Quality Of Work Life Of Aviation Personnel In Post Pandemic

Iratrachar Amornpipat
Aviation Personnel Development Institution, Kasem Bundit University, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract:
This is a case study conducted in a Thai Air Operator context with an attempt to explore the impact of the post pandemic on the quality of work life (QWL) among the aviation personnel. The purpose of this study is to facilitate the design of an human resources policy and programme to improve QWL of the aviation personnel who were affected by the Covid-19 situation. A semi-structured interview was the method to provide an insightful understanding of the current Thai aviation personnel. There were 20 full-time employees participating in this study, They were from four different departments, holding different positions, including 5 pilots, 5 flight attendants, 5 ground staff, and 5 aircraft mechanics. There were 4 findings from the data analysis indicated the impact of the post pandemic on the QWL were Mental Health and Well-Being, Physical Health and Occupational Safety, Competence, Skills, and Career Prospects, and Career Well-being. Discussion and future research are also discussed.

Keywords: *Quality of Work-life, Aviation Personnel, Aviation, Thailand*

I.   Introduction

In contemporary organizational discourse, the issue of Quality of Work Life (QWL) has ascended to a position of paramount importance, with growing recognition of its direct influence on employee productivity. Unlike the past, where work-life considerations could be relegated with minimal repercussions, today's dynamic business environment, characterized by a multitude of competing demands between professional responsibilities and personal life, demands a nuanced understanding of the intricacies of QWL. The 21st century witnessed an unprecedented acceleration and magnitude of the COVID-19 outbreak, propelled by the forces of globalization. The ramifications of this pandemic were particularly profound in the aviation industry, a sector integral to facilitating international travel. Despite optimistic forecasts by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) envisioning substantial growth and job creation, the industry found itself grappling with a recession due to the pandemic's far-reaching consequences. This paper seeks to explore the QWL of aviation personnel, considering the unique challenges they face due to the pandemic's aftermath (Civil Aviation Safety Authority, 2017).

II.   Literature Review

The term QWL has been traced in the early 1960s, and gained momentum after being endorsed by the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD). ASTD referred QWL as the means that the management of a company ensures all its employees participate in shaping its environment. Stephen and Robbins (1986) defined QWL as "a process by which an organization responds to employee needs by developing mechanisms to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work" (p. 207). The definitions of QWL are aligned with other scholars such as Daubermann and Pamplona (2012); Heidari, Enayati, and Hedayati (2010), that considered QWL as a process that organisation and stakeholders learn to work better together to improve both quality of their employees and organisational effectiveness. Lau (2000) identified QWL as workplace strategies, operations and environment that promote and maintain employee satisfaction aimed at providing the favourable conditions and environments of a workplace that support and promote employees' satisfaction.

The QWL framework encompasses various factors such as job satisfaction, personality traits, competence, and employee performance. Kassem et al. (2022) shed light on corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices in the aviation industry during the pandemic, emphasizing the importance of supporting employees and maintaining credibility in communication. Muindi and K'obonyo (2015) contribute to the discussion by examining how personality, job satisfaction, and competence influence employee performance in

a broader organizational context. In the post-pandemic aviation industry, understanding how these QWL factors relate to aviation personnel is essential for ensuring their well-being and the industry's resilience. The article emphasizes the significance of QWL in modern organizations, describing it as essential for attracting and retaining employees. It defines QWL as favorable workplace conditions and environments that promote employee satisfaction by providing job security and rewards. The concept of QWL encompasses various factors such as working conditions, compensation, job security, and management behavior. For aviation personnel in a post-pandemic environment, QWL factors such as health and safety measures, job security, and work-life balance may be especially pertinent. Ensuring a positive QWL for aviation personnel can help in their retention and performance.

More so, Job satisfaction is defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. Job satisfaction is affected by income, job stability, advancement chances, coworker relationships, and decision-making, according to Muindi and K'obonyo (2015). After the pandemic, compensation, job security, and workplace relationships may affect aviation workers' job satisfaction and performance. The article examines how employee personality affects job satisfaction and performance. Neuroticism, conscientiousness, and extraversion are linked to job satisfaction. Understanding the personality traits of aviation personnel can help aviation organizations tailor their approaches to improve job satisfaction and subsequently enhance job performance. The article presents employee performance as a multi-dimensional concept influenced by various factors, including abilities, personality traits, and job characteristics. It differentiates between task performance (job-specific activities) and contextual performance (supportive activities that enhance the work environment). Aviation personnel's job performance is critical for the safe and efficient functioning of airlines. Factors such as competence, training, and work environment can significantly impact their performance.

