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Cabin crew wellbeing during Covid-19 pandemic at Airline X

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The thesis is commissioned by Airline X to understand the effects of Covid-19 crisis and further use the results to support cabin crew in crisis situations.

The thesis three aims: 1) providing insights into cabin crew wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic in years 2020-2021; 2) identifying what affects cabin crew work in general and their work wellbeing during this particular time frame; and 3) suggesting how supervisors can support cabin crew during crises.

The theoretical framework covers selected theory about wellbeing at work, challenges in cabin crew work, crisis, and employee engagement. The thesis used qualitative case study methodology, as it is suitable when examining a group in a certain context or situation. A survey was designed together with the commissioner and sent to all cabin crew. Additionally, commissioner's standard wellbeing surveys from 2019-2021 were examined as well as their occupational healthcare provider was interviewed.

The findings verify whether and how crisis can affect cabin crew wellbeing, be it by creating uncertainty, stress, or financial problems. The thesis also presents a list of developmental suggestions for the commissioner.

Keywords

Wellbeing, cabin crew, covid-19, crisis, aviation

Contents

1   Introduction

Infectious coronavirus disease Covid-19 was originated in Wuhan, China in 2019 and by March 2020 World Health Organization, WHO, declared it a worldwide pandemic (Fimea 2020).

Covid-19 pandemic has taken its toll on the whole world and affected all industries and every sector causing significant economic and financial losses as well as deep uncertainty (ICAO 2022). Almost every business sector has been forced to make changes, and especially aviation industry has suffered hard. The beginning of the crisis paralyzed aviation industry across the globe leading some airlines going bankrupt and some needing to fire or lay off employees. It has been a deep crisis for the industry and still ongoing at the time of writing this thesis. The economic losses have been enormous, and it will take a long time to recover, if even fully possible. Airlines are trying to ramp up their operations, but it seems almost impossible when a new variant of the virus is lurking around in every corner.

According to International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO, the global economic impact of Covid-19 has been major, the offered capacity and passenger numbers have significantly reduced during 2020-2021, and therefore the airlines have suffered considerable losses (ICAO 2022).

YEAR 2020 RESULTS

✈ SEATS OFFERED (CAPACITY)
▼ - 50%

🧍 PASSENGERS FLOWN
▼ -2.703Bn

$ AIRLINE REVENUE LOSS
▼ - USD372bn

FULL YEAR 2021 RESULTS

✈ SEATS OFFERED (CAPACITY)
▼ - 40%

🧍 PASSENGERS FLOWN
▼ -2,2031M

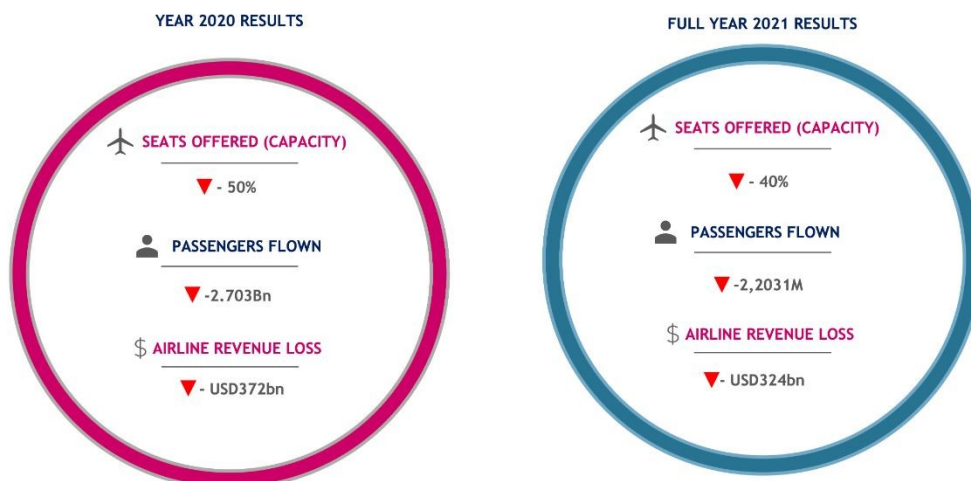$ AIRLINE REVENUE LOSS
▼ - USD324bn

Figure 1. Global economic impact of Covid-19 in aviation (ICAO 2022)

All subsectors in aviation industry, except freight and cargo airlines, have made enormous losses in 2020. According to McKinsey & Company analysis, airlines have suffered the

most in the aviation industry in 2020 and made the biggest economic losses. (Bouwer & al. 2022.)

The crisis has not only affected the aviation industry in general but also every individual working in it. Everyone has suffered from uncertainty, temporary layoffs, or having to give up their beloved jobs.

According to World Health Organization, WHO, Covid-19 pandemic has had serious consequences for health systems, economies, and societies, but on individual level also for mental health and has caused psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress among other things (WHO 2022).

By examining the effects of the crisis on cabin crew wellbeing, valuable remarks can be made, which can later help to prepare when another crisis hits the industry. Though Covid-19 crisis is one of a kind, it is well known that various crises in aviation industry are more of a rule than exception.

