

AN ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL REVIEW OF RYANAIR LTD AND ITS CHANGE PROGRESS



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Introduction

The aim of this assignment is to critically analyse the nature of change and evaluate complex concepts relating to leadership in relation to change management and the relationship between organisational culture and change; but also.

The report is also exploring the issues and their impact on Ryanair business management and looking at organisation change agent and emphasises the leadership style in change.

The report has been requested by the C.E.O Executive of Ryanair and was submitted on the 26th of March 2021 by the researcher Laura Bucurean.

The paper investigation has been based on secondary research methods, including Books, journals, websites, and reliable sources.

2.0. Findings

Ryanair Ltd

Background of organisation

Ryanair is one of the largest low-cost European airlines founded in 1985 by the Ryan family. It primary operates at Dublin and London Stansted Airports connecting over 200 destinations in 40 countries on fleet of over 470 aircraft. (About us, 2021).

The mastermind behind the low-cost operation was the C.E.O of Ryanair Michael Kevin O'Leary who has served the organisation since 1988 becoming the wealthiest businessman of Ireland's.

According to the Travel Leisure the Irish budget carrier well known for cheap flights within Europe has become the first European airline to transport over 12 million passengers in a month. (Kachroo-Levine, 2018).

The current market position as reported on Ryanair's Group independent report, due to COVID-19 the organisation's shares has fallen and suffered a significant loss. On the 2nd of November 2020 Ryanair Holding Company reported a high loss of €197 m compared to its profit of €1.15bn prior to that year.

2.1 A Critical Analysis of The Nature of Change

In business change is often seen as a risk but is absolutely vital. (Kalm, 2021).

Before the coming of COVID-19, business and technological forces already required organizations to manage change and make decisions more quickly than ever before.

Businesses were required to make changes and make decisions quicker than ever." The pace of change has never been this fast, yet it will never be this slow again." (McKinsey's Silicon Valley office, 2021)

All size companies felt the pressure to make their business fit the changing environment requirements. To survive, it means the organisations must have a clear purpose and skills needed for change.

These changes across the operating model, structure, people, and technologies, forced businesses to transform. A big challenge affected the leaders as well to reinvent the way work is done. Despite all these, many companies decided to move "full speed" because they realised the benefits of agility is more valuable now than ever. (Agility in the time of COVID-19: Changing your operating model in an age of turbulence, 2020)

Change in organisation leads to many positive aspects, that lead to retaining a competitive edge and remaining relevant in the business area. (McCullough, 2021). The benefit of change creates more effective shifts within an organisation. It helps to improve morale, productivity, and quality of work. Also

improves collaboration and communication. If the change approach is planned carefully, it can reduce stress and encourage people to stay loyal to the organisation.

The uncertainty brought on by Covid-19 has impacted all organisations across the world and all had to deal with challenges and implement change to adopt to the situation.

But today, the airline industry is facing a major change in the way they used to operate due to Covid-19 pandemic that hit the aviation industry hard.

Before the pandemic, Ryanair flew each day between 110 and 150 flights between the UK and Ireland compared to today which number dropped between six and 17 flights a day.

Due to the spread of Covid-19 virus, the Government imposed flights and travel restrictions which had a significant impact on the company, as the number of passengers has reduced to 99% in the first few month of pandemic leading the company to face the most “challenging period in its 35year history. Furthermore, the organisation expects reduced flights for the year ending March 2021 compared to what was originally planned.

During this difficult crisis, the company had to comply with EU Guidelines, therefore Ryanair implemented special health measures in the airport and on board flight. This require passengers and staff to wear surgical face masks which are mandatory in the airport and for the whole period of flight. Other precautions that Ryanair took on board is that “all Ryanair aircraft are fitted with HEPA air filters (High Efficiency Particulate Arrestors), which remove particles in the air, down to the size of microscopic bacteria and virus clusters with an efficiency of better than 99.99% and interior surfaces are disinfected every night with chemicals, which are effective for over 24 hours”. (Covid 19 Updates, 2021).

Due to Covid -19 the Ryanair organisation had suffered financial and operational change. Therefore, the business drivers have been identified as being Financial and Operational factors.

“Business drivers are the key inputs and activities that drive the operational and financial result of a business” and “Drivers” impact all financial aspects of the business costs. (Ryanair: No Obvious Upside Drivers from Here - Market Insider, 2021).