Yiu et al. (2022) address the future challenges faced by aviation students, highlighting the potential "career shock" caused by the pandemic. The study emphasizes the need for continuous skills development and specialized training to sustain the aviation workforce. The aviation industry, being one of the hardest-hit sectors during the pandemic, has subjected aviation personnel to a "career shock." This phenomenon is characterized by a sudden and disruptive event, such as the pandemic, triggering significant career-related concerns among employees.

III.   Methods And Results

This paper describes the methodology used, participants, procedures, ethics, and data analysis.

Methodology

This study adopted case study methodological approach. Harley (2004) said, "the case study is particular suited to research questions which require detailed understanding of social or organisational processes" (p. 323). The researchers began the research by conceptualising ideas related to the research questions and selected the institution as a case for the research. A critical problem for case study research is the number of participants and the fact that the results cannot be generalised (David, 2006). On the other hand, Flyvjerg (2006) argued to this view that "…it is incorrect to conclude that one cannot generalise from a single case. It depends on the case one is speaking of and how its chosen" (p.225). Nevertheless, this study was purposely conducted to gain more understanding of the faculty members in a particular context; thus, it is not intended for the results of this study to be generalised.

Participants

The selected institution is a private Thai Air Operator, providing flight and ground services for both domestic and international operations. The main base is located at Suvarnabhumi airport, Bangkok Thailand. The convenient sampling method is used. The population in this study was full-time employees. There are 20 participants including in this study. The representatives from four different departments; pilots, flight attendants, ground staff and aircraft mechanic were selected for the interview.

The participants were asked for permission to tape record the interviews. These participants were Thai full-time faculty. They were varied in demographic and educational backgrounds and institutional responsible roles. The majority of the participants held master degree, whilst there was only one holding a doctoral degree. Most of the participants have worked in this airline more than five years.

Methods

The chosen method of data collection was a face-to-face semi-structured interview of the participants. Three research questions guided in this study were: *1) How does the post pandemic impact your professional life? 2) What do you need to improve the quality of work life after the pandemic?* and *3) What do you think limit you and your organization to achieve the desired quality of work life?*

The participants were also asked prior to record the tape as well as informed to refuse to answer any question if they did not want to. They received an invitation including time, date and venue before I performed interviewing. Additionally, I adopted active listening skill while interviewing the participants. Lillrank (2012) suggested that, by being a good listener, a mental space could be created for the interviewees. She also emphasised that being a good listener should not lead the interviewees to one's own hypothetical framework. The time spent on each interview was between 30 – 60 minutes.

IV.   Data Analysis

After the interview, I transcribe the tape records as soon as possible. Everything occurred in the tape records were noted. When this process was complete, I needed to read to read the interview transcripts several times so as to assure understanding of the content. Prior to data analysis, the first researcher needed to transcribe tape interviews, which were in Thai. The participants received the tape transcripts to edit to ensure the accuracy of the data. All transcripts were analysed using an open coding method in order to categorise and thematise. I discovered that most of the participants linked their answers between each question as they saw interconnection among the questions. I then created a list of categories before moving to a higher level of abstraction to generate themes, which are in accordance to the posed research question.

V.   Findings

The majority of the respondents agreed that the consequence from the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath have had significant implications for the QWL of themselves. As the world grappled with the virus, aviation personnel, including pilots, crew members, and ground staff, found themselves at the forefront of an industry in turmoil. From the data analysis, five different themes were found. These themes indicated the factors affecting their QWL.

