

Business Impacts of the Coronavirus outbreak on a
chosen case study organization

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Virgin
Atlantic

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to analyse how the management of Virgin Atlantic has dealt with the coronavirus crisis in 2020. Virgin Atlantic like many other airlines have had to adjust to the new guidelines provided by the government in order to reduce the spread of the virus. The company has had to be under pressure in order to follow guidelines, having to deal with people's complaints and the amount of refunds that are being demanded by the consumers.

This report highlights the travel restrictions that have been put in place for airlines to follow which has affected many customers and employees of Virgin Atlantic with many losing their holidays and employees losing their jobs due to the pandemic. This will also include the problems that the company has faced and the impact that has happened during the last few months.

The pandemic has caused effects on the airline and the suppliers of the aircraft as it is uncertain what supplies would be allowed on the aircrafts. The airline has had to ask for government support as a result of the coronavirus causing problems for the airline financially as they were seeking a £500 million loan to help revive the aviation industry as they do not believe that the company will be able to survive without a loan or a rescue deal. The organizational structure would have this time to develop its new environment as the world has had to adjust to this new environment caused by the virus that was not predicted and no one could prepare for a crisis like the coronavirus.

The pandemic has caused issues for the staff and consumers with staff having to go on eight weeks' unpaid leave to try and secure jobs and having to deal with customers demanding refunds for their interrupted holidays. As this is an uncertain period and many companies have dealt with the pandemic in different ways, having to reduce their staff within the thousands to save money has caused more delays whilst staff have been working from home trying to refund millions of customers.

The passengers might not want to travel to certain destinations if they have to be quarantined for fourteen days as for many people the amount of days in quarantine would be the same amount of time as their holiday which people might think that there is no point going to a destination that they can't leave their hotel room.

The future of the company could still be alive as the flights have still been operating during the pandemic with cargo that has kept the company running. Looking at PESTEL has shown the different aspects that the coronavirus has had an impact on Virgin Atlantic and how the industry will recover as many new laws and regulations have come into effect to protect the people of Britain.

Many of the companies have had to follow guidelines which has caused airlines to reduce the number of flights and this has had an effect on the economy in the UK however, has reduced the risks posed to the environment by the planes flying which could be viewed as a benefit.

The conclusion suggests that during the pandemic, management have had to work to keep in line with government guidelines and try to protect their employees and consumers by travelling safely. Also, the airline needs to have the rescue deal to survive the loss of business during the last few months and to get ready to fly again to be able to make a start of reviving the business. Virgin Atlantic could create a crisis plan in case another pandemic will happen and they would be prepared with savings that could ensure the safety of the company in the future.

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Introduction

In 2020 the world has faced COVID-19 which has caused many industries to temporarily close with staff working from home or companies that have gone into administrations. Whilst other industries such as healthcare, education, public services, government, utility workers, public and national safety and transport have classed as essential workers and have had to work through the pandemic to help their local communities (White & Hope, 2020). As many sectors have been affected by the coronavirus online retail has grown by 23.8% during lockdown with all the categories together this could be the result as many shops had to close on the high street therefore people had to look online for their items. It could change once the high street stores reopen as some people like to browse in stores or the online industry could remain the same as people might prefer online shopping (Pressley, 2020).

In recent months many people have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic. This has affected many aviation companies including Virgin Atlantic as people have been restricted to travel to different countries unless it is absolutely necessary (Gov.co.uk, 2020). This is a situation that the world is unsure of what could happen next as there has not been many global pandemics before that have hit companies worldwide and one of the sectors that has a high uncertainty is the travel and tourism industry as there have been many travel bans across the globe although recently many European countries have already opened up their borders. (Oliver, 2020).

As Virgin Atlantic have suffered during the coronavirus like many other airline companies Virgin are looking at securing an American rescue deal of £1 billion which could save thousands of jobs. Virgin Atlantic are looking at having an agreement with First Data that could be beneficial for deals between companies and their creditors. This agreement could keep the airline company to continue throughout the crisis as without the key stakeholders the deal would probably not go ahead and the company would go into administration (Kleinman, 2020). The pandemic has caused many flights to be cancelled and for the company to handle a situation that no one has dealt with before whilst trying to survive. While all aviation companies have been affected, Virgin Atlantic has had to deal with many complaints from their customers and have had to follow the guidelines from the government, this has caused Virgin Atlantic to lose a lot of business, and the business is looking for financial help to secure its business (Pollard & Borland, 2020).