Financial Drivers

Financial management is vital because gives control over the organisation’s money. As a key to understand this factor is that finance is the heart of the business and it is important to keep up sufficient finance to run the business operation and allocate funds properly. In Ryanair organisation the financial drive was forced into this change because of growing losses.

The collapse in air travel caused by coronavirus as the organisation’s shares drop has caused a significant financial loss “much greater than after the financial crisis on 9/11”, Michael O’Leary said. (The Telegraph, 2020).

Operational Drivers

Operational change initiatives involve the way employees work and lead to changes. Typically refers to more common changes in certain work process, reporting structure or job roles. In general, Operational changes led internally with the scope to prepare measures to adapt to change. (Smith, 2021)

During the research, the report presents the Operational change the organisation faced. The effective operation management role is to keep cost low and provide quality customer services.

2.2 BENEFITS OF ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

“Change refers to bringing a shift in the way the activities are performed, work is done, problems are solved”. (Importance of Organizational Change solved, 2016).

According to the research, one of the biggest benefits of organisational change is a more fulfilling and attractive workplace. This includes better employee experience, better project outcomes at lower cost.

Based on Mc Kinsey & Company study, the second benefit is that the organisation change has a higher percentage possibility to stay ahead of schedules; because if the change comes from inside the organisation, it is more easily to be accepted and becomes the norm. However, if the change comes from external resources, the change process could cause chaos and reduced productivity for a longer period.

3.0 SWOT and PESTLE ANALYSIS

To critically show the evaluation of the organisation change a strategic analysis is given in the SWOT and PESTLE framework. The analyses are based on the information and material acquired from Ryanair Holdings Independent Management Report. The analyses provide an insight of the internal and external factors that impacted the airline industry.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

Based on the SWOT analysis, Ryanair has a stable business model. One of the main Strengths of the organisation is the Low-Cost operation and expected a quick recovery after the travel restrictions are lifted. *“Ryanair has built up a huge low-cost operations experience curve which will help it sustain going forwards”*. (Anthony, 2020).

Weaknesses

The organisation's weaknesses are due to internal factors such as job cuts, strikes, refund complaints also a bad reputation on extra charge that makes customers wary of hidden costs. Most of these factors arisen from the organisations model structure of keeping costs low.

Opportunities

The main advantage Ryanair has is its resilience. The organisation expects to grow its business and expand in ASIA *“While others in the industry crumble, Ryanair could emerge from the dust stronger than ever”*.

Threats

A major Treat of the organisation is due to the facts on flying rules and regulation which could lead to an increase future expenses.

PESTLE ANALYSIS

The PESTLE analysis reflects the Political and Government influence that had a high impact on airline organisations around the world.

The transport industry has been often a target of Government policies. Even though the aviation industry represents a small share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), has an important part on the economy. (Department for Transport, 2013).

Brexit has been an important factor for some time and had a major impact on Ryanair Organisation.

As a result of Brexit with the effect from 1st January 2021 when the UK left the EU, Ryanair Holdings PLC has passed resolutions to protect the company's EU airline licences post-Brexit. This means that Ryanair's will be owned and controlled by EU nationals. In addition, the organisation will also benefit from facilitating the operation of domestic UK flights.

Ryanair face two major uncertainties as shown in the PESTLE analysis. An important factor relates to the measures and safety requirements the organisation had to put in place, as social distancing measures which limits the number of passengers that can occupy the seats on the aircraft, and international travel restrictions resulting in a high drop in passengers and flights, affecting the airline economic activity resulting in slow recovery. (OECD.org - OECD, 2021).

Additional area of the organisations Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, together with the depth analysis of external factors like political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental factors discovered during the studies, are shown in the SWOT and PESTLE analyses at the APENDIX part of the report.

4.0 Cultural Influences of the organisation

Each organisation has a unique culture which can be influenced by various factors. (Factors Affecting Organization Culture, 2021).

According to Edgar Schein organizations do not adopt a culture in a single day, instead it is formed in due course of time as the employees go through various changes, adapt to the external environment, and solve problems. They gain from their past experiences and start practicing it every day thus forming the culture of the workplace. The new employees also strive hard to adjust to the new culture and enjoy a stress-free life. (Schein, 2010)

Ryanair organisation culture has gone a bit messy: a major issue is the fact that employee was not listened to and discouraged from even trying to bring up an issue.

Following a strike In September the airline had to cancel a high number of flights due to the problems with pilots and has proved the airline's relationship with the staff being very basic.

A successful culture involves their people as in Virgin Atlantic well known in putting its staff first, where in Ryanair culture the problems have been seen by employees but not involved in the solving process.