1.1 Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to,

- examine the wellbeing of Airline X cabin crew during Covid-19 pandemic in the years of 2020-2021
- to find out what factors contribute to cabin crew wellbeing, and whether some are more prominent during the time of crisis
- to find possible solutions to improve cabin crew wellbeing during crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic offers a unique viewpoint to examine its effects on cabin crew wellbeing. Though Covid-19 affects the aviation industry on a larger scale in economic level, on a smaller scale especially the health measures brought by the pandemic affect the daily work of cabin crew.

The importance of employee wellbeing is obvious and a part of attractive employer brand. Taking care of employees during crisis has an impact on effective ramp-up of the operations, not to forget the overall wellbeing and employer satisfaction after the crisis.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Selected theory is covered in chapter two, including theory about wellbeing, cabin crew work, crisis, and employee engagement. Chapter three explains the research method used in this thesis as well as how data was collected and analyzed. The results are explained in chapter four. Chapter five will evaluate the

credibility of the thesis as well as the ethical viewpoints, and give final recommendations based on the results. Chapter six will conclude this thesis by suggesting further research topics and containing self-evaluation of the thesis process.

2 Theory

This chapter will introduce selected theory about wellbeing at work, challenges of cabin crew work, crisis, and finally some features about employee engagement.

2.1 Wellbeing at work

Wellbeing is comprised of physical, social, and psychological wellbeing (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 3).

Wellbeing at work consists of non-work related contentments, work related contentments, and overall health. Wellbeing is not solely physical or psychological aspects of health, but also about life satisfaction and happiness, and include work-related experiences such as satisfaction in work and attachment to work. (De Simone 2014, 118-119.)

"Well-being can refer to mental, psychological, or emotional aspects of workers" (De Simone 2014, 119).

De Simone states that there are three factors that can affect wellbeing at work: *work settings, personality traits* and *occupational stress* (De Simone 2014, 119).

Work settings refer to various health and safety threats at work, which can affect health and wellbeing negatively when the work setting is dangerous. On the other hand, when those threats are absent or removed, health and wellbeing is impacted positively. (De Simone 2014, 119.)

When being in the same organizational atmosphere, *personality traits* will define how individuals manifest high or low levels of health and wellbeing. When a person has *internal locus of control*, they believe that their own actions and behavior determines what will happen to them, and persons *with external locus of control* thinks that external influence or influencers determine what will happen to them. (De Simone 2014, 119.)

Occupational stress can affect health and wellbeing, and it can arise from a conflict between personal needs and demands, and the environment. It can derive from:

- Work overload or underload, shift work, long working hours, and the physical work environment.
- Role ambiguity, role conflict, amount of responsibility for other persons.
- Different relationships at work.
- Uncertainty of work and career development.
- Low-quality communication in the organization, ambiguous working environment and inequality.

- Difficulties to combine work and family life.

(De Simone 2014, 119.)

Psychological wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing at work requires that work is rewarding, that you have good relationships at your workplace and that you have feelings of achievement. Good psychological wellbeing on the other hand is connected to good health. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 3.)

Stress

Stress at work reduces wellbeing and causes health related problems to the individual, as well as financial losses for the organization. It deteriorates performance at work and therefore also the productivity of the organization suffers. It can increase relationship problems at work, decrease commitment to the organization, increase willingness to change job, and increase sick leaves. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 39, 41.)

Stressors refer to stressful events or situations, in other words stimuli. Even though individuals react to the same stressors individually, there are so powerful stimuli that everyone will experience them as stressors e.g., natural disasters. People have different ways to handle stress and that will affect how a person will react to a stressful situation. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 39-40.)

According to National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, NIOSH, work life stressors can be divided into four categories,

1. stressors that are related to work tasks e.g. time pressure and role demands
2. stressors at organizational level e.g. uncertainty of work, limitations of the organization
3. stressors related to relationships e.g. bullying and harassment
4. stressors at individual level e.g. conflicts between work and family.

(Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 39-40.)

On individual level stress reactions can be physiological, emotional, or behavioral. Physiological reactions can include increased amount of stress hormones, that can affect blood pressure and heart rate variability. Physiological stress reactions are useful in short-term, but in long-term they will expose to heart conditions. Emotional reactions can manifest in short-term mood changes such as anxiety, depression, or irritation. In the long-term work stress can lead to psychological health problems such as depression and psychosomatic symptoms, there can be also cognitive disorders such as problems with memory, concentration and decision making, or deterioration of work performance. Stress

can negatively affect individual's ability to recover and the overall wellbeing. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 41-42.)

Uncertainty

Changes in work life and expectations of effectiveness have increased the uncertainty of work. Uncertainty in work can refer either to structural uncertainty, meaning that there is not enough work e.g., fixed-term employment or underemployment, or that employee experiences uncertainty in their work. Uncertainty often comes from the fear of losing work or being fired or laid off, being forced to do part-time work, relocate, or change job description. Feeling of uncertainty comes from something that has not happened, nor can the employee be sure that it will happen. Therefore, employee cannot control the situation and it becomes stressful. Often uncertainty is linked to organizational change which is in the hands of the management. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 88-89.)

