valid that age and airport does not cause any variation in the satisfaction level of employees. However, the value for the education factor is 0.06, which is greater than 0.05. It shows the satisfaction level of employees varies with variations in educational level of employees. People with higher levels of education respond differently relative to employees with lower level of education. However, this variation is not observed among the same respondents based on their age and airports.

Table 6: ANOVA Test for Age, Airport and Education Factors

ANOVA Test	Sig	Evidence Level
Age	0.023***	No evidence of change
Airport	0.000***	No evidence of change
Education	0.060	Evidence of change

This table shows that age and airport does not cause variation in the satisfaction level of employees as both values are less than 0.05 (***). However, the value for education factor is 0.06, which is greater than 0.05 shows that satisfaction level varies with the variation in educational level of employees.

Equation 1 shows the regression analysis of respondent's overall satisfaction in relation with seven broad categories of questionnaire. The p-value of 0.02 indicates the null hypothesis is rejected that there is impact of the seven parameters on the satisfaction level of workers. Similarly, an R-Square of 90% indicates that variations in these predictor variables significantly create variation in the response variable.

$$Satisfaction = 37.80 + 3.333 \,(Compensation) + 3.519 \,(Work\ Environment) + 1.296 \,(Age) +$$
$$2.242 \,(Education) + 1.326 \,(Airport) + 0.556 \,(Management\ Style) +$$
$$1.143 \,(Work\ Colleagues) + 4.815 \,(Job\ Stability) + 7.593 \,(Learning\ and\ Development) \quad (1)$$

The regression equation depicts the positive impact of these factors on the overall satisfaction level of GSS. Age, education, airport and work colleagues have a smaller impact on satisfaction relative to compensation, work environment and job stability. However, learning and development enjoys the highest impact on the satisfaction level of employees. Results of the regression compliment the earlier findings in which employees expressed dissatisfaction from their learning and development (L&D) opportunities. These findings clearly indicate that L&D plays a major role in the satisfaction level of employees and any dissatisfaction may lead to lack of motivation and other stresses among workers. Table 7 shows the results of the companion regression in which each independent variable is run separately against the dependent variable. Interestingly, both age and education were negatively related to satisfaction during their individual results, however, their relationship became positive in the combined regression model. This finding indicates that satisfaction level decreases with an increase in age and education respectively, but when these two factors are combined with other factors, the relationship is changed.

The impact of L&D was significant in both single and combined results, indicating the importance of this variable on the overall satisfaction level of employees. The table further shows the significant values of for job stability and learning variables indicating that these two variables are responsible for maximum variation in the response variable of satisfaction. In the last column, p-values indicate that compensation, work environment and L& D are the most significant variable in terms of their relationship with the dependent variable. Similarly, the last row indicates that overall, the model is responsible for predict 90% of the variation in the response variable with p-value of 0.024 < 0.05 indicates that the regression model is statistically significant in predicting the changes of employee satisfaction.

Table 7: Regression Results of the Individual and Combined Predictor Variables

S. No	Predictor Variable	df	Regression Co-efficient		R^2	R^2(Adj)	p-value
			Single Result	Combined Result	(%)	(%)	
1.	Compensation	1	2.54	3.33	9.82	6.28	0.003**
2.	Work environment	1	1.69*	3.519	13.7	10.9	0.128
3.	Age	1	-0.55***	1.296	11.8	7.65	0.002**
4.	Education	1	-3.78***	2.24	15.2	12.7	0.001***
5.	Airport	1	0.85	1.326	4.32	3.31	0.252
6.	Management style	1	2.67**	0.556	10.59	6.58	0.185
7.	Work colleagues	1	2.85*	1.143	5.35	3.49	0.016*
8.	Job stability	1	3.59	4.815	21.28	17.19	0.002**
9.	Learning & Development	1	3.16***	7.593	28.25	24.62	0.001***
10.	All	09	-	-	90.12	82.56	0.024*

This table shows the negative relation of age and education with job satisfaction in single results, but their effect becomes positive, when they are combined with other factors. However, the impact of L&D is significant in both single and combined results. P-values for compensation (o.oo3***), Age (0.002**), L&D (0.001***) and Job stability (0.002**) indicates their significance with job satisfaction. Finally, the last row indicates that overall, the model predicts 90 % of the variation in response variable with p-value (0.024*).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The changing dynamics of the airline industry and increasing customer expectations create pressures for managements to maintain profitability. In this regard, customer satisfaction plays an important role for both retention of old customers and marketing to new customers. The present research was also carried out to

identify the reasons behind customer dissatisfaction, which could hamper the profitability of major Middle Eastern Airlines (MEA). Based on the premise that customer satisfaction is closely integrated with employee satisfaction, a preliminary survey revealed that customers expressed their major dissatisfaction regard to events before the boarding process. GSS were mainly responsible for handling customers during this phase of their travel experience.

Data were collected from 406 respondents of the Ground Services Staff (GSS) with the help of a questionnaire comprised of 30 questions. Respondents were randomly selected from four major airports of the country named A, B, C and D. Reliability tests were conducted to verify the authenticity of the collected data. Later, independent sample T test and ANOVA were used for the analysis purpose. Results indicated that the overall satisfaction level of employees from their organization was neither bad nor excellent. However, employees expressed major dissatisfaction in the category of learning and development. This finding indicates that employees felt unsatisfied with training and development programs of the organization. Perceived development support from the organization not only enhances satisfaction levels but also reduces turnover intentions (Shehawy, Elbaz, & Agag, 2018).   No disparity was observed based on job levels. Both, middle managers and senior management expressed average satisfaction level from their jobs. Similarly, differences in age levels and postings at different airports did not result in any variation in satisfaction levels. However, educational differences led to variation in satisfaction levels.

Employee satisfaction could be enhanced by providing additional opportunities to improve their skills and career development. In this regard, seminars and workshops can be arranged to enhance the skills and capabilities of employees. Simultaneously, their educational level can be upgraded by offering them different short-term courses. Educational qualifications are found to impact their job satisfaction levels. Also, employment security, financial benefits and career growth plans can be amended to enhance their satisfaction level. These factors play a crucial role in improving job satisfaction levels of employees (Supriyanto, 2018). Leadership in the aviation industry can use these factors to develop improve strategies, which not only enhances the satisfaction level of their employees, but also improves the productivity and profitability of their respective organizations.

Managers can benefit from the findings of this research by focusing on the training and development needs of their workers. Findings here indicate that unclear career path and lack of professional development opportunities acts as a major contributor in creating dissatisfaction among workers. It can further lead to de-motivation and negatively impact their dealing with airline passengers. Despite in-depth analysis of factors bringing dissatisfaction among employees of GSS, the present research faces the limitation of access to the top management of the airlines. Although, they were supportive in conducting this research, their point of view could not be evaluated due to their busy work schedules. Future researchers can continue this research by incorporating top management as another respondent to give more credibility and authenticity to the findings.

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BIOGRAPHY

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