For the successful implementation of the culture, Ryanair should be aware of its cultural issues and empower, encourage self-development, and reward behaviours that nurture a quality culture.

5.0 Complex change role of the Leader and Leadership Style

"Leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal, "and defined by a Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu "the ability to hide your panic from others". (Heider, 2015).

Michael O'Leary is an effective leader. Looking at the confidence O'Leary dealt with the pre-Brexit with regards to measurements of shareholders voting rights, shows a quality identified in the Treat leadership style. The C.E.O also has an aggressive and autocratic style that may not make a positive impact on the long-term success of the airline. This has been shown in the commodity the way people within the organisation approach decision making to the problems, where the employees could not see that solutions were made, and they were nor listened to. "When the leader fails to listen to the people and acts as ultimate decision maker" then a culture of "emperor's new clothes "can be seen all over again. (Aggressive Leadership Style of Ryanair - 3WH, 2021).

O'Leary has been trusted to solve the problems; however, it is a question that he will succeed due to the designated workforce.

O'Leary's style includes a Non-Participative solution due to the Autocratic approach, as the best people are not involved, in finding solutions. In fact, people were afraid to speak up as their job could have been compromised.

Ryanair have taken on unexperienced pilots, unpaid for the period of 6-month training, forcing them to a zero-hour contract. This meant the pilots had to pay over 25k Euros from their own budget for the training, plus extra cost for accommodation, food, travels and living costs. However, after qualified they would be able to gain experience and get better paid jobs with better working condition airlines. (The Daily Mirror, 2020).

Due to the lack of benefits and trust, employees see their role just as a job and no more. What makes a great team to perform better is the Psychological Safety where they feel safe, involved, and appreciated.

The Low-Cost strategy works from customer point of view, but not quite the same from employee perspective, as they feel constantly on the edge and unevaluated, which leads to the organisation's underperformance.

The high profits and stakeholder's satisfaction, together with the Low-Cost approach of the business style remains under the question if the aggressive leadership sustain Ryanair in the future.

On the other hand, Ryanair has more internal issues to deal with, due to the C.E.O. meeting ambitions goals and not focusing to engage and communicate with employees. Not afraid to speak his mind about the thing he is most passionate, about profit. Absolutely 100% focused on price of all costs and flight prices. (Cooper, 2019).

According to Mc Gregor, all leaders are potential power holders, but not all powerholders are leaders. (Burns, 2010).

The internal pressure has a negative impact on the effective leadership team, this involving poor communication, fear to speak up, limited management skills in introducing the change and fear to change. When in an effective leadership team, a good leader provides employees with commitment and confidence and all members work together to make decisions and relies on their people to build team commitment to go through the change and meet the organisation's goal. (Crosby, 2021).

The critical perspective on Leadership is that Leadership isn't about a position or a person, it is about who can inspire people to do things they never thought they could. The evaluation on Leadership critically shown that above all qualities Leadership is important but so is teamwork, employees' participation, reliable communication, the talent, and ideas of the whole workforce not just those that comes from the top. (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019).

5.1 Leadership styles analysis

According to Kurt Lewin, the comparison between the autocratic style and its opposite Laissez-faire leadership style is that autocracy is all about power with the leader being responsible for making decisions, whereas laissez-fair leaders give the team freedom to complete the tasks and make decisions.

Autocratic style is focusing on getting the job done, which is highly valued in small organisations when things done are important for growth and survival, in comparison to laissez-fair which involves less amount of oversight.

The advantage of autocratic style is the fast decision making and suitability for crisis management. These points are essential for situations when the fast decisions are achieved by one single person, as seen in Ryanair leadership style.

Looking at the disadvantages of this leadership styles, it has been shown that autocratic style involves poor empowerment, too much control and lack of trust, which sadly often leads to toxic environment.

Even though Laissez-fair style sometimes is referred to as "the absence of leadership" it has advantages too, allowing team members to maximize their own leadership skills but also brings creativity by the employees that have freedom to bring new ideas. However, on the disadvantage side this style is not suitable for an experienced team and could damage the organisation with a long time of recovery. As clearly seen in Ryanair's organisation this method does not apply.

5.3 MANAGING CHANGE AGENT

A Change Agent is known as the *“individual or group that undertakes the task of initiating change in an organisation”*. Change Agents can be external or internal and depends mostly on the relationship between the change agent and the decision makers within the organisation. (Lunenburg, 2010).