Main Findings

Effect on the company

The initial response of Virgin Atlantic to the coronavirus pandemic was for the Virgin Group to support all the Virgin companies with \$250 million. In order to help with the PPE shortages in the UK, Virgin Atlantic were operating flights bringing in the medical essentials to frontline workers around the UK from China. Many of Virgin Atlantic's grounded employees have been able to volunteer on the frontline and help out in their local communities. Also, as many Britons were stranded in some destinations they were able to have repatriation flights for 3,000 of Brits abroad (Steere, 2020).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs could have an impact on how the company responded to the Covid-19 as the lower tier of the pyramid is physiological needs which is the basic need to survive that has become more evident during the pandemic that it belongs towards the top of the pyramid along with safety needs as companies have had to put their staff and consumers' safety above all else (McLeod, 2020).

Virgin Atlantic are looking for investors to help with the company as there has not been as much business as there usually is however the CCO Julia Jarvian is confident that the company is going to make a recovery after Covid-19 as it is known worldwide and is popular with consumers looking for a stylish adventure. It is also stated that cash is important in any business and difficult period especially in a time like this where there is uncertainty and with customer demand so low. Virgin now has to look at how they will be able to make it safe for the passengers and staff to get back on the planes which will take team effort with the authorities, airports, service providers and aircraft suppliers (Leigh, 2020).

In March Virgin Atlantic had asked for money to support the industry from taxpayers and in this time the company is struggling to survive and has asked for a £500m bailout to help with the effects of the pandemic. Last year Virgin had bought Flybe and when the coronavirus hit they failed to rescue the airline as the company needed to focus on themselves first before any other company, even Europe's largest carrier (Gill, 2020). The Coronavirus pandemic has shown that Virgin has been struggling with its finances and with Branson only leasing aircrafts instead of having ownership could be difficult if the company has to sell any assets to make ends meet as there are only a few assets that are owned by the company (Gill, 2020).

Virgin Atlantic would only survive with UK government support according to Branson but has made it clear that the company would pay the money back as it would only be a loan. If the company cannot find the sufficient funding it could lead Virgin Atlantic going into administration (CNBC, 2020). The financial aid that Virgin has requested from the Government has led to other airlines across Europe to follow suit in asking their governments for support to see if it will help the aviation industry through COVID-19 (Maszczyński, 2020).

As Virgin Atlantic is trying to survive Sir Richard Branson is going to put £200 million into Virgin Atlantic as part of a rescue package of £900 million. The money will be transferred from Virgin Group and it will be from the sale of \$500 millions of shares in Virgin Galactic. Air travel is not expected to return to normal for many years. After the government rejected the bailout for Virgin Atlantic, Richard Branson said that he would mortgage his Private Caribbean Island to bailout Virgin Group. However, they are still having discussions with the government about financial support as there could be impacts on the company's finances such as the quarantine rules that are in place for passengers arriving to the UK and air bridges that are needed in other countries. However, the aviation industry isn't considered a priority and are having to look for alternative solutions to save the industry (Davies,2020).

Organizations need to function together in the form of responsibilities and relationships. "Organisational structures are frameworks for getting things done" however they can change when the environment or circumstances have changed which has probably escalated since the beginning of the coronavirus This would have to develop in order to deal with the pandemic as the world is inexperienced to crisis' that have hit the industries as hard causing businesses to restructure their organisational structures (Armstrong, 2014).

Political Factors of Virgin Atlantic

Before the Coronavirus Virgin Atlantic were already making losses as there were higher fuel costs and by the uncertainty of Brexit. However, in 2018 the company had improved and in March 2019 Virgin Atlantic had bought shares in Flybe the UK's regional carrier (Spero, 2019). Due to the pandemic Flybe went into administration on the fifth of March 2020 as there were less bookings taking place which the carrier could not handle without a loan from the government which is the reason that they went into administration. As the company was already struggling financially and had requested a loan from the government to try and recover from the coronavirus it was rejected as it is thought to be of less importance at the beginning of the pandemic and the government support would be better spent elsewhere (Culbertson,2020).

