



How to enhance customer loyalty through dealing with complaints at The Royal Jordanian Airlines

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Abstract

Customers invariably decide on the continuation of dealing with an institution that treats their problems in accordance with ability of the foundation on offering assistance to attend to all there needs. The objective of the study is how one should to treat complaints in the flight- industry. This study tackles the case of the Royal Jordanian Airlines Company. Data was collected through distributing questionnaires airline on responsibilities of employees in addition to customers needs. The study tackles a number of problems in the machinery of the treatment and management of complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines. The study offers a model of processes to improve the treatment of complaints, and offers a number of propositions at different levels to obtain the satisfaction of customers and enhance their loyalty to the business, thus leading to sustainable business. Royal Jordanian Airlines is a successful company, not only financially but also in seeking to surpass customer expectations. It must strive to be at the uppermost level of the airline industry's customer satisfaction levels, and that will add to sustainability. What is needed are well trained airline employees.

Keywords: Concept of Service, Quality of Service, Loyalty, Customer's Complaint, Industries of Airline.

Introduction

Service Definitions

An agreement on a comprehensive definition of the service among researchers does not exist, and in spite of that serious attempts appeared to offer a definition. Kotler and Keller, (2012) stated that service is any activity, accomplishment, or benefit submitted from a party to another party without producing any possession. This service is also often unsubstantial and untouched or intangible and is connected with a substantial product or does also not necessarily connect with it. Gronroos, (2007) defined it is a process consisting of series of more or less activities and it is untouched aiming at solving problems for customers (Nicolaides, 2008). The demands are indicated to the service being a product, which is often intangible and it offers benefits and direct advantages to customers by employing some level of effort, human energy and machinery without possessing it, or substantially consuming it. Nicolaides (2008) indicates that quality service exists where the employees deliver a service that they are proud of and are willing to put their name to. In addition the service must be carried out in a timely manner and customer needs must be met immediately and be appropriate to what the client needs. The airline industry is one of the top examples of a huge service based industry and the service quality is a customer's general impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of the airline and its range of services.



The study problem

It is research in the issues related to the effectiveness of dealing with customers' complaints in flight industry that is the basis of this limited study. Employing the study of the Royal Jordanian Airlines case was undertaken to achieve the aim of the research. There are generally two viewpoints of quality measurement. These are the internal and external. The first tends to focus more on conforming to requirements, equally, the second perspective concerns the customers discernment, their expectations and customers satisfaction levels. The external perspective has become far more important based on customer awareness and their growing customer expectations. The research offers a deep analysis and understanding the issues that have been studied, including evaluating the customers and how complaints are treated, and also the commitment of employees with treating complaints and indeed the machinery of receiving complaints and treating them at the Royal Jordanian Airlines. This deep understanding is necessary to submit enhanced training and instructions for a better machinery and processes to deal with the complaints of customers. Data was collected by using some key main sources including *inter alia* documents, questionnaires, and meetings minutes.

Significance of the study

The study seeks to search out the range of issues related with the effectiveness of dealing with complaints of customers in the flight industry. It may assist in the responsibilities definition and help decision-makers to recognize some points of weakness in submitting services and work to evaluate them better. Results deduced by the study may assist in improving and developing the quality of the offered services. The study also makes recommendations for the concerned stakeholders and decision makers.

Literature review

Namukasa (2013) studied the effect of airline service quality on passenger satisfaction and loyalty using the case of the Ugandan airline industry. The aim of this study was, firstly, to determine service quality perceptions of airline passengers, and secondly, to link these perspectives to their satisfaction and customer loyalty. During the data statistical analysis, item-total correlations, reliability coefficients were computed for every variable. Aggregately, the level of Alpha coefficient was calculated equal to 0.92, and reliability coefficients ranged from 0.70 to 0.85 for the variables. Results showed that airline tangible service quality was the most significant aspect affecting both customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions. Also, customer satisfaction had a positive relationship with repurchase and customer loyalty.

Sudradjat et al. (2014) conducted a study of complaint handling and service recovery analysis in low cost carrier airlines and its effects on customer satisfaction in Indonesia. In this study, the researcher analyzed the situation of complaint handling and service recovery of ten low cost airlines in Indonesia, and then analyzed the influence of these two factors on customer satisfaction. The result showed that 40% passengers of Air Asia airline customers feel satisfied with the complaint handling and service recovery, while another airline companies' complaint handling ideas were satisfying to 40% of the passengers. The proper complaint handling and service recovery made an obvious difference on customer satisfaction. Ramphal and Nicolaides (2018) make very good suggestions for quality provision in the services industry. They argue that where there are defective processes and services, strategies for change and improvement should be



introduced and endorsed, so as to meet and exceed customer needs towards excellence. Quality issues can inter-alia arise from very poorly trained or un-committed employees, defective equipment, ineffective management within a department, or the organization as a whole as need changes.

