



Transition process activities and team efficacy of flight attendants



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ABSTRACT

The research goals of this study were to investigate how transition process activities among flight attendants affect team efficacy. We distributed a total of 600 questionnaires to flight teams in an airline company, which yielded a usable response of 275 fully completed questionnaires in the end. The research model and the hypotheses were tested using a structural equation modeling approach.

Our findings suggest that transition team activities have emerged as an important asset in team efficacy; moreover, increasing flight attendants' job satisfaction should be a priority for airline companies. Second, communication between flight attendants requires not just the delivery of information but also receipt and comprehension of the knowledge interchange, third, the development of shared leadership should be concerned in flight teams.

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1. Introduction

Airline companies see their flight attendants as the frontline ambassadors of the service (Chang, 2012; Paleari et al., 2010). Flight attendants, in particular, newly hired recruits, are trained for their tasks. However, flight teams frequently changing their composition limits the extent to which team members can anticipate each other's skills, knowledge, strengths and habits (Chen and Kao, 2012; Waller et al., 2004). Many short-term meetings, collaborations and interactions common in airline companies today, because of their short duration, do not allow participants to feel like they are able to achieve optimum team cohesion and success.

Successful team work is a function not only of the team members' talents and the available resources but also of the processes team attendants use to interact with each other to accomplish the work (Banks et al., 2012; Chen and Kao, 2012). Moreover, evidence suggests that a team that thinks in similar ways about difficult problems is likely to work effectively together (Bligh et al., 2006). However, a gap in the team effectiveness literature is that most

research models discuss only direct relationships between team design, process (Droege and Johnson, 2010), contextual variables and team effectiveness (Hampson et al., 2012), ignoring how such variables interact with each other. Few studies have considered how job satisfaction, shared leadership and process affect team efficacy simultaneously.

Moreover, previous research reported the development of special training for flight teams, which was designed to reduce error and increase the effectiveness of flight attendants (Chang, 2012; Yeh, 2012). Collaborating between flight attendants is an important issue; however, from the perspective of flight attendants, their service tasks are specialized, roles are differentiated, coordinated interactions of interdependence are specified, and expertise is distributed among individuals composing the team. Team process plays a strong indicator of effective team performance between flight attendants, wherein members of a flight team share similar conceptualizations of problems and approaches to solutions. This study aimed to investigate how transition team activities affect team efficacy of flight teams at an individual level.

From the perspective of a shared mental model, flight team members require time to develop an understanding of each other's skills and knowledge, and the training of flight teams includes focus on nontechnical skills critical for enhanced operational performance (Hannah et al., 2011; Kuipers and Stoker, 2009; Paleari et al., 2010). Likewise, leaders must be able to practice intercultural competence and shared leadership within work teams.

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In summary, flight attendant teams are formed because collective resources (knowledge, skills, and diverse expertise) are required to work on tasks that are too complex or large to be handled by one person, and shared knowledge and familiarity among team members is an important factor linked to team performance. The research goals of this study were to investigate how job satisfaction and service standard communication affect team efficacy via of team process activities among the flight attendants. Data were obtained via a mailed questionnaire given to flight attendants at EVA, an airline company in Taiwan. The research model and the hypotheses were tested using a structural equation modeling approach. Section 2 describes the theoretical background of this study and provides a review of previous research in the field. Section 3 illustrates the research methodology; Section 4 presents the research findings; and Section 5 discusses our conclusions.

2. Theoretical background and literature review

Airline companies need to take into consideration many elements when setting up their flight teams. As depicted in Fig. 1, this research model considers team efficacy based on job satisfaction and service standard communication of attendants and transition team activities.

2.1. Shared mental models

Shared mental models allow team members to understand who possesses what specialized knowledge, to trust the reliability of that knowledge, and to organize this differentiated knowledge effectively (Wang and Rafiq, 2009). All of these types of knowledge are shared in effective teams. The shared mental model theory offers an explanation of what the mechanisms of adaptability might be—that is, how teams can quickly and efficiently adjust their strategy. In this study, we argue that shared mental models become crucial to team functioning because they allow flight attendants to predict the flight information and resource requirements of their service teammates.