The Economy

During April 2020 the GDP had fallen and had shown that lockdown and the social distancing rules had caused less need for consumer demand, closures of businesses and disruptions for the supply chains. The GDP fell by 20.4% which shows a decline in services, production and construction. This decline has shown to be even worse than the recession in 2008 which had a decline 6.9% which shows the difference of how bad the economy has been hit.

Many of the industries that have been hit are accommodation, recreational activities, the arts food and beverage and many public places which had around 75% of the businesses being temporarily closed (ONS, 2020).

The pandemic has caused many flights to be cancelled to try and control the spread of the virus which has had an effect on the aviation industry worldwide. The first week of June had seen a 65.1% decrease in flights worldwide comparing it to the first week of June 2019. It will take a while for airlines to fully recover from Covid-19 but hopefully with Virgin Atlantic resuming flights from the UK on the 20th of July starting with Orlando, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Los Angeles and New York. Also, more routes should be opening in August with health and safety measures in place for staff and passengers should be the beginning of recovery for the airline. However, for passengers travelling to the UK will have to go into quarantine for fourteen days which might put people off travelling for leisure for a while as they would not be able to enjoy their holiday (Mazareanu, 2020).

Social Factors

To reduce the spread of the virus, countries worldwide have had to start social distancing to ensure that less people contract the virus which has caused a massive change because life as we used to know it is no more. People are having to stay two meters apart and up until the sixth of July in Wales people were told to stay local and only go out for necessities and exercise (Gov.co.uk, 2020). With these guidelines in place it has caused many of the travel and tourism industry to think of ways they will be able to travel again safely with health packs on board the flights, passengers having to wear face masks and constant sanitizing where possible on board (Kennedy, 2020).

The United States have been one of the countries most affected by the coronavirus with approximately eleven million cases and around five hundred thousand deaths which means that people have had to social distance and take precautions in countries worldwide which stopped many flights around the globe due to people's safety (Gutiérrez, 2020).

However, Virgin Atlantic have decided to resume flights to a few destinations at the end of July with changes at the airport and on-board which includes health questionnaires, temperature screening and face masks and hand sanitiser. This will give a new experience at the airport and on-board for passengers and this will create a safer environment from the moment passengers enter the airport (Topham, 2020).

Technology in the aviation industry

Before the beginning of lockdown in March Virgin Atlantic were trialling wearable technology in Heathrow Airport in the Upper Class wing. As the airline was trialling the technology before the pandemic it could take some time for the airline to reconsider

re-trialling as the airline will be focusing more on the safety of the customers and will probably use the technology when the economy rises to how it was before the pandemic.

When the airline re-trials the new technology it includes Google Glass and Sony Smartwatches that would be able to give customers a new unique and high tech experience. The Upper class passengers will be able to experience a greeting at arrival at the Upper class wing and will be able to have an immediate check-in process with the technology. By using this technology, the staff will have up-to-date information on the flights and destinations. It was created by SITA and the Virgin Atlantic passenger service system that will tell the staff which passengers they are meeting with and will give them the dietary and refreshment preferences to give a better experience to the passengers from the moment that they arrive at check-in at the airport.

Virgin Atlantic is the first airline to introduce wearable technology to the aviation industry to give a better experience for the passengers and with this technology if it becomes successful more companies are likely to follow (Employee, 2020). However, with the coronavirus pandemic and fewer people flying the process to see if the technology works will have to take a trial when flying goes back to normal.

The Environment

The aviation industry has asked for an investment in aviation fuels of £500 million and the reason is to prove to the investors of the private sector that the investment will succeed and to show that the new innovation products will help the environment which is why the industry needs an investment to get them up and running. It is undetermined whether all the plans for the aviation industry will still continue to plan as the economy has been hit with the coronavirus and this could cause delays in any plan that was created before the pandemic. With the current situation it can be an opportunity for the climate to recover from the damage that pollution has caused worldwide which could give the world enough time to consider a different approach to help the environment in the future during this time.

With Covid-19 hitting the aviation industry hard the technology for sustainable aviation fuels could have 14 plants producing the fuel for aviation for the UK by 2035 as this would be more environmentally friendly and could give economic benefits to the UK. It is predicted that the travel demand will grow by 70% by 2050 which means that there needs to be more transportation that will not cause damage to the climate.

