



CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND ETHICAL PRACTICES

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Suhail Miah 1808197

Understanding and Engaging in the Customer Experience

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Lecturer: Vajira Balasuriya

0.1 Executive Summary

Due to the large number of airlines in today's crowded market it has led to the increase in fierce competition and rivalry to gain market share. Customer expectations have grown and satisfaction has decreased in the airline industry which have influenced the methods of conducting business. Businesses are being challenged to come up with new strategic methods to provide unmatched service to remain competitive against their rivals. Organizations had to overhaul and adapt their strategies in order to compete efficiently in the lucrative worldwide market. Organizations who implement good CRM software will reap benefits in increased profits and loyalty. (Chen, 2003)

This report will look at the ethical and sustainable policies in the airline industry. These policies will be examined and discussed to help improve customer relationship management of the selected airlines. Three quality models were discussed and analysed to view effectiveness on customer relationship management. A selected model will be applied to help make conclusion and recommendation on the ethical and sustainable policies to improve airline customer relationship management.

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1.0 Customer Experience in Airline industry

This section will analyse three different airline companies considering the ethical and sustainable policies of the organisations in relation to customer experience.

British Airways



British Airways part of the International Airlines Group (IAG) is the largest international airline in the UK. The airlines home base is in Heathrow, London which is the world's busiest international airport. British Airways operates its flights to more than 300 destinations worldwide and serves more than 40 million customers each year. It has nearly 300 aircrafts and approximately 40,000 employees. (IAG, 2020)

American Airlines



Figure 1 Source : American Airlines

Founded in 1930 American Airlines is now one of the largest airlines in the world. American's headquarter is in Fort Worth, Texas, but it operates out of 10 hubs with Fort Worth being the largest.

With its regional partner American Eagle, American Airlines flies an average of 6700 flights to 350 destinations in 50 countries. It is a founding member of oneworld which is the third largest airline alliance in the world. As of 2019 the company employs around 130,000 people. Airline handles about 200 million passengers annually and, 500,000 passengers each day. (American Airlines, 2020)

Emirates Airlines



Emirates Airlines is the largest airline in the middle-east. Based in Garhoud Dubai, it operates over 3,600 flights per week from its hub at terminal 3 in Dubai International Airport. Emirates flies to more than 150 destinations in 80 countries with its fleet of nearly 300 aircraft. It flew over 56 million passengers between 2019-2020 and has over 59,000 employees. (Emirates, 2020)

2.0 Ethical Policies in Airlines

What is Ethics?

Ethics is considered as morally right or morally acceptable (Collins Dictionary, 2020). This would mean being ethical is doing the right thing or is the socially acceptable norm in society. Organisations will need to maintain a good image and need to conduct business with ethical considerations in mind, otherwise it could damage the brand and harm image of the company. Many airlines now have a social responsibility or code of ethics as part of their rules and guidelines as it shows they will abide by the laws and regulations.

Security Measures

An example of ethics is; all airlines must have security measures to ensure safety of its customers. It is their duty to make sure their customers can travel in a safe manner. Many restrictions such as only allowing certain number of items and level of liquids on to the flight is required to make people safe from potential terrorist attacks or flight risks. The Airlines must check the planes before flights to ensure it is safe to travel in and must abide by the regulations set by the Civil Aviation Authority. Air travel is seen as the safest way to travel. (CivilAviationAuthority, 2020)

2.1 Data Protection and Confidentiality

Confidentiality is very important for consumers private information. Customers have a right to have their personal information is kept secure at all times and not shared to unauthorised third party. Organisations will lose reputation if personal data isn't kept safe and will lose customer trust.

British Airways

BA vows to protect all personal information of customers and employees and this information won't be shared to any unauthorised third party. All sensitive information is kept secure such as flight details, bank cards, address etc.

Failing to protect customer data has been costly, as British Airways was fined £183m in 2019 for a breach in its security system where about 500,000 customers personal data and was stolen by hackers. Customers personal data such as emails, address, bank details and credit card details were all stolen due to poor security systems in place at the company. (BBC NEWS, 2019)

American Airlines

American also has a similar policy on data protection and confidentiality of all data of customers and colleagues. All data is to be kept secure and not shared to any other unauthorised party. Any company that fails to abide by data protection laws can get massive fines and sanctions which will have negative impact on company.