Flight teams with these shared mental model characteristics have elsewhere been labeled attendants, ad hoc teams, high reliability or ephemeral teams (Tjosvold et al., 2006; Weick et al., 2005). From a shared mental model perspective, job satisfaction levels are higher when the team members can decide how to develop and organize their work. Hence, flight attendants are able to act on the basis of their understanding of the service standard and how these will affect their team's response. It is this ability to adapt quickly that enables flight teams in dynamic environments to be successful.

2.2. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a measure of attitude that relates perceptions of past events and rewards to current impressions of a job (Judge

et al., 2008). It refers to the employee's general affective evaluation of their job (Judge et al., 2008; Morrow et al., 2011). It is more likely that emotional labor influences job satisfaction through its impact on emotional exhaustion.

From the shared mental models' perspective, previous research emphasized that flight attendants who received training on problem-solving skills reported enhanced problem-solving skills, more problem-solving self-efficacy, greater positive problem-solving effect, higher job satisfaction, and higher life satisfaction at post intervention (Ayres and Malouff, 2007). The level of job satisfaction of flight attendants team and cohesion decreases when there is more conflict between the team members.

Flight attendants' jobs are highly demanding with respect to both requirements associated with emotional labor and high physically demanding labor; job stressors and psychological distress will influence job dissatisfaction of flight attendants. From a shared mental model perspective, a frontline employee of an airline company identifies how certain emotional abilities may be learned on the job, in particular, those associated with how emotions are managed.

2.3. Transition team activities

Transition team activities refer to those activities involved in mission and goal specification, as well as strategy planning (Pineda and Lerner, 2006). In a dynamic team, members recognize themselves as a team and have some degree of shared accountability (Cohen and Bailey, 1997). Likewise, flight team members can be assigned roles and responsibilities speedily, and team members support their partners in establishing team goals.

To work effectively together, flight team members need to quickly transition to working with unfamiliar team members to provide high quality passage service; many studies of team effectiveness suggest that teams who find work motivational, and teams who are developmentally mature, will engage in effective process behavior (Collins and Parker, 2010). In the context of a multiphase episodic framework related to goal accomplishment (Lewis, 2011), flight team members engage in a wide range of activities to accomplish their goals.

Flight attendants work together to achieve something beyond the capabilities of individuals working alone. Flight team members might take advantage of each other's different strengths when working together in the airplane. The key component of a dynamic flight team is the transition team activities, which is responsible for adding and removing processes during work; accordingly, when flight attendants have a high degree of job satisfaction, they can be called upon to deal with complex, new and redesigned airline service knowledge and technologies, and helping behavior. This leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Job satisfaction is positively associated with transition team activities of flight attendants

2.4. Service standard communication

Service standard communication values the degree to which the organization measures, controls and communicates the standards of service quality (González and Garazo, 2006; Lytle and Timmerman, 2006). Conformance to a set of standards is more likely if those standards are understood by every employee in the organization (Fan and Ku, 2010). These standards, when communicated to all employees, maximize internal benchmark achievement and minimize service failures. They also strengthen the firm's ability to recover from such failures.

An excellence passenger service relies on attendants' interest to maintain the customer service standards. Flight team members

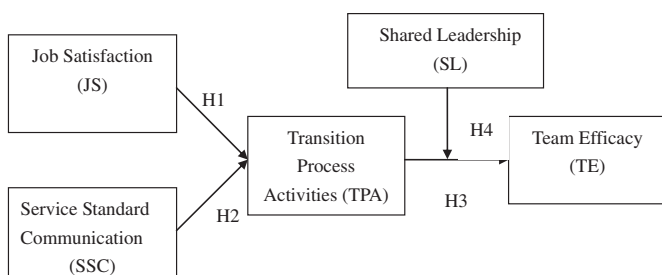


Fig. 1. Research model.

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