Virgin Atlantic are searching for solutions in aviation fuels which includes using the waste gas from industrial processes and transforming it into jet fuel which will be able to help the atmosphere and can hopefully bring in more renewable energy which can make more sustainable fuel (Macola, 2020). This suggests that there are some strengths and opportunities during this pandemic as it will give airline's time to plan for more environmentally friendly aviation travel.

Legal

Before employees can go back to work it is important for the employers to consider the employee's health and safety before allowing them to go back to work which includes the employee's transport to work as the government has requested that people avoid public transport unless necessary. Many businesses had to cut jobs or send people to work from home unless it had to be done in the work environment as the government had put the country on lockdown. If any employee or their family had any symptoms of Covid-19 the employees are entitled to self-isolation, shielding and statutory sick pay this would be to try and minimise the risk of the virus spreading in the workplace but this scheme will end on the first of August (CIPD, 2020).

The FCO has advised against any air travel unless it is essential and if people have to travel they should avoid the busiest time for flying, keep the two-meter distance from people when they can and use hand sanitiser or wash their hands when they travel. In many airports in England and Scotland it is necessary to wear a face covering in the airport and on-board unless you have a valid reason to not wear a face covering. The guidelines for when people travel are to try and prevent rising in cases as there are many people at the airport that will not be able to social distance when on-board the flight which is why the government has said for people to only travel if necessary (Gov.co.uk, 2020).

Under the European Law if planes are not operated the slots are given up. As the coronavirus have had to cancel services the UK Transport Secretary had written to the European Commission to try and have the rules of the slot allocation relaxed during the pandemic as it will make it better financially and environmentally as it is a waste of fuel to fly empty planes just for the airplanes to keep their slots. The schedule of the planes that carry out from one year to the next at some of the major English airports such as Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Manchester, London Luton and London City as the slots are limited at these airports. The rules have been suspended to China and Hong Kong but still applies to other destinations which is why carriers are still flying as the airlines could lose millions of pounds that airlines do not want to lose their slots. The EU allocation slots still apply to UK airports even though the UK is no longer part of the European Union that has to go to the European Commission in Brussels for the rules to be suspended during the pandemic as there are less passengers on board flights costing carriers money and wasting fuel (Leggett, 2020).

Many travel companies including Virgin Atlantic have refused a refund for customers or are issuing credit notes for cancelled flights and holidays. According to Which? all twenty companies that they contacted did not refund their customers within the respected timeframe which they are meant to by law. Virgin Atlantic is being accused of issuing credit notes even if the consumer had asked for a cash refund. It could take months for consumers to receive their refunds as travel companies have to offer an option of a cash refund even though they can offer vouchers if there is a cancelled booking. This could be viewed as a weakness of the company as the process of the refund takes longer the more consumers are annoyed and will reconsider the airline that they take in the future. The reason airlines might not be able to refund customers within the usual seven-day period due to the amount of refunds that are being requested during this time with only a team handling the refunds that could take time

to get them refunded. The credit notes that are being issued are valid for twelve months the same value as the cancelled booking and if it is not used within those months can request a refund (Slater, 2020).

How staff at Virgin Atlantic has been affected by COVID-19

Virgin Atlantic operated out of three major British Airports Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester and employed 10,000 staff however in order to survive the Covid-19 crisis the company has already decided to reduce its flights from Gatwick and focus more on Heathrow airport. Due to the pandemic Virgin Atlantic have made 3,150 of its staff redundant (Drewette, 2020) and employees had taken eight weeks of reduced pay for the company to try and survive and also to try and save as many jobs possible as the tourism, leisure, hospitality and aviation are some of the sectors that have been most affected by the Coronavirus (Branson, 2020). As many of the staff at Virgin Atlantic call centres have been furloughed some of them have been training for helping to handle 999 calls to help with the increase of calls to the NHS (Moore,2020).

As many people have lost their jobs or there hasn't been a need for more employees the companies are just using enough staff to cover the flights that are bringing in medical cargo for the NHS (Branson,2020). The Government has set up tax breaks, furloughing schemes and offering loans to ensure that people still get 80% of their salary. This could help people to still have a wage coming in to help pay for food and their bills (Smout, 2020). The staff were offered a few different options while the airline was trying to cut down costs as one was an unpaid sabbatical for 6-12 months instead of making the employees completely redundant, extending pay cuts for the entire leadership team or the option of reducing pension contributions for a year. Even with the options available the staff would have had to think about what they would be able to afford to do as they still need some sort of income to live and have to think about what is best for them (Maszczynski,2020).