Metwally (2013) studied the relationship between complaint handling and customer loyalty in Egypt. There were four variables in this research, which were complaint handling, customer satisfaction, corporate image and reputation, and customer loyalty. The objectives of this research were to understand the processes of complaint handling in Egyptair, and to get some idea about customer satisfaction with handling their complaints, and study the influence of complaint handling on customer satisfaction, corporate image, and customer loyalty. Metwally (2013) concluded in her study that handling customer complaints was a major determinant of customer satisfaction, and then complaint handling influenced a company's reputation and image. It also enhances customer loyalty via increased customer satisfaction as posited by Nicolaides (2008) in a study of the hospitality industry.

Concept of service quality

Interest in quality of services, in service and productive organizations became a common thing and of most significance to attain satisfaction, loyalty and confidence of customers and it serves to achieve benefit and competition for organizations and companies in spite of differences of quality perceived in the tangible goods from perceived quality in services that enjoy different characteristics. Therefore, the issue of quality preoccupied a large concern in the domain of practical and academic practice, and it can be said that the concept of services quality as a distinguished domain from the quality of industrialization which was laid at the end of the seventies and the beginning of eighties (Schneider & White, 2004). The origin of the quality concept refers to the Latin world 'Qualities' that means the nature of person, or the thing and degree of solidity. The quality concept changed as a result of the administration science development, industrial changes and appearance of great companies and increases in competition for the concept to now have new and diverging dimensions (Al-Daradkeh & Al-Shibli, 2008).

Customer Satisfaction

In a world flooded with strong competition among companies and organizations, the objective is that each service or productive organization is obliged to seriously seek to direct their efforts towards the satisfaction of the needs of customers and their demands, and that will not be done without building a strategy that creates a high level of satisfaction for customers. Customers as considered to be standard setters of submitted quality of services in an organization and are at the center of benefitting and helping companies achieve the competitive trait and loyalty which they seek form customers (Vovra, 2002). Acquiring the satisfaction of customers is considered a significant entrance taken today by many companies as a slogan to attract customers and achieve their loyalty to the organization, and we can say that the cost of attracting a new customer is greater five times than keeping the present customer (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The result is the more the performance is connected with the expectations of the customers the most heightened the levels of satisfaction will be, and the more the performance of the organization fails in making an acquaintance with customers' expectations and needs, the more adversely affected they will be and lose credibility (Ramphal, R.R. & Nicolaides, A. 2014).



Concept of satisfaction

The model of Cardozo (1965) is considered the first in an attempts of laying criteria for consumers' satisfaction leaning on theories of social psychology. In spite of researches and intensified studies that followed this model, the researchers had confronted a difficulty in deducing an agreeable definition from the consumer's satisfaction in order to assist in overcoming the problematic aspects that negatively affected the basic structure of the outlets of marketing researches and tests of theories (Cote & Giese, 2000), resulting in the difficulty of attaining some agreement on a unified definition and non-evidence of customer's satisfaction concept (Yi & Zeithaml, 1990). So the majority of definitions that tackled the concept included explanations that indicated satisfaction as a case of evaluation, affective factor, or an emotional response resulting from the experiment, as indicated (Oliver & Swan, 1989). Businesses that are concerned with treating customers' complaints, enjoy at a high level of customer loyalty. Customers thus decide going on with such a business in accordance with its ability to offer what they need and want. Zigiridis, and Nicolaides (2017) stress the importance of making every effort to provide the best possible service irrespective of the industry in which one operates. This study aims at understanding how to manage complaints of customers in the airline industry.

The case study of the Royal Jordanian Airlines Company is used to achieve the research objective. Data was being collected from customers and employees responsible for handling customers' complaints. The study tackles a number of problems in the process of managing of complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines Company. This is because of customers' displeasure which makes it difficult to keep company loyalty. The study submits a process model to improve treatment of complaints at the Royal Jordanian Airline Companies. Moreover, the study proposes a number of applications on different levels from the Royal Jordanian Airline companies to satisfy the customers and enhance customers' loyalty. Complaints of customers are considered evidence of dissatisfaction levels on service quality. Researches show that the businesses that show good treatment of complaints enjoy a high level of customer loyalty. It is said that unless the decision-makers understand the behavior of customers complaints and estimate the return of complaints treatment effectively they will not be able to perceive the strength of the relationship when treating the complaints, gaining loyalty and deriving benefits (Goodman, 2005).

The customers do not necessarily express their dissatisfaction in the form of particular complaints when their previous experience indicates that the organization does not concern itself about customers' complaints. Instead of that, the customer may choose, with disappointment, some transference to a competitor or participation in a verbal negative word (Dinnen & Hassanien, 2011). The research in dealing with complaints discloses that a small portion of unsatisfied customers complain and seek to grant the organization the opportunity to correct the problem. There is an evidence that some of customers do not grumble, because they are not certain of the organizational preparation or the ability to effectively solve issues or the conflicts that may arise. The simplest way for customers is to transfer to the competition in the marketplace. This encourages companies to seek to develop an effective system to deal with complaints of customers inside organizations. The effect of non-performance is what that leads to failure of labors (Dinnen & Hassanien, 2011). Management of complaints effectively can save costs. For example, the negative publicity of unsatisfied customers means lost returns and need additional investments in announcements to attract replacing such customers. In today's environment where there is great competition, companies are greatly concerned about



obtaining information about customers' satisfaction and their loyalty levels (Carvajal et al, 2011). Study of customers' satisfaction had been done as a factor in itself and as a determinant of loyalty. Carvajal et al, (2011) describes satisfaction considered as the psychological result of the experience of consumption, that is obliged not to mix between it and its evaluation, but it has to be considered from the psychological verdict and a is seen as a reaction of the experiment. In accordance with that, it is said that satisfaction is welfare resulting from the experiment of consumption by customers.

