

Dimensions of Recruitment to Retain the Commercial Pilots in Indian Aviation Industries: A Case Study

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Abstract: *Aviation industry in India offers a huge recruitment market and is looking at various options to recruit the commercial pilots for different assignments. The massive demand for commercial pilots which is also partly due to big time consolidation in the civil aviation sector has fuelled attrition to a high level of 46 per cent as the pilots and cabin crew spot opportunities in growing demand by domestic as well as foreign airlines. The process & prerequisites of becoming the commercial pilot is tedious, lengthy & stringent which is prerequisite to understand the recruitment problems faced by the Indian Aviation Industry. The working conditions of Commercial pilots are extremely stressful, thus the real challenge for the HR departments of commercial air carriers is to recruit these pilots who will stay with them for longer time. The present study aimed to find out various factors of recruitment. HR heads of jet airways, Kingfisher along with commercial pilots were interviewed regarding their recruitment policy in turn to retain the employees in the Aviation Sector. Case Study revealed five dimensions of recruitment as perceived by the HR heads and pilots, they were-. Encouraging & Employee-friendly Recruitment Policy, Impact of External Forces, Organizational Internal Factors, Employment Brand, and Organizational Growth & Self Advancement Opportunities of the recruitment.*

Keywords: *Recruitment, Commercial Pilots, Indian Aviation Industry, Dimensions of Recruitment*

Introduction:

The enormous demand for commercial pilots which is also to a certain extent because of time consolidation in the civil aviation sector has increased attrition to a high level of 46 per cent as the pilots and cabin crew spot opportunities in growing demand by domestic and foreign airlines. In India in 2007, pilot poaching was so serious that it led to cancellation of flights by some airlines. Figures released by IATA showed that the growth in air travel in the Middle East & Africa is also fuelling pilot poaching in India. As a result of this, pilot retention has become a major area of concern for commercial airlines in India. Fierce competition has driven salaries higher and higher and benefits have constantly improved.

Becoming the commercial pilot is a tedious, lengthy, & stringent process, numerous prerequisites are required to become a commercial pilots which in turn needs to understand the recruitment & retention problems faced by the Indian Aviation Industry better

Several factors are enticing the pilots, especially those who possess rare skills or expertise to join the rival airlines. When a company must replace a worker, it incurs direct and indirect expenses. The expenses include the cost of advertizing, headhunting fees, human resource costs, loss of productivity, new hire training, etc. – all of which can add up to anywhere from 30 percent to 200 percent of a single employee's annual wages, depending on the industry and the job being filled (May et al, 2004). Add to this, the cost of turnover is much greater in aviation industry because of the expenses incurred on the training of the pilots. The main objective of this case study is to find out various dimensions of recruitment followed by Indian Aviation Industries. Two Aviation sectors were approached, they were-

Jet Airways: which is a major private Indian air carrier based in Mumbai, Maharashtra. It is India's largest private airline and the market leader in the domestic sector. It operates over 400 flights daily to 67 destinations worldwide. It started Indian commercial airline operations on 5 May 1993 with a fleet of four leased Boeing 737-300 aircraft. In January 1994 a change in the law enabled Jet Airways to apply for scheduled airline status, which was granted on 4 January 1995. It began international operations to Sri Lanka in March 2004. On 12 April 2007 Jet Airways agreed to buy out Air Sahara. Air Sahara was renamed Jet Lite, and was marketed between a low-cost carrier and a full service airline. In August 2008 Jet Airways announced its plans to completely integrate JetLite into Jet Airways. On 8 May 2009 Jet Airways launched its low-cost brand, Jet Konnect.

Kingfisher Airlines: Kingfisher Airlines is an airline group based in India. It commenced its operations in May 2005. Its head office is Kingfisher House in Vile Parle (East), Mumbai. Kingfisher Airlines, through its parent company United Breweries Group, has a 50% stake in Low cost carrier, Kingfisher Red.

Kingfisher Airlines is one of the seven airlines to be ranked as a 5-star airline by the independent research consultancy firm Skytrax. Kingfisher operates more than 375 daily flights to 71 destinations, with regional and long-haul international services. In May 2009, Kingfisher Airlines carried more than a million passengers, giving it the highest market share among airlines in India.

Case Presentation:

The Indian Aviation Industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. It has undergone huge transformation following the liberalization of the aviation industry in India. Once owned by the Government, the aviation sector of India is now privately owned with full service airways and affordable carriers. The future aviation industry is estimated to grow at the faster rate. Almost more or less about 100 million passengers are expected to be handled by the airline industry. By the year 2020, about 280 million passengers are expected to be handled by the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Though the Indian Aviation Industry is growing, the problems it faces are also a lot. Indian Airline Industry is beset with many problems, which consist of high price of aviation turbine fuel, scarcity of skilled labor, quick fleet expansion, rise in labor costs and price competition among the players. These factors are adversely impacting the growth of Indian aviation industry. The airlines will not be able to operate the additional flights without having sufficient number of pilots to fly them.