Major organizational changes are a threat to our brain and causes well known stress related symptoms such as increased heart rate, slower digestion, suppressed immune system, increased cortisol levels and dilated blood vessels. Those symptoms are turned on by the amygdala, which is also responsible for us seeing more threats in the workplace that there really are, or even un-existing threats. Uncertainty will exaggerate the threats and make the situation even more stressful, it will also affect decision making, focus, memory, thinking, creativity and problem-solving. We may start to see our colleagues as a threat and collaboration might become more difficult. This means that during organizational change, when the organization needs its employees at their best to carry out change and integration, use new systems, work in new teams while taking care of customer, employees are impaired because of uncertainty. In addition, when we realize that we are affected and do not work at our best, the threat response grows even more. (Scarlett 2016, 30-32.)

Feeling of control affects greatly how we experience events, even a minor feeling of control can make the situation more positive. Having the opportunity to choose, reduces stress and cortisol, whereas events that we cannot control or predict are stressful. (Scarlett 2016, 148.)

Nummelin (2008) says that opportunity to influence organizational change has major impact on personnel's feelings of uncertainty. If management does not stand behind the change or if employees are not taken along to work with the change, it will increase uncertainty and negative feelings. (Nummelin 2008, 17.)

Uncertainty affects individual wellbeing, private life, as well as organizational wellbeing. Prolonged stress can manifest in burnouts and prolonged depression symptoms. Those, who feel uncertainty in their work, are also more discontent in their relationships and in being a parent, than those who are not feeling work related uncertainty. (Nummelin 2008, 17.)

In organizational level the uncertainty from a change will appear in decreased commitment, increased employee turnover, increased sick leaves, problems in atmosphere and decreased effectivity. (Nummelin 2008, 17).

2.2   The challenges in cabin crew work

Cabin crew work

Cabin crew and pilots are a major part of airlines' labour force, ensuring safety and providing customer service, they are the front-line workers and therefore the image of the airlines (Eriksen 2009, xv).

Being part of flying crew is more than a job, it's rather a lifestyle. Some of the challenges that flying crew face include fatigue, jet lag, challenges in personal relationships and demanding passengers, who can suffer from stress and fear. Other threats of the profession include terrorism, accidents, and unruly passengers. (Eriksen 2009, xiii, xvi.)

Flying crew often spends a lot of time away from home and has to deal with sleep deprivation and has low work control. All crew are individuals and handle challenges differently depending on their coping styles, age, culture, personality traits, mental health, biological factors as well as social connections. (Eriksen 2009, xvii.)

Fatigue, sleep deprivation and shift work

To increase revenue, airlines are required to operate in all hours of the day, meaning that flying crew also have to work when needed. Shift work, night duty, and long workdays are likely to cause fatigue and sleep deprivation for crew. Good scheduling is important for those reasons. (Eriksen 2009, 17.)

In short-haul operations fatigue often derives from irregular work and sleep, heavy workload, night duty, early mornings, several duty days in a row, time pressure, multiple flight legs, and not having enough time to recover between duty periods. (Eriksen 2009, 17, 19).

Many early mornings or late nights in a row can cause cumulative sleep deprivation, which can deepen if crew does not get enough rest. Cumulative sleep deprivation can cause cognitive (e.g. irrational thinking, memory loss, problems with performance and speech, and disorientation), emotional (e.g. feelings of sadness and sensitiveness, irritability and being annoyed), physical (e.g. problems with digestion, cold symptoms, headache, lethargy, problems with energy and motivation) and behavioral (e.g. irrational behavior and carelessness) symptoms. (Eriksen 2009, 20.)

The symptoms of fatigue can accumulate, and it might become difficult to notice the degree of the symptoms. Therefore, it becomes even more difficult to recover from fatigue. If the situation requires, flying crew has to operate sometimes even when experiencing fatigue and sleep deprivation. Employees must work their shifts, in addition they might have financial motivation work even when experiencing fatigue. (Eriksen 2009, 22.)

Relationships

Good relationships at work are important for productivity and satisfaction at work (Eriksen 2009, 31).

Work as a flying crew places unique challenges when establishing relationships at work, every time they report for work, they will fly with new colleagues and in different team, and when work is done, they might not work with same colleagues again. The nature of the work limits opportunities to form lasting relationships at work. (Eriksen 2009, 31.)

Forming a team and having efficient communication is crucial to be able to deal with whatever issue happening onboard. However, it might not always be easy to establish rapport with the crew. (Eriksen 2009, 32-33.)

Positive relationships with colleagues can create supportive network for crew whose family and friends are back at home. On the other hand, these short-lived relationships at work can impact to the ability to form deeper and more meaningful relationships and raise feelings of isolation and loneliness. (Eriksen 2009, 37.)

Mental health

Several accidents, incidents and outside threats over the years have raised concerns about flight safety and therefore the physical and mental health of crew is highly important. Cabin crew is not immune to personal and emotional problems such as stress, difficulties in relationships, bereavements, and traumatic events in life, but crew can be

highly independent and self-reliant due to being a lot away from home, and therefore it can be difficult for them to seek help. The feelings of guilt, shame or fear may arise from searching help. Managers should provide adequate support to their employees since mental difficulties can result in longer absences, reduced performance at work and high employee turnover. (Eriksen 2009, 8-10.)

