

Exploring Air Namibia's Operational Efficiency: The Interface Between Strategy and the Six Pillars of the Organisation

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the interface between strategy and the six pillars, namely, structure, people, systems, processes, technology and innovation, in order to establish key factors contributing to the operational challenges being faced by Air Namibia. A qualitative study was conducted among a purposive sample of executives at Air Namibia using an exploratory design. The data was analysed using the thematic method. Exacerbated by the grounding of aircrafts due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Air Namibia's strategy, resources, processes and systems contributed its operational inefficiency. The leadership of airlines in general and Air Namibia in particular, need to be fully cognizant of the importance of strategic planning and developing structures, systems and processes which will mitigate any micro and macro-economic disruptions on business operations. Since there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to crisis management, airline boards, executives and managers should consider their unique position and needs in strategizing how to survive and grow following a macro-economic.

Keywords: Tourism, air travel, operational efficiency, Covid-19, strategic planning

Introduction

According to Zweigenthal (2020), the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the African Airlines Association (AFRAA) and the Airlines Association of Southern Africa (AASA) are jointly calling on international financial institutions, country development partners and international donors to support the African Travel and Tourism sector through these tough times. The above appeal stems from the fact that Africa's Travel and Tourism sector employ some 24.6 million people on the African continent and without urgent funding, the COVID-19 crisis could see a collapse of the sector in Africa, taking with it millions of jobs. Zweigenthal (2020) also emphasizes that the sector contributes \$169 billion to Africa's economy combined, representing 7.1% of the continent's GDP.

The above serves to highlight, as an example, that the impact of COVID-19 in Africa continues to be brutal and the survival of the airline industry and its allied sectors (incorporating travel and tourism), has serious ramifications for Africa's entire air transport system (Zweigenthal, 2020). The aviation industry faces significant operational challenges not only

because of the dynamic nature of the sector (Rosenberger, Schaefer, Goldsman, Johnson, Kleywegt & Nemhauser, 2002) but by the Covid-19 pandemic (Terry, 2020). Furthermore, the aviation industry is characterised by vastly cyclical drifts whereby peak seasons are followed by periods described as a slump, which significantly impacts the airline's operational efficiency (Kuljanin, Kalić, Caggiani & Ottomanelli, 2019).

To maintain optimum performance, the airline must ensure that the operations are efficient on all fronts, avoiding any losses that may accrue from ineffective processes. Setting up accurate operational efficiency of an airline is a tall order since this depends on factors such as the air traffic which the airline experiences, the geography of the area within which the airline mainly runs, and the basic structure of the airline's routes (Asif, Searcy, Zutshi & Fisscher, 2013). An additional disruptive element which is greatly impacting airline operations internationally is the Covid-19 pandemic, which grounded air travel to a halt (Zweigenthal, 2020).

Exacerbated by the current Covid-19 pandemic, the Namibian airline industry has been experiencing internal challenges that limit the maximisation of operational efficiency that would lead to the better performance and sustainability of the airline. Recent research into the phenomenon reveals that improvement in areas such as aircraft and crew placement, aircraft turnaround time, routine maintenance operations and reducing flight delays, cancellation and diversion of flights, can significantly improve the efficiency of the airline (Asif et al., 2013). The formulation, implementation, and evaluation of excellent strategic plans are without a doubt, leading signals of the success of an organisation (Ansoff, Kipley, Lewis, Helm-Stevens & Ansoff, 2018; Bryson, Ho & Siouris, 2018). The airline industry is extremely competitive and marked by a rapidly evolving market climate in which most of the changes come from stakeholders. A highly cyclical trend is a feature of the sector, and most changes are not avoidable due to high competition and changes in regulation. It follows that active and effective leadership and management are therefore, a top priority in such a dynamic industry. Like any other business organisation, without a well-crafted strategy, the airline might incur huge losses which may eventually drive it out of business (Kuljanin et al., 2019). The strategy helps airlines to identify feasible and viable destinations and the cheapest (in terms of time and fuel consumption) routes to the identified destinations, ensuring optimum long-term performance.