Mental Health and Well Being

The respondents affirmed a perception of poorer mental health and well-being due to the pandemic situation. One respondent pointed, *"I have lost a lot of income because of the airline reduced the numbers of my flight time, so it's very tough for me as a bread winner to take care of the family during the Covid-19. I was very stressed and depressed every month, all I could do was hoping the situation would be better soon"*. The data analysis denoted that every respondent perceived reduction of the income due to lesser of working time required by the airlines, was the most crucial obstacle for them to be mentally healthy. They also revealed that working with lesser number caused them stress, as they could not financially provide to their family. As recently, the pandemic was over, the growth of the industry is getting better, the majority of them pointed that in a post-pandemic situation, addressing the work environment, health, work-life balance, career development, job security, social support, and resilience will be paramount to enhancing the QWL of aviation personnel. Organizations in the aviation industry must prioritize these factors to create a safer, healthier, and more satisfying work experience for their personnel.

Physical Health and Occupational Safety

Every participant responded in the same direction when talking about working life styles after the pandemic. The perception on the quality of life was changed by including physical and occupational aspects. Physical wellbeing refers to the daily lifestyle of the individuals in relation to consuming healthy food and beverages, having sufficient sleeping hours, and engaging in exercise regularly. Having a high level of physical wellbeing has a significant positive impact on mood and overall life satisfaction by making the individual happier and decreasing the stressors in life. For the occupational safety, they referred to the individual's sense of occupational health and safety in their workplace. This construct involves having an environment free from injury and hazard, well-equipped facilities and equipment to perform tasks, as well as a pleasant and positive working environment that is created by the physical design of the workplace and the positive emotions associated with the workplace. The data analysis identified that every participant perceived that physical health and occupational safety became one of the most crucial aspects to reflect their quality of work life after they have experienced the challenges through the pandemic. They also revealed that the organisation should put this policy as a priority to gain confidence from the employees.

Competence, Skills, and Career Prospects

All participants emphasised the positive relationship between continuous training and skill development to remain competitive and adaptable. There are 2 categories included within this theme

Changes in Personnel Competency Needs

The participants affirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic brought significant challenges to working conditions in the aviation sector. Aviation personnel faced increased health and safety concerns, disruptions in schedules, and financial uncertainties. These challenges can directly impact job satisfaction. Thy emphasised that the organization must address these aspects to improve the job satisfaction of their personnel and promote their overall well-being. The pandemic has underscored the need for resilience and adaptability among aviation personnel. Rapid changes in protocols, measures, and operational procedures were common during the pandemic. Organizations should provide training and resources to enhance the resilience and adaptability of their workforce, ultimately improving their QWL. Additionally, with the technological advancements, the pandemic forced the aviation industry to reevaluate traditional work arrangements. Remote work and flexible schedules may become more common, impacting the QWL of aviation personnel positively.

Professional Development

Access to specialized training programs and educational resources is essential to enhance the QWL of aviation professionals. Employers should invest in the professional growth of their workforce. In the post-pandemic era, aviation personnel need to adapt to reformed industry requirements, necessitating continuous learning and development to enhance competence and ensure sustainable career prospects. In order to adequately equip individuals for the ever-changing aviation landscape, it is imperative to implement specialized training programme. Non-technical competencies, such as effective communication, collaborative teamwork, proficient leadership, and efficient management, hold equal significance. In light of the post-pandemic "career shock," it is imperative for the organisation to develop their training courses in order to adequately equip their employees for the dynamic aviation sector.

"The post-pandemic aviation industry is undergoing significant reforms, including the incorporation of emerging technologies and changes in required skill sets. Aviation personnel must adapt to these changes through continuous skills development and professional training.

Career Well Being

Every participant in this study emphasised the influences of relationship between an individual and perceived job satisfaction. They stressed that the post-pandemic scenario, aviation personnel experienced a "career shock," triggering a reassessment of their future paths. The respondents highlighted the importance of an individuals' sense of job security and advancement, as well as to a workplace environment that includes organisational vision, career development and management plans, effective organizational structures, and to the individual's sense of job security. The job security in relation to their own financial situation. This construct also includes financial management for personal expenditures and savings.