Flying crew is the most important pillar of Aviation Industry. The recruitment and retention of these pilots must be dealt with caution as the growth of the Aviation Industry depends to a large extent on their availability, capabilities, and performance.

The Two HR heads of aviation sectors along with few 200 pilots were interviewed regarding the recruitment factors of their organization knowing very well that this is practices and activities carried out by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees (Perry & Wilson 2009) to work for the organization and stay for longer time. All of the respondents responses put for the factorial analysis which revealed five primary factors which influence the recruitment.

Management and Outcome:

With the help of extensive interview from the HR heads and pilots of different aviation sectors it was found out the recruitment process were affected by various dimensions. Those were- Encouraging & Employee Friendly Recruitment Policy, Impact of External Forces Organizational Internal Factors, Employment Brand and Growth and Advancement Opportunities.

Encouraging & Employee-friendly Recruitment Policy

This factor speaks about the futuristic, encouraging and employee friendly policies used by Air Carriers to attract the best talent. The organizations try to attract prospective talent by building brand image that projects them as transparent organizations that care for & nurture their employees. The organization that welcomes the employee with open arms generally creates a positive image in the mind of that employee and helps the employee to get bonded with it. Employees also appreciate the fact that the company communicates its vision, mission and goals to the employees that help the employees to understand what the company stands for and what to expect from this company. The pilots prefer working for these kinds of organizations that also provide them extra benefits like sufficient rest period and moderate flight time. They prefer working for organizations that understand the importance of giving opportunities to these pilots to utilize their skills.

Impact of External Forces

Pilots perceived the legal & economic policies of India affecting the recruitment process in any Indian Air-carrier. Though these forces are external & not in control of these airlines, they affect the recruitment process of these carriers. It also includes other external factors like demand-supply ratio of commercial pilots in India and the need for these airlines to think about campus recruitment in case of severe shortage of the pilots. The pilots think that the airlines need to be flexible in their approach to recruitment.

Organizational Internal Factors

Internal factors of the organization play a major role according to the commercial pilots in recruiting the best talent. Remuneration is a major, but not the only component that pilots consider while taking up a job

with any airlines. Pilots don't care about job hazards much while accepting the job offer of any airline, especially when the benefits like insurance cover offered by the airline takes care of this factor. They also feel that majority of the airlines do not differentiate among the pilots based on the gender.

Employment Brand

Employment brand plays an important role in attracting the commercial pilots to the air carriers. The state of technological growth in India really does not matter much to the pilots while making the career decision because most of the leading airlines have the advanced technology available with them.

Organizational Growth & Self Advancement Opportunities

Organizational growth and self advancement opportunities are very important criteria in decisions related to recruitment in any Indian Air-carrier. Pilots believe that the organizations that grow also provide growth opportunities for their employees.

Discussion & Conclusion:

Aviation Industry in India saw an important change in the year 2003, when budget flying was introduced by Air Deccan through the lowering down of fares to about 17% in comparison to what the other airlines charged. Air Deccan was joined in this process by Indigo, Go Air, Spice Jet, Jet Lite and Kingfisher Red. Thus new trends were introduced in the aviation market, by these budget airlines. Now competition is much more than ever before, each Airlines wish to retain employees especially pilots at the minimum cost, on the other hand these trained pilots also know their values in the market, and try to manipulate that. Thus while recruiting all airlines must pay attention that there is a need to create brand image of the airlines, must pay attention what is happening on side of the completion, organization must be in position to provide growth and self advancement opportunities to the employees.

In case of both the private sector airlines, they understand the importance of linking their business strategy to HR and they both do it. HRP is followed by private sector airlines as a first step towards successful recruitment program. Skill inventory of the commercial pilots is maintained by them as a part of HRP. They feel that the factors that affect the recruitment process of commercial pilots in India are: growth rate of the organization, working conditions and salary-benefit packages, company's image perception of job seekers about the company, the state of economy of Indian Aviation Industry, & the state of technological growth in India. Internal recruitment including promotions & transfers, advertisement, professional bodies related to aviation etc. Unlike public sector airline, they do not use employee referrals as a major source of recruitment. One of them is open to campus recruitment while other does not think it is essential as there are ample candidates at the entry level. These airlines are able to attract both young & experienced pilots to them. Employment Branding plays a major role in attracting pilots to these airlines diplomatic pressures, job hazards associated with flying.

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