Air Namibia which is the national airline of Namibia and 100 percent state-owned, is a major contributor toward the promotion of tourism in the country, by linking Namibia to the world. The airline's ability to deliver on its mandate depends greatly on its strategic model, resources and operational management. In terms of resources, human capacity, adequate capital and assets are considered to affect the airline's daily operational efficiency. In addition, with a rise in the number of passengers and more routes being added, there seems to be a little internal change to operations and structure that could influence operational efficiency. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the inefficiency of the airline was characterised by flight delays, flight cancellations, crew shortage, aircraft maintenance and other issues that are beyond operational control. This was further exasperated by the international and domestic flight restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Prior to the grounding of aircrafts due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some of Air Namibia's flights were grounded, some completely cancelled and others abandoned.

Mhlanga (2017) states that Air Namibia's debts have escalated to around N\$1.5 billion and the airline needed a bailout of over N\$2 billion in the three year period 2017 to 2019, including N\$730 million for 2017/18 and N\$756 million for the 2018/19 financial years. However, the Namibian government was not willing to continue with the bailout but suggested that the relevant ministries, together with Air Namibia's management, develop a turnaround strategy, while the government considered the future of the airline (Bo, 2019). The above

challenges which the airline faces were exacerbated by the international grounding of all flights due to the Covid-19 pandemic since the airline had not considered the impact a macro-economic disruption such as the pandemic would have on its operations and thus no disaster management strategies were in place to mitigate volatility, uncertainty, complexity ambiguity (VUCA), which conflates four distinct types of challenges that demand four distinct types of responses.

Most research studies on the airline industry have concentrated on areas other than operational efficiency (Barros & Peypoch, 2009; Lu, Wang, Hung & Lu, 2012). The aim of this study was to explore the role of strategy and the relationship between structure, people, processes/systems, technology and innovation, in determining the efficiency of Air Namibia's operations during the VUCA period. The structure, people, processes, systems, technology and innovation that impact operational efficiency are directly linked to the airline's overall management, which, according to IATA (2015), is the key driver of strategic planning and good strategic planning will enhance an airline's operational efficiency (Pratistha, 2016).

At the time of this study, Air Namibia faced numerous operational problems including delays in flights, flight cancellations, crew and aircraft shortages, and aircraft maintenance issues and this was exacerbated by the grounding of flights due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was on this basis that the study's main purpose was to explore the efficiency of operations at Air Namibia by ascertaining and analysing its strategy to determine how strategic planning affects the airline's operational efficiency, investigate the root cause of the airline's poor performance and examine how Air Namibia responds to disruptions such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Literature review

Strategic management and planning

According to Hacklin, Björkdahl and Wallin (2018) there is consensus among strategic management experts about the fundamental role which strategy plays in highly dynamic and volatile business environments. For example, Toffler (2003) likened the lack of strategy to an unstable aircraft flying up and down in the sky tossed about by the turbulence caused by thunder and headwinds. Eventually, if the plane is not brought down by the turbulence which it continuously experiences, it will run out of fuel and fall out of the sky to a catastrophic end (Toffler, 2003). To further highlight the importance of strategy Thompson and Strickland (2001) argue that an organisation without a clear plan that informs the actions they take is like a ship without a rudder. For the airline to escape such a turbulent atmosphere, it is required to re-align structures, systems, leadership behaviour, human resource, policies, culture, values and management processes (Gibson, Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2011). Overall, strategic planning and management are essential for the efficient operation of any business (Maleka, 2014) and the nature of the airline industry dictates that airlines have to oversee their activities consistently, speedily and cost effectively, to maintain relevance and profitability.

Operational efficiency

Operational efficiency plays a primary role in airline management and the effectiveness of the airline as a business (Mhlanga, Steyn & Spencer, 2018). An airline management's strategy is to maximise its performance, to ensure sustainability and growth while delivering positive returns to shareholders, all the while maintaining a competitive edge in a highly competitive industry (Mhlanga et al., 2018). Operational efficiency may be regarded as the capacity of an organisation to maximise using its resources while reducing costs, to deliver quality services and products, by focusing on well-trained workers, resources, advanced technology, system integration and return to scale (Kalluru & Bhat, 2009). These researchers further describe

operational efficiency as the aptitude of a corporation to curb the capabilities of the unwelcome (inter-alia, the Covid-19 pandemic) and maximise resources aiming to deliver quality service or products to customers.