Karasek's Job Demand-Control model

Job Demand-Control model, JDC model, is a work stress model developed by Robert Karasek in the end of 1970's. In the model, the relationship of individual's ability to control own work and the demands of work affect how much psychosocial stress one has. Control of own work means employee's possibilities to impact on work conditions, content of work, take part in decision making concerning own work and the diversity of work. Demands of work mean quantitative overload of work, time pressure and role conflicts. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 43-44.)

According to the model, high demands of work and low possibilities to control own work results in work being overloading. This kind of work can expose employee to stress-related diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, in addition it is linked to problems with psychological wellbeing and mental disorders. Whereas work that has low demands and high possibilities to control, stress symptoms occur seldom. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 44, 47.)

Cabin crew work has high demands and low possibilities to control own work and thus, according to JDC model, it can be considered as stressful work. Cabin crew work is demanding since they are working in several different roles in their workplace and often with time pressure. They are welcoming hosts/hostesses acting as the image of the company, taking care of the safety of the plane and passengers, taking care of the wellbeing of flight crew and passengers, being the eyes and ears of the flight crew. The demands for the role derive from the company and aviation regulations, thus cabin crew has low control of their work. Even though cabin crew work can be considered stressing according to JDC model, the demands of work can decrease depending on the flight, as there might be less passengers onboard, or less duties or events.

According to JDC model work can be either passive or active. Active work has high demands and high opportunities to control own. Even though employee has high demands in their work, they have possibilities to impact their own work and be heard in the work community. As a consequence of active work, the employee will learn better, be more motivated and develop more. Whereas passive work means that employee has low

demands and low possibilities to control own work, as a result learning becomes difficult, work motivation decreases, and it is more difficult to develop. Especially the possibility to control own work is a factor that protects from stress symptoms in young adults. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 45, 49.)

JDC model was later broadened to include the aspect of social support, meaning the support and appreciation of superiors and colleagues. This model is called JDCS, Job Demand-Control-Support model, where work can be either collective or isolated, depending on how much support the individual gets. Work that has high demands and low opportunities to control work is more harmful when individual does not get any support to their work. Active and passive work is divided according to the amount of social support as well. Employee's learning, motivation and development is advanced with collective aspects. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 45-46.)

If cabin crew work is considered stressing according to the JDC model, it will be highly important to have the support and appreciation of colleagues and superiors as a protective factor against stress.

According to Sonnentag and Frese (2012) there are four different intervention models for stress, 1) decrease of stress factors in work 2) increase of resources 3) decrease of stress reactions 4) change of life habits. The interventions aim to reduce the negative effects of stress. (Sonnentag & Frese 2012, 578.)

Each model can be used both on individual or organizational level e.g., individual's way to decrease stress reactions could be the learning and use of relaxing techniques, and on organizational level it would be e.g. to pace the work correctly with breaks. Increasing resources could mean in organizational level e.g. that work is reformed by giving the employee possibility to influence and take part in decision making, and on individual level it could mean that employees competence and skills are increased. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 66-67.)

The demands of work can be divided into quantitative and qualitative demands, where quantitative demands stand for the amount and pace of work, and qualitative demands refer to different skills and cognitive achievements which are needed in the work (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 74).

Many modern job descriptions contain various simultaneous qualitative stress factors, which expose employees to cumulative risk of stress, and therefore to problems with wellbeing (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 75).

Table 1. Typical qualitative stress factors at work and their definitions (adaptive from Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 75-76) in addition, the last column speculates how those manifests in cabin crew work

Qualitative stress factor at work	What does it mean?	How it manifests in cabin crew work?
Cognitive demands	Producing of information, interpretation, processing, remembering, thought process, creative thinking, complex decision making or problem solving. Role conflict, role overload and role ambiguity are considered cognitive demands because they require cognitive processing.	Assimilation and processing of manuals and other various changing information and guidelines, application of knowledge into practice, problem solving, planning and timing of own work, decision making. There can also be role conflict and role overload.
Work intensification	Employee invests more time and know-how to work, takes more responsibility of setting the goals of work, decision making, managing own career, learning and skill requirements.	Cabin crew manages own learning process to assimilate manuals and instructions, invests time to learn new devices. Many tasks that work requires e.g. learning, following email and intranet, renewing passports and licenses etc. are done remotely and often on employee's own time.
Ethical demands	There are ethically demanding situations at work, where employee do not know what is the right thing to do, or cannot do	Cabin crew has to make decisions in their work which can have consequences for other passengers and crew.

	what is right in their opinion. Decision has to be made among equally bad or good choices, and there are always consequences for someone. These situations often happen in a hurry, and there are differing expectations and different interests and values.	These can include service, medical, safety, security, or time pressure related decisions.
Emotional demands	Work requires social interactions with people which can be emotionally stressing especially if there are negative feelings of customers/patients, or if the work requires that employee's own feelings are hidden.	Cabin crew work requires social interactions with passengers, crew and other stakeholders, and there can be negative feelings involved. Sometimes employee's own feelings need to be hidden to fulfil the work requirements.
Uncertainty of work	Employee is afraid to lose their work, or there are negative changes in work. There can be role overload, role ambiguity or role conflict involved. The uncertainty requires cognitive processing.	Uncertainty can be often present in turbulent aviation industry and in crisis situations.
Conflict between work and family	The demands between work and family (or private life) are incompatible. The demands of work role and family role are in negative interaction with each other,	With shift work and time away from home, flying crew can have difficulties and stress to fit work and family life together.

	there can be demands for time and behaviour.	