Fraudsters targeted American Airline frequent flier program AAdvantage customers in 2015. It was reported 10,000 out of 70 million accounts may have been accessed. "It was discovered frequent fliers were often exempt from same level of security scrutiny" stated by Shirley Inscoe, an analyst at AiteGroup. If hackers were able to use frequent flier paperwork to pass through airline security, which could be a major cause for concern for increasing probability of airline terror attacks. American Airlines offered one year of free credit monitoring to customers as goodwill as a result. (InfoRisk Today, 2015)

2.2 Customer Service and satisfaction

Ensuring customer satisfaction is key to making sure repeat custom is gained. Companies that do their best will have an edge over their competitors that can help organization health and long-term sustainability. (Steven, et al., 2012)

British Airways

Customer services reps are available with many BA call centres, to help deal with customer enquiries and complaints. This is crucial to help dissatisfied customers and is key creating a good customer relationship management. Dissatisfied customers are very likely to use another airline and transfer negative experiences to other potential customers therefore harming future business. BA has a strict anti- bribery scheme as part of their employee code of conduct, so customers don't gain an unfair business advantage and to ensure fair treatment is given to every customer. (British Airways, 2020)

Investing in service and experience

BA has pledged to invest £6.5 billion to improving customer satisfaction. This investment will be put in to improve the experience of lounges, airport, dining experience, service and high-speed internet access at every seat. (British Airways, 2020)

American Airlines

American has a similar policy in regarding strict anti-bribery policy and will not accept gifts from third party which has not been approved by the ethics office. Bribes can harm reputation of companies and give perceived favouritism of potential business partners and customers. (American Airlines, 2020)

American Airlines is focusing on improving the travel experience to improve its service and give better value to customers with a few improvements as of August 31 2020.

- No change fees – Change fees for domestic flights or short haul flights on main premium cabin fares and most main cabin fares will be eliminated
- Fly standby for free- customers on flights will have ability to fly standby on earlier flights to same destination at no extra cost – this extends to domestic and international regardless of ticket price.
- More options in basic economy flights – Customers will be given more choices to tailor their upgrades to their package. Preferred and main cabin extra seats, priority boarding and same day flight changes.
- Same AAdvantages (frequent flyer) during the journey no matter the ticket price.

Both British Airways and American airlines have a similar approach to customer service and experience. It is important to improve in the customer service and provide better value as customers have a wide variety of choice in today's airline industry and failing to improve services and experiences can cause stagnation and failure to retain customers. (Gustafsson, et al., 2005)

3.0 Sustainability Policies in Airlines

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is defined as “causing little or no damage to the environment therefore being able to continue for a long time” (CambridgeDictionary, 2020).

Airlines must have sustainable policies in order to continue conducting business efficiently for a long time. Continuously depleting resources has a negative environmental factor and means eventually in future it is inevitable that it will run out so, alternative and improved methods will need to be considered as part of a business corporate responsibility. (Graham, et al., 2005)

3.1 Reduce carbon footprint.

Airlines are one of the largest contributors to air pollution and global warming so the way organisations consider environmental impact when conducting their policies will help their relationship with customers and improve brand image. (Givoni & Rietveld, 2010)

British Airways

British Airways is committed to reducing its carbon emissions. Customers are able to offset their domestic flights by investing in projects which will contribute to the creation of renewable energy. Flying more fuel-efficient aircraft such as A350 and 787s which are around 25-40 percent fuel efficient than the 747. Continuing to find improvements in efficiency has led to retiring the fuel intense entire fleet of 747 much earlier. BA is investing in its Lincolnshire waste-to-jet fuel plant which will be ready by 2025 which is an alternative method to overly relying on burning fossil fuels. BA is serious in committing to reducing its environmental impact by funding different renewable energy projects and offsetting flights. The aim to meet net zero emissions by 2050 and parent company IAG has invested \$400m to enable meeting this goal. (British Airways, 2020). This strategy demonstrates company awareness of the importance of environmental implications of flying was considered and helps the organisation adapt to new regulations.

Emirates Airlines

Emirates Group believes in growing the business sustainably and has outlined many goals in their environmental policy. Emirates vows to reduce the carbon footprint that aviation no doubt causes. Very large investments, billions of pounds are made in the business to create efficient methods of travels, and improving the quality of services and aircrafts. Using sustainable fuels and navigation route planning to reduce travel time and distance. A close eye is kept on the

development of biofuels which is a possible future option for flying more efficiently. (Emirates, 2020)

Working together with all the legal bodies such as IATA (International Air Transport Association) to help improve efficiency in fuel consumption and carbon emissions is a clear indicator of British Airways and Emirates accepting responsibility in limiting the impact on the environment. Customers will view the organizations as law abiding and following guidelines which shows they are conducting business honestly and responsibly.