Although there has not been too much research explored on which type of agent is most effective, there have been identified some type of methods of implementing change; these includes internal agent such as managers or employees appointed to oversee the change, and outsiders agents that are not members of the organisation who are looking to use different options that are more radical than the community will accept. Majority of organisation uses external change agents because they are most likely to bring different perspective to the situations as they are not familiar with the organisations culture or politics. Due to the lack in understanding the company’s history, the external agent is merged to work together with the internal coordinator from human resources department. (5 Steps to Being an Effective Change Agent | GovLoop, 2018).

Another agent type is focusing on the computerised information process system, an online webform as a free app that O’Leary has implemented, allowing customers to give feedback and suggestions on customer service improvement.

In addition to perform the role of change agent play, the manager function is to provide employees with a new set of skills as training which in Ryanair Organisation has been identified in training pilots to achieve the skills to comply with the organisation’s requirements.

6.0 The Change analysed under Kurt Lewin Model

According to Kurt Lewin's model, change is a fundamental approach to manage change and involved three steps: Unfreezing, Changing and Refreezing.

Lewin is widely known for the classic or fundamental approach of change management, which underlines assumptions of any change in human system (K.L,1974) (Schein,2010).

The process of Change Lewin's model refers to, is the perception that a change is needed, then "moving toward the new desired level of behaviour and finally solidifying that new behaviour as the norm".

According to Lewin's first stage -Unfreeze, it is probably the most important stage that involves the point when the change is necessary.

Ryanair is preparing to change and adopt to the COVID-19 traveling rules. With the pandemic social distancing and Government travel restrictions, Ryanair was restricted to perform travel services, therefore the change was necessary to adopt to the current circumstances.

Ryanair has taken immediate action to reduce operating expenses including freezing recruitment and employment contracts, significant working hour reductions and payments. The impact and duration of which is now impossible to determine.

Due to the decline in bookings and reduced operational airport services, the organisation will make further cuts, as necessary. "The C.E.O Michael O'Leary said: At the Ryanair Group Airlines, we are doing everything we can to meet the challenge posed by Covid-19 outbreak". Therefore, the Force Field Analysis is necessary because helps to think about the pros and cons before the action is taken and should exist a motivation change.

The second stage of Lewin's model which is the Change, or transition process is part of the journey in reaction to changes that are needed. In Ryanair organisation this is the hardest stage to apply because involved the process of moving towards something new. Moreover, applying role models and allowing people to develop their solution to the process of change; However, in Ryanair this stage does not exist, because the employees are facing a level of resistance to the changing process due to the Autocratic leadership style O'Leary approached. This resistance also includes Psychological -safety, lack of communication and trust. Since the participative factor does not exist, employees are falling back to the old patterns.

This stage of framing the process of people clearly was not useful for Ryanair organisation.

The last stage of Freezing or Refreezing stage is considered by Lewin a very important stage because requires efforts that must be made to ensure the people do not fall back to their old ways of doing things prior to the implementation of the change. There are some arguments to the refreezing step as being outdated in the existing businesses due to the constant need for change. However, by applying this stage, could help Ryanair to deal with Change. (Lewin's 3-Stage Model of Change: Unfreezing, Changing & Ref, 2021)

7.0 CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented crisis for the world's airlines. Ryanair Organisation has been forced to implement change to comply with the situation which affected its traveling activities. The aircraft and airports had implemented public health guidance, as special cleaning, face mask covering and safe distance requirement. Due to the pandemic Government imposed lockdowns and travel restrictions leading to flight cancellation for an indefinite period. (The Impact of Covid-19 On the Airline Industry, 2020).

"However, the aviation industry makes its way through the traveling restrictions, Brexit its looming on the horizon". (How will Brexit impact the airline industry? 2019).

The report has shown the process of innovation can be a managing change within organisation. However, this is a more complex process and requires good collaboration and knowledge management. Treating change as a process and identifying the key elements which are holding up the change as Planning, Management and Maintenance, leads to a successful change implementation. (Franklin, 2014).

The global situation is changing rapidly and day by day. Therefore, to keep up with the changes and create a great organisation that fit for the future, organisations need to have a clear vision of the end of the goal and benefits they seek for. (The impact of globalisation on international business – iQualify UK, 2021).

Not every organization or person enjoy change, however "following steps to clarify the goals of the change and getting employee buy-in, will ensure that the change goes smoothly and moves the organization forward". (Lawrence J.D., 2017).