Airline efficiency is heavily researched and most the studies centred on American, European, Middle Eastern and Asian airlines, with very little evidence of African studies (Barbot, Costa & Sochirca, 2008). In this study, efficiency was used with specific reference to the Namibian airline's operations using guidelines of certain researchers (Asif et al., 2013; Merkert & Pearson, 2015), since achieving profits with the resources at the airline's disposal, in the highly competitive and very dynamic and disruptive airline environment, can be challenging (Ling, Kokkiang, Gharleghi & Fah, 2018).

Ling et al. (2018) argue that the airline industry is a dynamic, very highly competitive environment which is also highly regulated and thus needs proper management. According to Spurling (2010) and Mhlanga et al. (2018), national airlines worldwide are faced with operational efficiency challenges and are finding it challenging to produce high returns because of high competition. The comparatively high fixed costs in the aviation industry and economies of scale have a significant impact on the airline. Measuring the airline's operational efficiency can be an extremely complicated task, due to the various views for judging the efficiency of the airline and the different possible approaches of analysing operational efficiency. Furthermore, measuring the organisation's operational efficiency provides management with a way to analyse and evaluate its objectives and determine if they are achieved (Behn, 2003). There are several ratios for measuring operational efficiency, and these ratios show whether the firm is managing operational cost efficiently, which will finally influence its profitability (Rao & Lakew, 2012).

Traditionally, many performance measurements have been based around financial aspects only, omitting important non-financial aspects. To evaluate the performance of airlines, for example, one usually employs financial indices, providing a simple description of the airline's financial performance in comparison to previous periods. However, Belay (2017) argues that focusing on financial aspects alone is not enough for management to deal with the changing business environment and thus there is need to look at the resources, finances, services offered, and the quality of service provided.



Figure 1: Six Pillars of the Organisation
Source: Developed by the Researchers, 2020

The literature reports several models to implement strategy and measure performance and operational efficiency which include, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), Porter's Five Forces, Sustainability Key Performance Indicators (KPI) Framework, the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental (PESTLE) Framework and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis (Indiatsy, Mwangi, Mandere, Bichanga & George, 2014; Wang, Tsui & Xin, 2011). On the basis of the literature review, the conceptual framework for the evaluation of OE at Air Namibia is represented in Figure 1 above. The conceptual framework was used to explore the interface between strategy and the six pillars of the organisation, aimed at determining airline's operational efficiency under the six subheadings, namely, structure, people (employees), process, system, innovation and technology. A brief discussion of each of the aforementioned concepts will be provided for context only.

Structure

Structure in organisations outlines the hierarchy of responsibility or the chain of command and it creates various communication channels and levels that facilitate the flow of information within organisations (Estalaki, 2017). The degree of complexity in the structure of organisations directly impacts efficiency, since highly complex organisational structures, delay decision-making, which is not ideal for business, especially service providers like airlines. Complex structures also result in complex communication channels and the consequential breakdown in communication often leads to several lapses in responsibility, which eventually hinders the organisation from running efficiently (Estalaki, 2017). Creative ideas that originate from the workers who deal directly with customers and flaws in organisational structure result in bureaucracy which shut communication channels, stifle ingenuity and innovation and this impacts production and efficiency (Sanina, Balashov, Rubtcova & Satinsky, 2017). A strong, simple, and flexible organisational structure that is intended to progress with the firm will preserve efficiency and productivity and create room for improvements in the original design, which is a critically important feature when it comes to the expansion of organisations (Vidović, 2015).