VI. Discussion, Recommendations, And Conclusion

Aviation personnel have had to confront job insecurities due to potential layoffs and reduced job engagement, which can result in higher turnover intent. This increased anxiety among aviation professionals is particularly significant for those with specialized knowledge in aviation, as they are vital for the industry's sustainability. Additionally, the aviation industry is undergoing significant reforms and challenges in the post-pandemic period. The reforms encompass the integration of emerging technologies, specifically unmanned aerial systems (UAS), as well as enduring modifications to industry processes (Yiu, Ng, Yu, & Yu, 2022). The incorporation of ongoing skills development and professional training has become an essential component of the career trajectories of aviation workers. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the significant contribution of vocational training in the development of future aviation experts, including pilots, air traffic control officers (ATCOs), and aircraft maintenance professionals (Yiu et al., 2022). Specialized training plays a crucial role in adequately equipping workers for diverse positions within the aviation industry. Higher education institutions have a significant role in providing relevant technical and non-technical skills to meet industry needs. These skills encompass communication, teamwork, leadership, and management, as well as technical competencies required in specialized roles. While numerous studies have focused on forecasting aviation industry recovery and understanding travel behaviors during the pandemic, there needs to be more research regarding the QWL of aviation personnel in the post-pandemic era (Muindi & K'obonyo, 2015).

This gap includes the prospects and impediments faced by aviation students and professionals as they navigate a changing industry landscape. The current body of literature lacks qualitative insights and evidence, so impeding the progress of formulating policies and allocating resources to bolster the aviation industry's standing in a post-pandemic era. The post-pandemic era presents a complex landscape for the aviation industry, with profound implications for the QWL of aviation personnel. the concept of QWL could cover an opportunity for constant learning and development of new skills, and participative decision making (Rossi, Perrewee & Sauter, 2006). Further, the key element of the QWL on job security has been emphasised by several scholars

(see Hayrol et al., 2010). It could be because job security has a direct impact on work motivation and performance among employees. Burchell and Robin (2011) also found that employees who feel proud of their job, have a sense of belonging to the company, are treated fairly, have the possibility to involve in decision making process, have healthy relationship between individuals, are satisfied with total working environment, and have work-life balance tend to increase their motivation and job satisfaction. This can be implied that their QWL may be considerably improved (Burchell & Robin, 2011; Cunningham & Eberle, 1990; Hunker, 2014; Amornpipat, 2018).

Further, for the future research, it may be interesting to examine the relationship between the level of perception of QWL among pilots and other variables such as happiness, organisational commitment, and accident and incident rates .Further, the model of Pilots 'QWL may be used as a foundation for future research to statistically test it .The model may be suitable for different work functions in the aviation industry.