3.2 Recycling materials and reducing waste.

Sustainability policies in place will help build a better brand image for airlines which will lead to long term stability and improve the customer relationship by playing its part in reducing the impact that the aviation industries cause on the environment.

British Airways

British Airways announced in February 2020 a target of removing 700 tonnes of single-use plastic on board their flights by the end of the year 2020, which is more than a quarter of a billion plastic items. In order to achieve this many different things were swapped for more greener alternatives, for example...

- Plastic stirrers were replaced by bamboo alternatives.
- Introduced water bottles which were made from 50% recycled plastic.
- Reduced plastic packaging on Club world amenity kits.
- Removal of plastic bags
- A duvet was created entirely from recycled bottles.

Emirates Airlines

Reducing Food waste and recycling

Emirates is committed to reducing waste. The use of technology has been used to help track what customers order on board. This gives data on customer satisfaction and consumption of food. This data is collected and clever A.I calculates the amount of food that is required to be ordered. Overall, 30-40% of food waste is reduced due to this, without compromising choice.

The goal is to improve by 60-70% as technology advances in future. Sourcing from local economies when possible while travelling to destinations helps support the economy of the destination of travel. Re-using old components from older planes models. Emirates works closely with suppliers regarding single use plastic. Blankets were created from recycled plastic bottles which is the same scenario as British Airways. (Emirates Airlines, 2020)

Both British Airways and Emirates have taken measures to reduce waste and recycle as part of their ethical and sustainability policies. This will help customers appreciate that airlines are contributing to reducing waste while still offering the services that will be required for the experience of flying. (Emirates, 2020)

Emirates, Qantas and SAS airlines have onboard recycling to sort aluminium, plastic, glass and paper products before landing. Spain's Iberia airline as part of the European Union's Life Zero Cabin Waste policy, has introduced 500 new trolleys, with separate compartment bins for separating waste. In 2018 RyanAir pledged a 5-year goal to outlaw plastic to become the "greenest airline". (Chua, 2019)

4.0 Three quality models to Improve Customer Relationship Management

In this section three quality models will be analysed and discussed to understand how effective it may be to improve CRM on the selected airline organisations.

What is Customer Relationship management?

Customer relationship management is the process of organizations using and managing data about its customers, to improve its relationship with them. Companies with good CRM policies are more likely to have better customer retention and increased profitability. An example would be providing tailored recommendations and offers to repeat customers based on their purchase history, this would make customers feel valued and increases loyalty. (Fjermestad, 2003)

Examples of CRM in Airlines

One of the earliest concepts of CRM in airlines was American Airlines' frequent flyer AAdvantage program launched in May 1, 1981. American is AAdvantage is still going strong today and is the oldest established CRM in airlines. In 1982 American Airlines was the first US airline to partner with an international carrier British Airways. AAdvantage fliers could earn miles on their flights on BA flights to Europe. British Airways launched its own frequent flyer program called Executive Club. (Rosen, 2019).

A revolutionary method of earning airline "miles" was created by the use of airline credit cards for shopping. Customers were able to spend money to earn miles on their respective airline. This transformed the landscape and reached many more customers whether they were frequent flyers or not. (Rosen, 2019)

Airline Alliances: working together to improve CRM

Customers had a whole heap of opportunities to earn airline miles on different flights due to the creation of airline alliances. Star Alliance was the first airline alliance created in May

1999. United Airlines is a member of this alliance and contains 27 other airline members, making it the largest alliance. Oneworld is the third largest airlines alliance which is made up of 13 members including British Airways and American Airlines. These allegiances are made to create a win-win situation and allow customers more options for travel while still earning airline miles from another competitor as part of the alliance. (Park, 1997)

4.1 Juran's Quality Trilogy model



Figure 2 Jurans Model. Source:WhatIsSixSigma.net

Juran's "Quality Trilogy Model" was named after its founder Joseph M. Juran. Juran is a management consultant and an engineer, specialising in quality management. The Juran model purpose is to reduce poor quality by planning quality in to the products and services. (WhatIsSixSigma, 2020)

The 3 processes in the model are:

1. Quality Planning

At the initial stage planning is important to be able adhere to and focus on the goals, objectives and visions of an organization.