Every organisation requires change agents which can be anyone who has skills power to coordinate the change effort. Michael O'Leary's autocratic leadership style is the fast decision making and suitability for crisis management.

The research shown that Ryanair has adopted to COVID-19 change, applying Government and travel restrictions rules. The SWOT and PESTLE analysis revealed Ryanair's stable business model by keeping costs low, being well prepared to cope with the aftershocks of the pandemic expecting a positive outlook.

However, following the current uncertainty about COVI-19, Ryanair will have a challenge year ahead.

The expectation to carry more passengers will remain revised, as is due to the EU Governments air travel restrictions which could lead to a higher loss then last year.

APENDIX

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
1) Ryanair's business model	1) Ryanair faces internal factors -which are due to the increased number of complaints on extra charges
2) Cost leadership competitive advantage	2)Controversial Position :O'Leary stating by "operating an airline with social-distancing is stupid
3) Keep the airline at Low -Cost	3)Cut Jobs cuts due to restructuring
4) Irish stock exchange	
5) C.E.O Michael O'Leary plan to expand the fleet to 600 -Boeing 737 Max	
6) Eager to break its record of 190mil passengers per annum.	
7) Expecting a quick recovery after flight Restrictions are lifted.	
8) Strongest balance sheet in the industry	

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
1) Influenced by external factors- Opportunity to expand in Asia for business and tourism	1 Based on the new rules and flying hours and aircraft regulation could lead to increase future expenses
2) Increase in flights ticket after travelling is allowed	2) The organisation pays tax on Profits in Ireland impacting the tax rate increase which could affect the organisation cash flow
3) Regain customers	3) Other profits earned by the Maltese registered aircraft are subject to tax in Malta
	4) Ryanair is a low-cost budget organisation therefore the increase in oil price could have a major impact on the organisation
	5) Impact on future flights in some European countries
	6) Bad customer -service reputation due to flights cancelation -and delays in reimbursing customers

(Sudhakaran, 2020)

PESTLE

The organisation hoped that the Risk of a No-Deal Brexit, UK, and Europe will come to an agreement which will allow the free movement of people to continue after the Transition period in December 2020.

Another concern was that Brexit could cause adverse trading consequences, with regards to the company's restrictions on non- EU shareholders' voting rights. Therefore, on 11 March 2019 and 29 December 2020 Ryanair put in place necessary measures to ensure that the company remains majority EU owned. (Ryanair Holdings plc).

Economical

As a result of the international travel restrictions, Ryanair has suffered a 99 percent drop in passengers which resulted in a net loss of approximately UD\$217m.

Therefore, Ryanair was forced to furlough 300 jobs, and planning to reduce pay by 20 percent to minimize more layoffs.

Ryanair planned to regain 70 percent of its operation before pandemic hit the airline industry but, due to the traveling restrictions this kept them from pushing through the plan. As a result, Ryanair suffered an economic loss and cuts to their Human Resources.

Also, another economic situation Ryanair has confronted with, was the shares fall to 7.6 percent due to the pandemic situation and movement restrictions decline. Ryanair will continue to have economic problems in the coming year as forecast, with a full recovery late as 2023.

Social

From Social point of view, until the number of infections decreases and the countries opening their borders allowing tourists to book flights, the recovery of the losses is hard to see.

While accounting only 12 percent of the airline passengers, business travellers bringing the highest profit due to the pricey last-minute bookings, frequent journeys, and premium services the recovery seems even harder.

Technology

Even though Ryanair has suffered economical losses, the carrier is looking to close the deal with Boeing 737 Max Jet which forecast a post-pandemic recovery as they expect an increase in flights numbers. The new Boeing will put the organisation on top of competitors.

Legal

Ryanair has argued the 14-day travel restrictions entering the Irish State, and that the non-essential travel is lawful, but The Ireland High Court which had in place the most strictest rule on travel, did not accept the claim, reason being the travel movement to the risk of Covid-19 infection.

Prior to the pandemic, Ryanair has faced court action due to the poor wage of employees, work conditions and strikes, and in the end have agreed with them to prohibiting further work interruptions. However, no legal measures were made.

Environmental

The airline industry has the largest contribution to the carbon footprint due to the high level of fossil fuel burn. The organisation has responded in a positive way, by planning to replace plastic on board with wooden and paper materials for cutlery, allowing travellers to take their own cups. Ryanair is also taking an environmental commitment to reduce its carbon, by charging passengers an optional carbon offset fee of 2Euros to reduce their carbon impact and to become the greenest airline in Europe.

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