

An Analysis of Job Security & Job Satisfaction of Cabin Crew Members in a Private Airline - JET AIRWAYS

Nazreen Khanam*

Abstract

In a climate of reform and change where airline companies are facing amazing pressure to take stern steps to save operational costs, some crew members are inevitably experiencing low levels of job security and job satisfaction. It is often said that happy employees are productive employees and in the current economic scenario it is of utmost importance that employees are kept happy, which may in turn impact their performance. The study focuses on a private airline, Jet Airways where a high proportion of crew members were dismissed within a very short time. The crew members who remained in the airline felt demoralized and distressed.

The research was an exploratory and descriptive investigation where the aim of the study was to explore the different dimensions and effects of job security and job satisfaction. The problem was explored by qualitative, primary and secondary data. The research used both quantitative and qualitative methods containing closed and open ended questions pertaining to job security and job satisfaction. The most salient finding of the research was that it discovered the contemporary attitude of the crew members that acts as an important factor concerning job security and job satisfaction. Recommendations are provided in order to make crew members more satisfied with their jobs, so that their job performance improves and they are able to provide better services to customers.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional labor is a prime component of the service industry which requires its employees to exercise emotional control to maintain good relation with customers (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). According to Kinman (2009), work which involves a high amount of personal contact with customers is bound to involve emotional labor and employees working in these jobs are exposed to work which often lead to exhaustion and social withdrawal. This in turn makes their work life monotonous and distressing. Emotional labor can be stressful

and dehumanizing. The employees who provide service to customers work at subordinate level and their job is quite routine and opportunities are constrained (Grandey et al, 2004). The purpose of this proposed research is to examine the various factors which can contribute to job satisfaction and job security, particularly during times of economic uncertainty. According to Korczynski (2003) though customer service providers experience hostility from customers, they are expected to maintain calm conduct all the time. These kinds of feelings often lead to alienation from the job. Cited in Boyd (2001) Sir Colin Marshall said that employees are the most important asset of an airline company. The economic

recession, technological change, industrial restructuring and global competition have altered the nature of work in this industry (Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). According to Hitt et al (1994), increasing global competition, development in information technology and recession are the reasons for an increase in the pressure on the structure of an organization. Organizations experiencing this pressure tend to increase their stability by downsizing and saving their labor cost. These activities leave a negative impact on the individual leaving the job but it also has a very deep impact on the performance of the employee who survives the lay-offs and is left behind (Latack and Dozier, 1986). Burchell (1999) states that fear of redundancy reveals anxieties about the consequences of unemployment. Even though employee's jobs are secured they still are anxious about the prospect of losing it. Organizations today are finding themselves face to face with an important phenomenon amongst their employees-job insecurity. Boyd (2001) concluded that the unsafe and unhealthy working conditions for crew members make it increasingly difficult for flight attendants to maintain their high standard of service and professionalism. According to Arthur et al (2005) the unstable employment conditions have increased the level of uncertainty regarding what an employee can expect and what he desires from an employment relationship. In order to enhance employee job satisfaction and job security, it is important for an organization to recognize the causes of failure and design interventions to help employees perform more effectively. Boyd (2001) further indicates that productivity of the airline company directly depends on how the cabin crews perform and hence, management should take account of their performance, and also the important factors leading to improved performance such as job satisfaction and job security.

Justification for chosen organization

There has been a rapid development in the aviation industry in India in recent years. Due to the development of the infrastructure

required to support high air traffic the government had to increase taxes on air travel. This step reduced the passenger strength massively as the air fare of low-cost airline which accounted for maximum contribution to the growth became similar to that of a premium airline. Hence, the revenue of airline companies started to fall (Chandran, 2008). To make matters worse the US economic recession also hit the industry at the same time. Foreign investors started pulling out, leaving airline companies with an acute cash shortage. Airlines started cutting costs wherever they could. Two of the biggest private airlines, Jet Airways and Kingfisher airlines joined hands to combat the recession by using some of their facilities jointly. They jointly managed fuel costs, share some pilots, allowed cross selling of tickets, share training facilities and supported each other air miles programme. But these steps were not enough and ultimately airline companies had to resolve to downsize, which in turn increased job instability in the aviation sector (Chandran, 2008).