As can be seen from table 1 above, cabin crew has many simultaneous qualitative stress factors in their work.

Role demands

Demands that are related to roles such as role conflict, role overload and role ambiguity includes demands and expectations which employee has to work cognitively and psychologically (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 78-79).

Role conflict can occur when employee has to function in different roles at work, e.g. a manager whose tasks are both quality control and supporting the staff, they might have to behave in contradictory manner (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 78-79).

Role overload can happen when a person has in addition to their core duty some minor tasks that they have to fill e.g. a nurse whose core duty is to take care of patients but in addition they have to fill in patients' information to information system. Employee can also experience that minor duties are less meaningful for their work. It can feel that the minor duties take too much time and effort from the core duty, and employee experiences role overload. Those secondary duties such as reporting, filling information, compiling statistics as well as managing different information systems are also called illegitimate tasks, which are thought to increase with digitalization. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 78-79.)

Role ambiguity means that work description and the requirements of work are unclear, employee does not know what is expected from them. Role ambiguity might increase in the future if job descriptions become broader and more fragmented. (Mäkikangas & Mauno & Feldt 2017, 78-79.)

Role conflict can be typical in cabin crew work since they work as friendly customer servants but in case of medical, safety or security related situation they quickly change to another role. Role overload is also typical since cabin crew need to file reports every time something out of the ordinary happens. If flights are busy those reports are often filled during ground time, breaks or after work. Typically, role ambiguity is not that much present in cabin crew work since it is very clear what to do and there are instructions for most of the tasks and situations.

2.3 Crisis

Covid-19 pandemic is a worldwide crisis and therefore it is inevitable to describe basic theoretical framework about crisis, leadership in crisis, Covid-19 pandemic's effects on working life and crisis communication.

Coombs (2015) divides crises into disasters and organizational crises. Disasters are big sudden events that disturb systems, demand actions, require governmental units to respond, and endanger values and social goals. Disasters can lead to organizational crises, and vice versa. Crises can cause economic losses to organizations, but also more severe damage such as injuries or deaths to stakeholders, damages to property, harm to reputation or brand, and environmental effects. (Coombs 2015, 3-4.)

Organizational crisis is a sudden occurrence that has an impact on organization's performance, and which threatens stakeholders' expectations of safety, health, environmental, and economic matters. A crisis exists if stakeholders think that there is a crisis, even if the organization itself denies it. Therefore, it is important that the management is able to view matters from stakeholders' perspective and understand if crisis exists. (Coombs 2015, 3.)

There needs to be criteria to identify if events are qualified as disasters or crises. WHO has defined criteria, which determines when an infectious disease outbreak is declared as pandemic. (Sellnow & Seeger 2021, 5.) "An epidemic involves the emergence of a new disease or reemergence of a disease, with sustained human transmission, occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people" (Sellnow & Seeger 2021, 5).

Crisis can happen all of the sudden, but not unexpectedly, meaning that it is common that crises will happen to organizations at some point. Crisis management is about reducing the damages and negative effects caused by the crisis, to protect the industry, stakeholders, and the organization itself from more harm. Crisis management consists of prevention, preparation, response, and revision. (Coombs 2015, 3, 6.)

Tourism industry affects economy, environment, as well as cultural and social aspects on international, national, regional, and local level. World's economies, transportation and media are so integrated that when a crisis, whether economic, political, or natural disaster hits a tourism market or region, the impact affects the system as a whole. (Visser and Ferreira 2013, 1.)

The entire industry can suffer even though the crisis happens to only one organization (Coombs 2015, 4).

Crises in tourism industry can be termed *crises events* because they have a duration and they happen in a specific time and space, nevertheless they can have prolonged effects. If a crisis is long lasting, it becomes part of normal and a background to everyday life. (Visser and Ferreira 2013, 12-13.)

Leadership in crisis

A world-wide crisis like Covid-19 can create mass-scale trauma responses and multiple physiological and psychological responses like heightened sensitivity and distress, people may seek familiar places and contacts, old traumas can come to surface and there can be grief, denial, shock, anger and depression (Chen Nielsen & D'Auria & Zolley 2020).

According to Chen Nielsen, D'Auria and Zolley (2020) compassionate leaders perform better, gain more loyalty and commitment from their teams. During a crisis compassion is highlighted even more and it becomes important to help employees with their reactions, this will also be the beginning of recovery for the business. If the whole organization is in fear and focuses on control, it becomes difficult to be creative and innovative, qualities that are needed to get through crisis and survive. Though visible and caring leadership becomes even more important during crisis, it's also often the time when leaders are busy with meetings and operational issues. (Chen Nielsen & D'Auria & Zolley 2020.)

Covid-19 pandemic's effects on working life

According to Kukkonen (2022), Covid-19 pandemic has changed work life. Remote work has increased and those who still work from their workplaces are facing more stressors in the form of restrictions and uncertainty. Globally the pandemic has brought changes for the entire labour market, and in the USA there is a phenomenon called The Great Resignation, where millions of Americans have voluntarily resigned from their work. Though this has not been the case in Finland, there has been labour shortage in many industries and people are thinking more about changing their jobs. (Kukkonen 2022.)