The few steps in this stage are required:

- Understanding customer requirements and compliance will be required at this stage.
- Customer needs, defining product/ services features and specifications.
- Designing the product
- Formulating the process which will enable to meet the target product and/or services.

2. Quality Control

After all the steps and processes have been well-defined the next stage is to adhere to all the specifications and requirements of the product and/or services during the

creation stage. Recurrent checks and inspections need to take place to make sure that correct implementation of all the requirements are added. Detecting defects and taking preventative actions will take place and discovering the root cause will help eliminate or reduce faults. All of this will help arrive at the desired goal at the end.

3. Quality Improvement

No matter how perfect the design stage is sometimes things do not go as planned. The end product may fail to meet the perfect requirements of customers and specifications. Many external forces can affect this such as a machine fault and errors, change in customer requirements, business circumstances and market factors, etc. The goal of quality improvement is the process of improving the present methods and devising new better ways to achieve the target goal and implementation.

All the three stages outlined are connected to help improve different aspects of the products or services, however ultimately the goal is it will lead to continuous improvements in achieving the total quality management required. (Juran, 1992)

4.2 Crosby's "Zero Defects" Quality model

Philip Crosby states quality is intangible and immeasurable. He became famous for the "zero defects" approach on quality management in his published work "Quality is free" in 1979. The belief that the goal is to meet the requirements on time, first time and every time. Crosby thought that main reasons for poor quality products is related to poor management. The focus on Crosby's approach is prevention rather than inspecting and making corrections. The zero defects model is also known as the 14 steps to quality management (Crosby, 1979).

Crosby's 14 steps to Quality management

1. Management Commitment

Make it clear that management is committed to achieving quality.

2. Quality Improvement Teams

Members of different departments brought together to make a quality improvement team. Should have level of authority to control the department area they represent.

3. Quality measurement

Quality measures in place to establish areas which require improvement. Crosby believes delegation to those who do the job, so prevention of defect is easier to control.

4. Cost of Quality

Evaluating cost of quality allows an indication of where necessary action will likely result in greater profits.

5. Quality Awareness.

Training employees to improve quality awareness. Explaining to the employees and making aware of the cost of defects can have on organizations. Sharing this information is a key element in Crosby's model.

6. Correction of Problems

Corrective action taking place regularly to fix issues identified from previous steps. Employees need to know that problems are continuously being fixed. This will need to be the norm and become a habit in organisations to encourage problem solving.

7. Monitor Progress

Establishing a monitoring system to show progress and improvements.

8. Train Supervisors

Training supervisors to improve their role on Quality improvement.

9. Zero Defects Day

Holding a Zero Defects day to show management commitment to the cause. Can help boost employee's belief and commitment if everyone has same goal.

10. Establish targets for teams

Supervisors to set short term goals for improvement for themselves and their team.

11. Eliminate fear

Encourage employees to share their perspectives to management without fear. Employees on a single form of paper asked to describe anything that causes them from doing error free work. Employees concerns should be reviewed in 24 hours to establish trust that they are being listened to.

12. Recognition

Recognise employees who consistently achieve their goals. This will also boost morale and they will continuously strive to do better. Other employees will take note that management will recognise good contributions. Rewards can be given but the act of recognition is important.

13. Quality Councils

Establish teams to meet regularly to discuss quality issues and goals for improvements.

14. Repeat the cycle

Repeat the cycle to help integrate Quality being entrenched as part of the organization. Important to repeat with a new team so the learning process is continuous and never ends. (Crosby, 1979)

4.3 Deming's Cycle (PDCA)

In 1950s Dr William Edward Deming, a management consultant created a method of identifying why certain processes don't work as planned. Deming's PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) model is a popular approach to continuous quality management. Organizations are able to find what works and what doesn't and make amendments. The PDCA cycle has 4 steps is working in a continuous loop to show that it is non-stop. (Davies, 2001)