Many businesses in this time of uncertainty have been found to be using British taxpayers' money to pay the wages of their workers and the High Pay centre found that 37% of FTSE 100 firms have reduced the boardroom pay however only 13% have decided to cut bonuses. Also, Virgin Atlantic are using British taxpayers cash to cover 80% of wages for 8,000 furloughed staff. This time is hard on every type of business and many companies have to make sacrifices in order to survive however if the company still has the money itself and can afford to give bonuses they shouldn't have to use the British taxpayers' money to pay their employees on the other hand businesses are struggling through this pandemic and every business owners are having to deal with millions of employees and having to think of the best solution to ensure the future of the company (Hiscott, 2020).

Consumers

There are new regulations for people entering the UK from abroad on the 8th of June onwards to have 14 days in quarantine when they arrive. In July Virgin Atlantic hope to be able to start flying again with more passengers and the routes they will be able to operate when restrictions are eased in different parts of the world. If Virgin Atlantic are able to start resuming their flights they will start to recover in 2021 (Gibbons, 2020).

The pandemic has caused many flights not being able to go ahead with consumers' holidays being cancelled however, not all of the holidays have been refunded as some people are still waiting four months after having their holidays cancelled with over 4,000 people joined the Virgin No Refund Support Group in hope that they will get their money back and many people have complained about airlines not refunding their holidays (Pollard & Borland, 2020).

Consumers have had to cancel their holidays in early march as it was a safer option to stay home than to risk catching the virus on holiday. However, when people were cancelling their holidays at the end of march there were only six planes flying continuing to New York JFK and Los Angeles (Maszczyński, 2020).

The Future of Virgin Atlantic

All airlines have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and 90% of commercial flights aren't continuing as the travel restrictions are put in place (Leigh, 2020). However, Virgin Atlantic have started a cargo-only aircraft programme in May which has increased PAX by 33% with the company operating these flights it still keeps some people in work the industry can still keep going even without many passengers being able to fly and help the recovery of the UK and international businesses from Covid-19. The cargo flights are important to keep the supply chains going especially the businesses that are still open for business. Virgin Atlantic have found that with the exports and cargo flights that they have made the highest revenues of the airline's history this could be an opportunity for the airline to keep the exports going even after the restrictions are lifted and the economy goes back to normal (Harry, 2020).

Due to the coronavirus the Boeing 747 has retired at Manchester Airport as there was less non-essential travel as they were not meant to retire until 2021. The planes will be replaced with new 787s, A350s and A330s as they will be more efficient for aviation travel (Sharma, 2020).

Conclusion

This report highlights that Virgin Atlantic have had financial issues before the coronavirus and the pandemic has caused the airline to search for a rescue deal. As the airline has had to cut around three thousand jobs to try and cut costs to save the airline company.

The entire aviation industry has suffered a downfall as the FCO travel advice has gone against any air travel unless it is essential which has seen companies such as Flybe to go into administration as they could not handle the loss of passengers due to the pandemic. Virgin Atlantic had to rely on their cargo flights to maintain some operations being used and it has increased their cargo flights by 33% during the pandemic which has been a benefit for the airline to still be able to operate a service during this time.

The airline followed government advice and had to cut many flights by the middle of March in order to keep the public and their staff safe which included asking the staff to take eight weeks of unpaid leave to try and save as many jobs possible. It is clear that this situation has left many businesses uncertain about the future. However, as it happened it has obviously caused for information to be brought to light such as Virgin Atlantic's financial issues that were not well known before the coronavirus and for the company to come to a decision to ask the staff to have unpaid leave in order to try and lessen the cost.

The airline like many others have had to make decisions that are best for the company and to plan for the future of the airline with having time to think how they can make their customers' journeys more environmentally friendly as they do not want to waste aviation fuel that can be harmful to the environment. As the airline has had to follow some strict government rules with being unable to carry passengers for non-essential travel and the airline having to issue refunds to customers.

The key priority for management is for staff and consumers to be able to get back to travelling safely during this time and they will have to follow strict guidelines at the airport to be able to fly and once on board they will receive a bag with a mask and hand gel to be used until people can start travelling safely and there is less risk of coronavirus. This will be able to prepare businesses to plan for a crisis such as the coronavirus in the future in order to try and survive as many businesses have gone into administration.

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