People

It is indisputable that employees are the most valuable asset of any organisation and the success of organisations depends on the quality of human capital in the organisation (Gabcanova, 2011). Thao and Hwang (2015) highlight several factors which are purported to impact the effectiveness of employees, and eventually the overall efficacy of the organisation. Of critical importance to the performance of employees, according to DuBrin (2004) is the leadership style, which is a blend of the leader's character and attitude which establishes patterns of how the individual handles the subjects. In the fast-paced and volatile environment of the airline business, enablement of employees includes regular training and retraining (to advance and improve the skills of the workers), as well as coaching of the existing staff to better deliver on their mandates and adjust to the changing dynamics of the business environment (Tinofirei, 2011). Strong cultures within organisations create room for adaptation and support the development of the workforce and when there is a sense of shared value (as a result of strong organisational culture), then employees will tend to dedicate their effort and time towards realising the goals of the organisation (Stewart, 2010). The physical work environment, which comprises the office space and furniture used by the employee, directly impacts the effectiveness of employees as it affects comfort and ability to sustain prolonged hours of working (Tinofirei, 2011). Generally, there is a wide consensus among scholars and practitioners, especially in the field of ergonomics, that improved working environments that

guarantee the comfort and occupational health of employees strengthen performance and efficiency meaningfully (Tinofirei, 2011). Most researchers agree that poorly motivated workforces are often too costly for firms, with high worker turnover rates, high costs of recruitment and hiring, and lost productive hours (Rajhans, 2012). It is therefore important for the management of organisations to know the factors that drive their workforce.

Processes and systems

Processes in organisations are all about value addition and the production of desirable products or outputs from the available resources (Rosemann & vom Brocke, 2010). The key inputs in the delivery of services are the personnel, equipment and accessories used for delivery of the services (Rosemann & vom Brocke, 2010). Thus, for efficient operations, an airline must manage its equipment and personnel well to ensure smooth processes. The sequence of input-output conversion is logical, enabling the smooth flow of activities and one of the most significant barriers to achieving efficiency is the lack of a logical sequence of events in the service delivery units. Such a deficiency of flawless order leads to confusion which, in the case of airlines, causes flight delays and cancellations, congestion in the waiting lounges, and frequent misplacement of customers' luggage. The systems approach is utilised when dealing with the increasing complexity in organisations, as it reduces the complexity by modelling system conceptually (Merali & Allen, 2011). Identifying and understanding non-linear relationships as described by Arnold and Wade (2015), recognises the interconnection between parts, understands the system structure and how it facilitates the system behaviour.

Innovation and technology

Technology is a fundamental part of any modern business and word processors and electronic filing systems that allow easy and organised storage and retrieval of data, are some operational efficiencies that technology provides (Pfano, 2016). Additionally, effective and up-to-date technology lessens human error, which is especially helpful to the airline industry, where human error can often lead to catastrophic outcomes. An innovative business environment also encourages employees to look at problems from different perspectives and come up with novel ideas to solve the issues. Innovation in workplaces opens communication channels, allowing employees to be more involved and productive (Buhalis, 2004). The aviation industry has nurtured a dependency on ICTs for most of its operational and tactical management functions (Taneja, 2017). Compared to most of the other businesses under the category of tourism and transportation, airlines adopted ICTs early and have fostered ICT advancement through innovation for an exceedingly long time (Buhalis, 2004). According to Singh (2019), innovation and technology in the airline industry is fascinating since the industry has a long history of continuous improvements, and few innovations can be classified as disruptive. Arasti, Khaleghi and Noori (2017) assert that the linkage between technology strategy and business strategy is bidirectional, interactive and dynamic. The innovation and technology strategy captures the role of technology and the importance of innovation with opportunities it can open up for the airline's future.

Research gap

Most studies of airline efficiency have been conducted in among the Middle Eastern, American and European Airlines, with little or studies on African Airlines. Thus, this study would contribute to narrowing the information and knowledge gap by exploring the relationship between its operational efficiency and strategy, structure, people, systems, technology and innovation. More specifically, the study was conducted during the period 'disruption' when air

travel was grounded due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which negatively impacted airline operations.

Research methodology

Because of the essence of the study being phenomenological, it was necessary to conduct the study from an interpretivist perspective using a qualitative approach (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Qualitative research methods are the best approach when studying a phenomenon in its natural setting (Flick, 2014), and when striving to understand social processes in context (Esterberg, 2011). An exploratory research design was deemed suitable, considering the exploratory nature of the study employed to develop initial ideas and insights and to provide direction for the research to be conducted (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

Purposive sampling was used as it allows for participants to be chosen because they are knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena under investigation (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). The Heads of five departments at Air Namibia, namely, commercial, ground operations and flight operations, training and human capital, were purposively selected. The selected respondents were contacted personally and via telephone and e-mail, to secure a suitable date and time for an interview. Upon receiving consent from the respondents, all interviews were held at their place of employment. The researcher explained the aim of the research and the information required, by reading out all the questions before actual commencement of the interview, and the researcher ensured that the questions were well understood and where necessary, clarity was provided. The respondents were provided with a code to protect their identity and they were assured of their anonymous participation.