According to employment agency Barona's inquiry,

- 51% of employees in Finland feels that hurry and stress have increased during the pandemic.
- 45% of under 40-year-old employees in Finland consider changing their job.
- 50% believes they will change to another industry.
- 71% evaluates that they have good mental wellbeing and happiness

(Barona 2022.)

These numbers have increased when compared to the same inquiry made in 2020, also the experience of good mental wellbeing and happiness increased by 11% (Barona 2022).

According to Finnish Institute of Occupational Health's research, How is Finland doing?, those who work in the physical workplace, women, those who work in the public sector and those who are less educated, are now more willing to change their work than before the pandemic. Those who work in health care, tourism and restaurant sectors have been especially stressed during the pandemic. The reasons are that there are shortage of labour and therefore too much work, as well as general uncertainty. Those who work in tourism or restaurant industries are now more willing to change their job. The pandemic has affected especially those who work in physical workplace. In general women seem to be more prone to change their job than men. Women's wellbeing at work has decreased more than men's. (Kukkonen 2022; Mäkiniemi & Hakanen & Kaltiainen 2021.)

According to Research Director Anne Mäkikangas from Tampere University Work Research Centre, employers have to pay special attention to young employees and employee engagement as the pandemic gets prolonged. Mäkikangas' research project studies psychological security during the times of distant work, and the results show that leading is in an important role when maintaining meaningfulness and motivation of work. Also, employer's actions on how employees' health is prioritised, and open dialogue is maintained are important. A work community that is psychologically safe is not afraid to face difficult matters. (Kukkonen 2022.)

Communication

In crisis situation everyone in the organization has an emotional need for information, but commonly there is a lack of information due to chaos and confusion brought by the crisis. Everyone involved in the crisis has a need to know what happened, why, and how it will influence their lives. Ambiguity can be present in crisis. (Klann 2003, 8.)

Communication is important in an organizational change situation. If communication and informing about the change are insufficient it will increase the feelings of unequal treatment. Everyone wants to be accepted and considered in every situation. (Nummelin 2008, 17.)

Postcrisis

When crisis is over, organization needs to evaluate its next actions. Postcrisis phase is there to prepare the organization for next crisis, ensure that stakeholders have positive

image of the crisis management actions, and to confirm that crisis is really over. Crisis is a chance for learning. (Coombs 2015, 11, 162.)

According to Coombs (2015), crisis management efforts should be evaluated in two different ways;

- How the organization handled the crisis, how effective was the crisis management plan and its execution?
- Evaluation of the effects of the crisis, what was the damage?
(Coombs 2015, 162.)

If the organization's crisis management efforts were efficient, the actual damage should be less than predicted (Coombs 2015, 162).

Work wellbeing in crisis situation

Highly stressing events like crisis can make otherwise rational people act irrationally. Crisis situations cause emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety, surprise, sorrow, shock, disgust, love and desire for revenge. People in crisis situations can act with positive behavior such as compassion, self-sacrifice and courage, or with negative behavior such as selfishness, cowardice and greed. During crisis the possibility for conflict and illogical behavior increases, and previously disturbed behavior can worsen. For some that are emotionally affected by the crisis, it can become difficult to carry out even simple tasks. (Klann 2003, 8.)

2.4 Employee engagement

Employee engagement will show in profitability, productivity, customer loyalty and satisfaction, and in safety of the organization (Markos & Sridevi 2010, 92).

Being treated in a fair way

Our brain has a reward network that can be activated in several ways, being treated fairly is one of them. It helps our brain to be in a more positive state if we think that we are treated fairly. Change increases our need to be treated fairly, so even during change we want to be able to have the things that are normally possible. Like for example have the same chance as colleagues for changing our role in the organization or getting the salary that we should get. This will set requirements for those who are managing and leading the change, new processes and their outcome should be fair. It is a good idea to set principles of how the change will be conducted and to use these principles when leading the change and employees as well. (Scarlett 2016, 70-71.)

Appreciation at work

Research Professor Jari Hakanen from Finnish Institute of Occupational Health emphasizes employers' responsibility that employees enjoy their work, are motivated and experience appreciation at work. When a person feels that he is appreciated at his workplace he will stay there but if he feels that work is heavy and there is lack of appreciation, the situation worsens. If the work is meaningful and developing, offers experience of autonomy and appreciation, it is harder for the employee to leave his work. If employees don't feel that they are part of encouraging and supporting work community they are more prone to leave as well. (Kukkonen 2022.)

eNPS

ENPS stands for employee net promoter score. Employees are asked a question like "How likely would you be to refer a friend or contact to work for us?". Employees can answer by choosing a number between 0-10, 0 meaning they would not refer the company, and 10 meaning that they would refer it. Employees are divided to detractors, passives and promoters depending on their answer. To calculate the score the percentage of detractors is subtracted from the percentage of promoters. The passives will be ignored and not calculated in. The number will most likely be lower than customer NPS because employees are emotionally invested in their work and will therefore be more critical. An eNPS number that is 10-30 is good and over that is excellent. Changes in business can change employee engagement, which becomes visible in eNPS number. If eNPS is asked only once a year it might be difficult to see the trends behind it. The number itself does not answer why employees gave those scores and without that information the employer cannot make any changes. A solution for this could be to ask this in conjunction with the score, e.g. "What is the reason for this score?". ENPS can be most useful if the employer can act according to the data behind the score. (Marr 2021.)