References

[1]. Adhikari, D .R., And Gautam, D .K .(2010).Labour Legislations For Improving Quality Of Work Life In Nepal", International Journal Of Law And Management, 52 (1), 40-53.
[2]. Amornpipat, I. (2018). Quality Of Work-Life Of Pilots: A Literature Review And Research Agenda. Kasem Bundit Journal, 19(June), 367-377.
[3]. Burchell, M. J., & Robin, J. (2011). The Great Workplace: How To Build It, How To Keep It, And Why It Matters. John Wiley & Sons.
[4]. Civil Aviation Safety Authority)2017 .(Pilot Wellbeing. Retrieved From :Https//:Www.Casa.Gov.Au/Wellbeing
[5]. Chatthai, T. (2016). Quality Of Working Life Of Personnel At Dhurakij Pundit University. Research, Dhurakij Pundit University.
[6]. Cunningham, J. B., & Eberle, T. (1990). A Guide To Job Enrichment And Redesign. Personnel (Ama), 67(2), 56-61.
[7]. Daubermann, D., And Pamplona, T.V.(2012). Quality Of Worklife Of Nurse In Primary Health Care. Actapaulista De Enfermagem,25(2, 277-283.
[8]. Dorneich, M. C., Passinger, B., Hamblin, C., Keinrath, C., Vašek, J., Whitlow, S. D., & Beekhuyzen, M. (2011, September). The Crew Workload Manager: An Open-Loop Adaptive System Design For Next Generation Flight Decks. In Proceedings Of The Human Factors And Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting (Vol. 55, No. 1, Pp. 16-20). Sage Ca: Los Angeles, Ca: Sage Publications.
[9]. Federal Aviation Administration (2013). Safty Rish Management. Retrieved From :
Https//:Www.Faa.Gov/Regulations_Policies/Handbooks_Manuals/Aviation/Risk_Management/
[10]. Gentili, R. J., Rietschel, J. C., Jaquess, K. J., Lo, L. C., Prevost, C. M., Miller, M. W., ... & Hatfield, B. D. (2014, August). Brain Biomarkers Based Assessment Of Cognitive Workload In Pilots Under Various Task Demands. In 2014 36th Annual International Conference Of The Ieee Engineering In Medicine And Biology Society (Pp. 5860-5863). Ieee.
[11]. Gibb, R., Ercoline, B., & Scharff, L. (2011). Spatial Disorientation: Decades Of Pilot Fatalities. Aviation, Space, And Environmental Medicine, 82(7), 717-724.
[12]. Heidari-Rafat, A., Enayati-Navinfar, A., & Hedayati, A. (2010). Quality Of Work Life And Job Satisfaction Among The Nurses Of Tehran University Of Medical Sciences. Dena J, 5(3).
[13]. Hunker, I. K. (2014). Quality Of Work Life In The Hospitality Industry. Copenhagen Business School, 1-71
[14]. Iata. (2021). Iata. Retrieved From Www.Iata.Org Website: Https://Www.Iata.Org/ Kasper, M. R., Geibe, J. R., Sears, C. L., Riegodedios, A. J., Luse, T., Von Thun, A. M., … Gillingham, B. L. (2020). An Outbreak Of Covid-19 On An Aircraft Carrier. New England Journal Of Medicine, 383(25), 2417–2426. Https://Doi.Org/10.1056/Nejmoa2019375
[15]. Ilkhanizadeh, S., & Karatepe, O. M. (2017). An Examination Of The Consequences Of Corporate Social Responsibility In The Airline Industry: Work Engagement, Career Satisfaction, And Voice Behavior. Journal Of Air Transport Management, 59, 8-17.
[16]. Jayakumar, A., & Kalaiselvi, K. (2012). Quality Of Work Life-An Overview. International Journal Of Marketing, Financial Services & Management Research, 1(10), 140-151.
[17]. Kassem, R., Salama, A., & Ganepola, C. N. (2022). Csr, Credibility, Employees' Rights And Legitimacy During A Crisis: A Critical Analysis Of British Airways, Wizair, And Easyjet Cases. Employee Relations: The International Journal, 45(1). Https://Doi.Org/10.1108/Er-11-2021-0517
[18]. Krueger, P., Brazil, K., Lohfeld, L., Edward, H. G., Lewis, D., & Tjam, E. (2002). Organization Specific Predictors Of Job Satisfaction: Findings From A Canadian Multi-Site Quality Of Work Life Cross-Sectional Survey. Bmc Health Services Research, 2, 1-8.
[19]. Lau, R. S. (2000). Quality Of Work Life And Performance–An Ad Hoc Investigation Of Two Key Elements In The Service Profit Chain Model. International Journal Of Service Industry Management, 11(5), 422-437.
[20]. Maurino, D. E., Reason, J., Johnston, N., & Lee, R. B. (2017). 1 Widening The Search For Accident Causes: A Theoretical Framework. In Human Error In Aviation (Pp. 15-43). Routledge.
[21]. Mirsepasi, N. (2005). Strategic Human Resource Management And Labor Relations. Tehran, Mir, 251-252.
[22]. Muindi, F. K., & K'obonyo, P. O. (2015). Quality Of Work Life, Personality, Job Satisfaction, Competence, And Job Performance: A Critical Review Of Literature. European Scientific Journal, Esj.
[23]. Otto, J. L., & Webber, B. J. (2013). Mental Health Diagnoses And Counseling Among Pilots Of Remotely Piloted Aircraft In The United States Air Force. Medical Surveillance Monthly Report, 20(3), 3-8.
[24]. Re, W. (1975). Criteria For Quality Of Working Life. The Quality Of Working Life: New York, (1), 91-104.
[25]. Robbins, S. P., & Judge, T. A. (2017). Organizational Behavior. Pearson.
[26]. Rossi, A. M., Perrewee, P. L., & Sauter, S. L. (2006). Stress And Quality Of Working Life. Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.
[27]. Srivastava, S., & Kanpur, R. (2014). A Study On Quality Of Work Life: Key Elements & It's Implications. Iosr Journal Of Business And Management, 16(3), 54-59.
[28]. Thompson, M. N., & Subich, L. M. (2006). The Relation Of Social Status To The Career Decision-Making Process. Journal Of Vocational Behavior, 69(2), 289-301.