Data was collected through semi-structured personal interviews which were recorded, transcribed and then common themes were extracted. The researcher identified the various statements relating to the research question and assigned a code to each response (Miles & Huberman 2015). A 'thematic process' was then followed to interpret the data. In addition, document review which is a form of qualitative research was used to analyse operational policies and procedures, to complement the data collected through personal interviews. Air Namibia's Operations Manual and its Strategic Plan were scrutinized. The document review provided information on the management of systems, the airline's structure and operations procedure.

Research findings

The demographic profile of the respondents is reflected in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Biographical Data of participants

Code	Gender	Centre	Role	Experience	Qualifications
R01	Male	Head office	GM Commercial	19 years	Masters in Economics
R02	Male	Head office	GM Human Capital	Eight months	MBL
R03	Female	Head Office	Organisation Development and Training	6 years	MBA
R04	Male	Head Office	GM Flight Operation	29 years	Master in Airline Management
R05	Male	Head Office	GM Ground Operation	23 years	MBA
R06	Male	Head Office	Manager IT	6 years	Master's in Information Technology

Source: Developed by the researchers

From demographic information in Table 1, it is evident that barring one, all experienced senior managers at Air Namibia were male, held masters degrees and had experienced extensive experience.

The researcher developed codes from the concepts identified in the text of the interviews. Having interrogated the concepts and their relationships within the context of the study, the researcher developed various codes, and from the coding, the researcher identified the themes which emerged as reflected in Table 2.

Table 2: Core themes

Coding	Theme
Mission, Vision Strategy Business Model	Strategy Management Process
Corporate Governance Leadership	Leadership and Governance
Organisation Chart Chain of Command Structure Management	Organisation Structure
Evaluation and Monitoring Process and Procedures Policy	Management of System
Productivity Reward System Learning and Development Benefit Traning Employee Engagement Performance	Human Capital
Financial Reporting and Control Financial Capitalisation	Financial Management
Infrastructure Aircraft Optimisation	Management of Resources
Communication Technology Innovation	Technology and Innovation

A discussion of the eight themes which emerged from the data analysis is provided so as to provide the link with the research objectives.

Strategy

The first theme is related to the strategic plan of the airline since it specifically dealt with the airline’s mission, vision and strategy. It emerged that the Vision was not clearly articulated and neither was it effectively communicated to employees. The Vision, Mission and strategy have also not focussed on commercial success as there was no profit motive in the airline’s Vision. It emerged that the airline had failed to achieve its objectives, and also failed to implement its strategies effectively.

Leadership and governance

It emerged that the airline lacked leadership, and this has been the situation for several years. Management is seen as accepting mediocrity from the workforce and very tolerant of poor performance. It was observed that there is also a general lack of discipline and lack of adherence to policies, rules and regulations which manifested into failure to carry out responsibilities and contain operational costs. In addition, there is also a lack of communication on important matters including exclusion of operational staff from formulation of business strategy and annual plans. It seems that the management and the board of the airline are loggerheads and each seeking the seat of power. Despite a written charter which stipulates and demarcates roles and responsibilities, there has not been any clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of shareholders, the board and executive management. Thus, decision

making has vacillated between these three powers centers, such that it is no longer clear which leadership structure is taking responsibility for the current state of affairs at the airline. Furthermore, it became apparent that the management team is in total confusion since the airline is governed by two Ministries, namely, the Ministry Works and Transport and Ministry of Public Enterprise. In terms of corporate governance, it became apparent that the board did not follow its charter to ensure accountability and success of the airline. Board committees like the Audit and Risk committee did not ensure that the airline's financial statements are up to date and on time in line with the law. The HR Committee also failed to ensure that the executive positions are properly filled with competent, qualified staff and personnel, since there were several acting positions. The board also failed to hold the airline management accountable for the mismanagement of the funds at the airline.