3   Methodology

The chosen research strategy for this thesis was case study research since it examines a certain case or cases in a certain context and deepens knowledge in business (Farquhar 2012, 6-7).

Only one case is examined in this thesis, which is Airline X cabin crew, in a certain environment and in specific timeline, referring to cabin crew work during Covid-19 pandemic in the years of 2020-2021. The results are applicable to Airline X specifically and do not provide wider understanding to the researched matter since the working conditions are unique at Airline X during the specific timeline.

This chapter will describe and explain the chosen research method, as well as how data was collected and analyzed.

3.1   Research design

The objectives are to find out how Airline X cabin crew wellbeing is during the pandemic, what affects Airline X cabin crew wellbeing in general and especially during Covid-19 crisis, and how the company can support its cabin crew during crisis.

Case study is empirical research that requires that data is collected and analysed. Case study approach suits well when researching contemporary phenomenon. Case study method suits well for business research because it provides information of the researched phenomenon in its real-life context and it's studied where it is really happening, such as in a country, industry, company, or team. (Farquhar 2012, 6.)

In the beginning of the research, it is important to define the research questions, which in case study research start often with *how* and *why* (Yin 2018, 27).

According to Yin (2018), when defining the case, the classic definition would be an individual person and in case of several individuals, it would be a multiple-case study. Nevertheless, the case can be an entire event or entity, such as a family, citizens, community, event, or e.g. disaster recovery efforts. If the case is too wide, it becomes difficult to define the beginning and ending points of the case. The preliminary definition of the case is done when defining the research questions. When defining the questions several themes or cases could arise, which would all require their own case study, research questions, research design and data collection. (Yin 2018, 28-30.)

There can be either one case or several cases depending on the scope and focus of the research which are defined in the research objectives (Farquhar 2012, 7).

Case study often consists of qualitative research, but it can involve quantitative data as well (Farquhar 2012, 2). The data collection methods in case study research are diverse and can be chosen according to needs and the nature of cases e.g., whether the case is a big company or a small company (Farquhar 2012, 8).

The disadvantage of case study is that the findings can be difficult to use in other context or purpose, since the phenomenon was studied in a certain group and in certain context. On the other hand, the case study research increases knowledge in the business in question. (Farquhar 2012, 6-7.)

In this thesis both aviation industry and cabin crew work have many unique features and therefore the findings could be difficult to generalize, even if other method was used. Also, all airlines have used different strategies to tackle the Covid-19 crisis and the outcome in employee wellbeing might be different. The purpose of this thesis is to provide knowledge that applies uniquely to Airline X in a specific context and therefore case study is a suitable method.

The case that is examined is Airline X cabin crew and the contemporary phenomenon is Covid-19 crisis during the timeframe of 2020-2021. Detailed information about the case in a certain situation is collected throughout the research and then presented.

There can be some preliminary theory topics beforehand but often it is recommended to do some fieldwork before deciding on the theory. Though some theoretical research is advisable since it can reveal some practicalities or insights which will help in data collection and data analyzing strategies. (Yin 2018, 34-35.)

3.2 Data collection

In case study research it is typical to use various data sources, which can be divided into primary and secondary sources (Farquhar 2012, 7). Primary data means that the researcher has collected the data from original sources exclusively for the particular research, and it answers the research questions with up-to-date information (Farquhar 2012, 68).

When collecting case study data, it is a strength to utilize several sources of information (Yin 2018, 126). The findings of the research are reinforced when data is collected from different sources or using different methods. As the research findings get reinforced the

evidence is triangulated. Triangulation in case study research means that the phenomenon is studied from different angles which strengthen the findings and arguments. (Farquhar 2012, 7.)

Research can have multiple sources of data but different findings in the end. When data is triangulated, the different sources reinforce the findings. (Yin 2018, 128.)

Both qualitative and quantitative data sources can be used in case study research (Farquhar 2012, 68). In this research, survey is a quantitative data source but contains also qualitative features in the form of open questions. Company wellbeing surveys are partly quantitative, partly qualitative as well. The e-mail interview is qualitative source.

3.3   Management and analysis of data

Archival records, documentation, interviews, direct and participant observations and physical artifacts are sources that are often found from case study research. It is recommended to use as many sources as possible. (Yin 2018, 113.)

3.3.1   The Covid-19 wellbeing survey to cabin crew

A survey was made to all Airline X cabin crew. In case study research, a typical survey is called a case study interview (Yin 2018, 120).

Before conducting a survey, it is important to take ethical issues into consideration so that those can be implemented in the survey.

Ethical viewpoints when conducting a survey

Researcher should always be objective and not let their own opinions influence the research. However, objectivity can be difficult demand since researcher should rule out all irrelevant matters between them and the research subject and be as unpersonal as possible. This is more difficult if the researcher has to be part of the research subject, e.g. when they are part of a community that is being researched. (Mäkinen 2006, 29.)

According to Bryman & Bell (2015) researcher's responsibility is to evaluate whether there is a risk for any kind of harm to the participants of a research and minimize it. Harm can be anything from physical harm to stress and e.g. harm to career development. (Bryman & Bell 2015, 135.)