Figure 1: The Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle

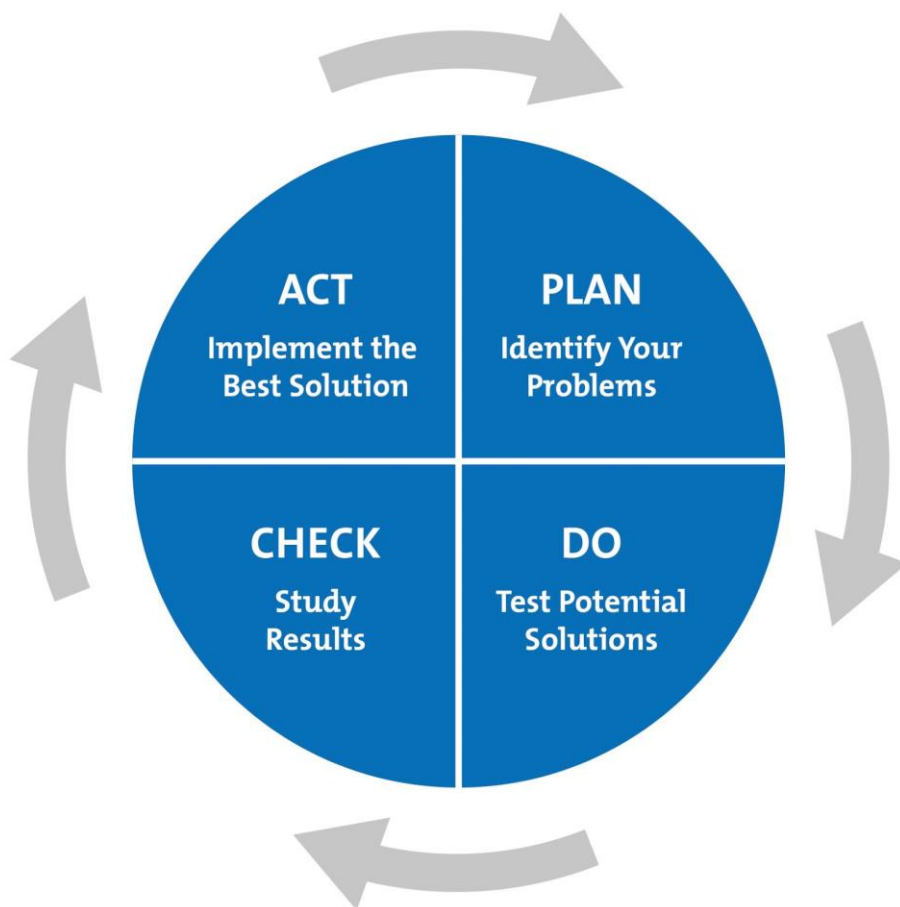


Figure 3 Deming's PDCA model Source: Edwards Deming's Institute

The 4 steps of PDCA (also known as PDSA)

1. Plan

Identify the problem or what needs to be done. Maybe a process hasn't gone as planned or an item quality wasn't good as intended.

2. Do

Once a potential solution has been recognized it is time to put into motion with a small-scale pilot project.

3. Check

Analyse the results of the initial pilot test. If the results are good you can go to the next step. If it's not successful you repeat steps 1 to 3 until satisfied.

4. Act

Once satisfied with the results, implementation of solution is required on a larger scale. The improved function or method because the new standard. The PDCA is continuous loop so there's not just a beginning and an end, the goal of aiming to improving quality will continue repeatedly.

4.4 Which approach is best for Airlines CRM?

The three total quality management methods were looked at, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. It is worth considering while they are all highly regarded as the “gurus of total quality management” they largely had an impact on the manufacturing industries. (Davies, 2001). Comparison of the techniques will be considered when making decision for which models will be best applicable to airlines to improve the customer relationship management

Juran's Trilogy approach closely considers the viewpoint of the customers. An important element in creating a product or service whether it will fit customer needs or specifications. An advantage that the model focuses on top down communication and technical methods rather than worker satisfaction. However proper implementation requires the proper personnel who understand the statistical processes. Higher success has been found in organization with strict policies, this means employees may struggle to properly benefit from this model in organization that are more lenient. (Heinzlmeir, 1991)

Crosby's 14 step policy emphasises prevention and “zero defects” being the ultimate goal. A benefit of this approach is Crosby is the focus on behaviours of people. The methods adjust people's attention towards achieving quality. The steps emphasise that management must show commitment to their goal and then pass that message on to their employees and assist them in achieving the quality level. All of the steps are linked and one affects the other. If everyone is not committed then the system will not be very useful to achieving zero defects. (Heinzlmeir, 1991)

Deming's PDCA cycle breaks things into 4 steps. The advantages are that organizations can find out what works and doesn't work and seek continuous improvement using the cycle. The drawbacks are that it leaves little room for variables for understanding and analysing when things go wrong. Getting stuck in the analysis stages can delay or even kill a project. The final step is where the actual implementation takes place. Quality experts focus on the determination of quality, instead of employees. Therefore, creating difficulty when measuring independent performance, as there is great emphasis on teamwork. (Reid, et al., 1999)

Due to the complex nature of organisations structure and policies the three selected airlines (British Airways, American Airlines and Emirates) should adopt strategies from each of the 3 above quality models. In essence the company structures and cultures remain intact but alterations could help improve their current CRM systems.