Organisational structure

It became apparent that the airline has been unstable at the leadership level since it had three acting Managing Directors (MD) since 2015. Currently, the airline does not have an MD, and GM HR is acting in this position. The EXCO which is made up of 15 people who report directly to the MD; however many of the incumbents are in an acting capacity. Apart from the challenge of a wide span of control, the airline structure does not change in line with the business model. It was determined that Air Namibia (Pty) Ltd. is a Holding Company with two subsidiaries, namely, Air Namibia Properties (Pty) Limited and Air Namibia Ground Handling (Pty) Limited. The two companies in the Group are therefore private limited liability companies requiring separate Board and management structures. However, the two separate companies were being treated as two departments within Air Namibia (Pty) Ltd., whereas, each should have its own governance structure.

Management of systems

Air Namibia relies on systems of functional accountability to measure performance and outcomes of the departure are divided into departmental objectives, for which individuals are held accountable. Each departure delay is traced to the department which is thought to have caused it. The problem is that, because of the interdependencies in the flight departure process, it is often difficult to determine which department caused a particular delay. Determining the cause of a delay is a conflict-ridden process which often deteriorates from problem-solving to finger-pointing and blame avoidance. There are many reports and meetings that waste time and energy, which energy could be focused on serving the passengers better. The airline does not have a proper cross-functional performance measurement system for assessing performance and the airline management Manual did not explain the organisation process.

Human capital

According to the 2015 SWOT analysis, one of the greatest strengths of Air Namibia is its workforce, since the general education levels, specialised skills and technical know-how of the employees are satisfactory. Moreover, the compensation offered is competitive in the market and most of the employees have requisite skill sets that are relevant to the demands of the airline business. However, the airline seems not to have invested much in employee development and advancement through customised training. Employee performance appraisal and appreciation of exemplary employees is a culture that is not well developed or entrenched within the airline.

It emerged that employees at Air Namibia are less motivated to do their jobs due to the lack of an elaborate employee reward system that acknowledges their efforts. There appears to be no proper succession planning or mechanisms to mentor and develop future leaders within

the airline. Many employees consider leaving their organization because of a poor relationship with their direct line managers. Developing current employees for leadership positions is a challenge because some of the top employees leave the airline after a short stay and this has not helped Air Namibia's performance.

Financial management

This particular theme is concerned with the future of the airline and it is a critical one. The financial records of the company were not up to date and this was also highlighted as a weakness in SWOT analysis. There are no proper financial reports to inform management about the performance of the airline and the management also does not have a financial dashboard to help in operational and management control of the airline's operations. It became apparent that the airline did not provide the shareholders with a financial report for the past five years, which resulted in the shareholders not wanting to fund the airline any longer. The airline's financial problems resulted in cash flow shortages, which had a knock-on effect on payments to suppliers, employee benefits and payroll deductions, such as medical aid. The delay in payment had caused some suppliers to change the terms of reference on the contract agreement between the parties and withholding of key supplies which is impacting operations.

Management of resources

It became apparent that the airline failed to optimise its resources since, in the recent past, the aeroplanes were not fully utilized. Neither was the airline network fully optimised to ensure efficient connections through strategic networking.

Technology and innovation

It was ascertained that the airline did not have innovative technological strategies and did not fully embrace technology and innovation, as is international practice in the industry. Concerning ICT, there is a general lack of flow of operations due to the flaws in the airline systems such as lack of up-to-date physical infrastructure that supports its primary business. Additionally, the study established that the integration and assimilation of ICT in the airline are poorly addressed and that the current system does not fully support innovation which is essentially the driver of technology. Closely related to organizational systems and their efficient operations are office equipment, tools, and other accessories.

It was evident that the airline did not have an elaborate feedback channel to capture the experience of the customers it served daily. The lack of a feedback mechanism makes it difficult for the airline to tailor its products and services to specifically meet the needs of the customers. As a consequence, customers may be opting to fly with other airlines that offer services and products that are customized to their specific needs.