The researcher should agree with potential research participants about the confidentiality and anonymity of data. When publishing research, it should be ensured that participants

or organizations cannot be identified or identifiable, unless otherwise agreed. Special care should be followed if sample sizes are particularly small, since it might be possible to identify organizations and departments and hence individuals unintentionally. (Bryman & Bell 2015, 136.)

Researcher should make clear for the participants, how the data is used, and if there is any plan to preserve, share or use the data later. It is necessary to evaluate what is the reason for collecting data, can it be used for other research purposes, who owns the data and in which conditions it is acceptable to use the data. (Bryman & Bell 2015, 146.)

The process of designing the survey

It is often the case, that all individuals that are selected for a sample do not answer to the survey. This is called *total nonresponse*. The reason for not answering can be that the individual is not reached. If the individual participates to the survey, but does not answer all the questions, the term is *item nonresponse*. The reason for item nonresponse can be that the individual does not understand the question, the question is not relevant for them, the question is too sensitive for them, or none of the answer options are suitable. (Tietoarkisto.)

3.3.2 Company wellbeing surveys

Standard company wellbeing surveys were examined. In case study research previous surveys fall in the category of archival records (Yin 2018, 117).

4   Results

This chapter introduces the results of the three different data sources.

5 Discussion and recommendations

In this chapter the reliability of the research is evaluated, and ethical viewpoints are examined. The chapter includes recommendations based on the results and theory, starting from section 5.3.

5.1 The reliability of the research

The aim of the thesis and research questions were:

- examine the wellbeing of Airline X cabin crew during Covid-19 pandemic in the years of 2020-2021
- to find out what factors contribute to cabin crew wellbeing, and whether some are more prominent during the time of crisis
- to find possible solutions to improve cabin crew wellbeing during crisis

This thesis answered to the research questions quite well; the wellbeing of cabin crew during 2020-2021 was examined, factors that contribute to cabin crew wellbeing were found, as well as solutions how to improve cabin crew wellbeing during crisis. It was found out how some typical wellbeing factors altered during Covid-19 crisis, but not necessarily how those would behave in other crises. There are more recommendations that could be made, and hopefully the commissioner can have some insight from this thesis and continue the work.

5.2 Ethical viewpoints

There are some ethical matters that need to be taken into consideration, when conducting a survey. The most relevant is, whether there is any harm for the participants for answering a survey.

Harm could be done if there was a possibility to identify respondents and use the information they provided in the survey against them. Therefore, the survey to cabin crew was anonymous and before answering the survey, possible respondents were told that answering is anonymous and important for development purposes. It was told that the data will be used for improvement of wellbeing and that the results can be used also in other development purposes of the unit.

It was assessed that no major other type of harm could be done to participants for taking part in the survey. The participants could have felt some stress when memorizing the effects of the pandemic, but the purpose of the survey was important since the results were used to examine the effects of the crisis and to improve wellbeing.

There was only one background question which limits the possibility to identify participants. The answers to the open questions were collected to groups according to similar answers and direct sentences were left out, in order to make it impossible to identify participants.

5.3 Recommendations

6 Conclusion

This is the final chapter that concludes this thesis, it will suggest possible further research topics and contain self-evaluation of the thesis process.

6.1 Further research topics

Covid-19 offered a forced brake to everyday hectic life and was a point where many started to look for other options in their career. It inspired, or forced, many to change their work, start a new career, start studies, work less, or work remotely. For many, Covid-19 changed the mindset for what career should look like. This would be an interesting research topic, are the effects long-lasting, are employees more courageous to change their career also in the future because of Covid-19? How long the effects of Covid-19 will last, e.g. in organizations' employee turnover?

6.2 Thesis process and self-evaluation of own learning

Preferably thesis process is already started while studying compulsory courses and conducted simultaneously or right after other study efforts. However, during my supposed thesis work timeframe, there have been two major world crises, the Covid-19 crisis and the war between Russia and Ukraine. These events have been disturbing as well as affected my personal life through work.

Overall, the thesis process took more than a year. The subject was initiated already in autumn 2021. The Covid pandemic came as a shock slowing down own studying, though there was more time in the form of layoffs from work. As the world was in a stage of unknown it also postponed my own thesis process. Nevertheless, the crisis also brought this interesting thesis topic to research.

It came clear that it was very difficult to combine work and study and therefore I took a study leave of five months which helped enormously. When spending time apart from the thesis due to work schedules, it was difficult to resume back to thesis. I would recommend to either dedicate a fixed period to thesis work every now and then, e.g. a week at a time, or try to keep up with it regularly. Regular thesis work might be more appropriate when working during office hours. In shift work it turned out to be somewhat impossible to maintain regular study efforts.

After having the topic and some kind of idea of the research, I decided the research method and then proceeded straight to the cabin crew wellbeing survey. At the same time, I started to frame and search for theory and continued that throughout the work.

During the thesis process I did not only learn about the interesting topic itself but how to conduct a larger project on my own. I have learnt about time management and self-discipline as well as being understanding towards self, everything cannot be done at once. A bigger project is tackled by taking small steps consistently, while not getting let down by mistakes or not having enough time.

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Attachments

Appendix 1. Cabin Crew Well-being during Covid-19 pandemic