Rationale for Study

The majority of research surrounding job satisfaction and security has been conducted widely throughout the world with little attention to employees in the aviation industry in India (see for example Burke and Nelson 1998, Sverke and Hellgren 2002, Grand et al 2008 ; Probst et al 2001). The aviation industry is one of the fastest growing in the economy and also one of the worst hit by the current economic recession (Verma, 2009). There are various reasons that have influenced the choice of this research study including the impact of the current recession. Briefly, these are :

- ❖ Loss of trust of employees in their organization. The biggest layoff in Indian aviation history took place when Jet Airways gave the pink slip to 1900 of its employees to massively and immediately reduce their operating costs. But all were reinstated the next day. Due to this unforeseen event, employees lost trust in their organization.

- ❖ Cabin crew members are alienated workforce as they are physically located away from the organizational base. There is no stability designed into the way they function together. This widens the gap between the organization and its employees and hence enforces the researcher to explore the matter deeply (Vinnicombe, 1984).
- ❖ Due to the economic crisis this research is taking place at the appropriate time and may result in the development of useful practical solutions.

Objectives

- ❖ Explore the different dimensions and effects of job security and job satisfaction.
- ❖ To identify the potential effect of job satisfaction and job security on performance.
- ❖ To provide recommendations and solutions to improve the degree of job satisfaction and security and hence improve performance.

Literature Review

Literature review is the summary of the results of the secondary research which was conducted for the preparation of the primary research as outlined in the methodology section. It is divided into two subsections. These are job security and job satisfaction. Both the sections explore the definition and main variables associated with job security and job satisfaction. It further reviews the important content and theories related to dimension of job security.

Job Security

There has been a great demand for organizational change in the past decade. This is due to various elements such as change in information technology, environment of recession and increasing global competition. The changes in an organizational structure i.e. reorganizations, mergers, take-over, downsizing are thought of as the primary fear in employees when dealing with work. As a direct result,

organizations all over the globe have strived to increase organizational effectiveness and simultaneously reduce operating costs by downsizing (Burke & Nelson, 1998). The biggest work related threat for an individual is organizational change. Job insecurity has received a lot of attention in recent years and as a result there have been a lot of research in this key area (Sverke et al, 2002). Scholars define job insecurity using various different terms such as the gap between the preferable and experienced security of an individual in a situation of employment (Grand et al, 2008). Vuuren & Klandermans (1990) define it as the concern of an individual employee about the performance of his job in the future. While Davy et al (1997) define job insecurity as the expectation of an employee to be able to continue working in the same position. However Heaney et al (1994) suggest that it should be defined as the perception of an employee of any future threat to the continuity of his/her current job. All of these researchers have argued about the definition of job insecurity which is evidently the overall concern of an individual about the continued existence of their job in the future (Sverke et al, 2002). Ashford et al (1989) suggested that sharing/ communication of problems is a result of no provision of information to employees on outcomes of lay-offs. Lack of information forces the employee to communicate his concern which in turn only heightens the feeling of insecurity.

Measurement of Job Insecurity

The past decade has seen an increase in the number of restructuring decisions, mergers & lay-offs. A very large number of organizations around the globe have undergone downsizing which resulted in loss of jobs (Probst, 2000). The findings of Boyd (2001) indicates that in order to minimize the cost and maximize the productivity at micro and macro levels the airline companies are dehumanizing the crew members by exposing them to stressful and intensive working pattern. Due to the cost efficiency a number of airlines have reduced the number of cabin crew member on flights which, in turn has created a greater work pressure on