Juran's Quality model can work when creating or focusing on customer service, carefully considering customer experiences and feedback and making alterations to seek improvements. Deming's has similarities to Juran's and could potentially work also; drawbacks must be considered such as constantly reviewing policies could lead to analysis paralysis before the final stage. Constantly checking what works is good but considering what external factors is affecting a problem needs to be taken into account. Crosby's 14 step policy will be useful to creating or making changes to an overall structure of company policy and procedures of CRM. It's emphasis on teamwork and managerial commitment will strongly create a team environment where workload is shared and reviewed. Recognising employee contributions and giving rewards will be a positive motivation for staff to continue working to discover new ways of improving services. Elimination of fear also will make employees more willing to contribute to the organization as they will feel trusted. (Elnaga & Imran, 2013)

None of the quality models are absolutely superior than each other as they all contribute different things to quality management. Specific aspects of each model allow an unbiased approach to implementing a quality model as each has comes with its own pros and cons. There is no "one size" fits all approach and clear understanding from both employees and management needs to happen to make positive changes and improvement on airline CRM models.

Conclusion

Organizations through use of CRM systems gather data on customers whether it be prior to purchase, during or after. The organizations are then able to build a profile on the customer and this data is stored on the company's systems for later use. It is important that this data is gathered ethically and not shared or sold to other organizations for monetary gain. Due to the increasing shopping being done online it has led to concerns about spyware software to gather information unethically about customer habits. In these instances, concerns about how firms will use individual's data has led to individuals having doubts about organizations. With the increase in use of internet platforms such as social media, blogs, websites and forums people are more likely than ever to leave negative reviews if they have bad experiences with organizations. Negative reviews can impact the reputation of organizations and can be deter potential customers. Customers who suspect their data is being handled to get an unfair advantage will change their behaviour when giving out data, this gives organizations false information which may lead to eventually losing customer loyalty. (Nguyen, 2012). Highlighting trust and privacy will lead to a better relationship with the customer and organizations. The 3 chosen airlines can take on board improving their data protection and confidentiality policies when using their CRM systems to collect data. (Moorman, et al., 1993)

The second ethical policy of airlines analysed was customer service and satisfaction. Using CRM systems, the airlines can improve on the customer service by providing tailored recommendations to customers. For example, giving a frequent flier discounts and free upgrades to entice them to travel more. Another example could also be letting customers know about any potential delays to their flights via text message beforehand to prevent frustration and shows consideration from the organization. Improving customer service is key to customer retention as well as to keep organization sustainable for long term. Providing more training to staff to handle complaints and provide better services goes interdependent with good CRM. Airlines are increasing use of chatbots, online, FAQs and customer self-service apps to gain data about customer experience. (Dubos, 2020)

Sustainability policies such as reducing carbon footprint, recycling materials and waste were looked at on the airlines. These policies are part of organizations social responsibility and will add a good reputation to each respective company. Bad policies can cause negative press and potentially lead customers to choose a different company for their travel needs, especially in a highly competitive environment. Considering the aviation industries environmental impact is a huge factor not only for long term sustainability but for customers perception of the organisation. The airlines should continuously seek improvements to reduce carbon

emissions, by using sustainable fuels and improve recycling and finding greener alternatives as it is critical to longevity of the industry. (Chao, et al., 2019.)

Recommendations

While CRM has been proven to create efficiency within the airline industry, it has also exposed security frailties which requires organisations adapt to new wave of threats which could at large undermine the successes of CRM implementations. With the increase in cyber security, big corporations in the airline industry will hope to have secure systems to protect customer data. To improve the CRM of airlines great care needs to be taken of customer data as well as providing good customer service and value. Building customer trust by offering more suitable recommendations by gathering data. Price will be the main factor for some customers when choosing an airline but overall, the airline who knows the customer, and their preferences will have an advantage versus their rival competitors (Gustafsson, et al., 2005). The future of technology such as Big Data analysis and A.I will help assist in gathering more detailed information. Adoption of elements of the three quality models and training employee's customer service skills will help improve the 3 respective airlines CRM. While some success has been gained from airlines using CRM the overall impact is still not fully clear on airlines industry, however whoever is able to stand out and differentiate themselves from their rivals is expected to profit greatly.

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