Discussion of the findings

It became apparent that measuring the airline's operational efficiency can be an extremely complicated task, due to the various perspectives for judging the efficiency of the airline and the different approaches to analysing operational efficiency. In this study, the conceptual model (Figure1) provided one perspective by connecting strategy and the six pillars of the organisation to show the relationship between key variables (Grant & Osanloo 2014). This is somewhat in line with the view of Kalluru and Bhat (2009) who state that operational efficiency may be regarded as the capacity of an organisation to increase using its resources while reducing costs, to deliver quality services and products by focusing on well-trained workers, resources, advanced technology, system integrations and returns to scale.



It emerged that leadership is critically lacking at air Namibia. Northouse (2007) describes leadership as a process which involves a person influencing a team of workers to attain shared goals. Of primary importance to the performance of employees, according to DuBrin (2004) is the leadership style, a blend of the leader's character and attitude which establishes patterns of how the individual handles the subjects. Based on the character and attitude of the leader, worker performance and efficacy is either encouraged or inhibited (Armstrong & Murlis, 2007). Although the chances of success are not always good in highly competitive and volatile business environments like the airline industry, good leadership is necessary to transform good strategic plans into competitive advantages (Burgelman et al., 2018; Bolderston, 2012).

A Deloitte report (Terry, 2020) titled "Covid-19: rising to the challenges with resilience," argues that the rapid global spread of COVID-19, widening travel restrictions, and the plunge in demand for air travel are shining light on the core tenets of crisis leadership that can help the airline industry respond to this challenge with resiliency and move forward with confidence. Generally, every South African-domiciled airline intending to operate under the latest regulations must first submit their COVID-19 health and safety protocols and procedures, flight schedule and request for departure and arrival slots to SA Civil Aviation Authority, Airports Company South Africa and air Traffic Navigation Services respectively for approval before they are entitled to fly. The start-up phase will be difficult for all carriers as it involves significant financial outlays before any revenues have been generated. Most carriers worldwide, including South Africa, only had about two months of cash reserves in late March 2020, when the travel restrictions were imposed, bringing the industry to a sudden halt. In the case of Air Namibia, the picture was much bleaker.

Despite the difficulties and barriers to maximising efficiency in the airline industry, recent research into the phenomenon reveals that any improvement in areas such as aircraft and crew deployment, aircraft turnaround and routine maintenance, as well as delays and cancellation, and diversions of flight can significantly improve the efficiency of the operation of any time (Asif et al., 2013). Ericksen and Dyer (2005) caution that the airline management must be careful in applying resources and should be able to analyse what is most and less needed, to avoid high use of added resources and drive organisational ineffectiveness because of the lengthy process caused by high usage and long processes. Allocating resources and shortening the processes across the organisation needs to be professionally managed, and it can be achieved when system integration is applied in the airline. The actions government, industry leaders, and individual airlines take during this period will influence how deep the crisis reaches, and how long its effect will last, how quickly the industry recovers and which airline will emerge stronger than its peers.

Conclusion

It is recommended that Air Namibia change its vision, mission and strategy to include commercial viability as a central theme for success, especially if it intends emerging from the current malaise which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 virus which grounded aircrafts the world over. An integration strategy and generation of a set of integrated values need to be created. The two companies Air Namibia Properties (Pty) Ltd and Air Namibia, should be separated so that Air Namibia ground handling would be run as stand-alone business unit and its operational efficiency measured and closely monitored.

The shareholders should appoint board members who understand airline dynamics and establish proper committees by focusing on the airline's long-term strategy and business development to ensure adherence to the airline's corporate governance framework. There should be a clear path for the flow of information and innovative ideas that enable the airline to develop a competitive advantage in the volatile industry which is riddled with complexities

compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. All executive positions should be substantively filled with competent, skilled staff to support the managing director and an effective performance management system should be implemented.

The operations manual should be amended to provide the airline with a unifying framework on how it should be operate and be managed as this will contribute to the effective operation and control of the airline's processes. Improved operation systems and digitalisation processes should be introduced to improves operations the airline's operational efficiency. There is a need to have an integrated system to monitor and manage the airline's operations. The ERP system can manage the overall costs more efficiently, create enhancement of customer relation management, employ streamlined and automated processes, and ensure the system status is perceptible for both business process and system data.

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