Treatment of customers' complaints is considered to be one of the main determinants of customers' satisfaction, in addition to their decision of staying with an organization for future business. And so, it is possible for the organizations that do not seriously take complaints of customers to quickly lose them. Besides that, it is said that a sharp critical incident may cause a direct loss for the customer. This study aims at understanding the process of dealing with complaints of customers in the strategy of airline companies. By employing the study of the case of the Royal Jordanian Airlines the study discovers the factors that cause the displeasure of customers in dealing with complaints, achieved from problems caused in the process of managing complaints of customers, and it proposes a model for the effective dealing with complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines.

Quality of Service and Customers' Satisfaction

It is said that satisfaction of customers is significant to achieve benefits (Shin & Elliot, 2001), and satisfaction of customers is an important barrier for going out, and going out assists the company to keep its customers and protects the company from rivals (Fonell, 1992). Thus customers' satisfaction has become a main objective for the services organizations and at the same time, in most businesses means satisfying customers and having less complaints and less costs in treating cases of failure (Clemes et al, 2008; Spreng et al, 1995). Researchers argue that the satisfied customers are ready to pay more in return for the benefits they receive, that is they are less sensitive to increase prices (Fornell & Johnson, 1996; Shin & Eliot, 2001). It is also said that quality of service is preceding customers satisfaction (Cronin et al, 2000). This means that offering a service with high quality is the key to achieving customers' satisfaction (Nicolaides, 2008). The most common definition of service quality is "the customer's imagining of service distinction" (Carvajal et al, 2011). This definition includes the idea that quality can be specified in accordance with the customer's evaluation of the offered service level. The idea behind these definitions is that customers perceive the quality of service in accordance with the present and precedent experiment together with the performing of the service by the business (Bhat, 2005). The relationship between the quality of service and customers' satisfaction is a critical an issue.

Parasuraman et al, (1994) defined quality of service as a standard or worldly verdict relating to excellence of service and offer a narrow satisfaction of what relates with specific treatment. Cornin and Taylor, (1992) said that quality of service was a precedent to customers' satisfaction. Moreover, they mentioned that customers' satisfaction had a stronger effect on the intention of purchasing from the quality of service. Cornin and Taylor deduced that the organization of service has to basically concentrate on programs of customers' satisfaction. Customers' satisfaction has been operated as a multi-dimension foundation (Suresh Chandar et al, 2002). They also argued (2002) that the quality of service and customers' satisfaction have different structures, at least from the customer's point of view. Different definitions have been offered for the quality of services in literature. All the definitions concentrate on the points of view of customers. They concentrate on the



idea that customers are important dimensions of the quality issue even though the dimensions of service quality were the subject of discussion in the literature too. For example, Parasuraman et al, (1988) submitted five dimensions for the quality of service, including the tangibility and trustworthy origins, response, assertion and sympathy. Rust and Oliver, (1994) submitted three dimensions to the quality to the quality of service and deduced that product of service (that is the technical quality), and offering services (that is the occupational quality), and environment of service, are the basic dimensions for quality of service. In accordance with Berry et al, (1994), the quality of service has ten elements including listening to customers, saving confident services, concern with basic services, understanding service design, customers being surprised, recovery from service problems, practicing clean paying, encouraging group work, listening to employees, and creating service leaders. Four of these elements include understanding expectations of customers, their imaginations and then fulfilling or exceeding them. These factors cover: listening to customers, surprising customers positively, recovery from service problems and practicing clean playing (Rhoades & Waguespack, 2000). Understanding the nature of service quality and its impact on customers satisfaction is a significant matter in specifying the main problems related with deliverance of complaints in the airline industry. The different dimensions of service quality are considered important to evaluate the quality system of treating complaints.

Customers' satisfaction in the air-travel industry

Air-transport has a vital role in transferring persons or products from a place to another, either it be local or international. The movement of goods, persons, or shipping from a place to another is considered to be very important. Staying 'near' the customers and fulfilling their expectations is the key of works to success (Oyewole et al, 2007). Kotler et al, (1996) say that successful work is an anticipation of the customers' needs. Needs of customers and their participation in the first stages are expected from their first decision making. The air-travel industry has been classified as being an 'untouched service industry'(Climes et al, 2008; Kloppenborg & Gourdin, 1992; Shostack, 1977). There was a great anxiety in the past few years based on the numbers of customers who are obliged to fight industry to deal with them well. Usually the airline industry deals with customers in "the condition of direct connection". This illustrates the significance of the relationship between the organization and its customers (Oyewole et al, 2007). Though, customers became more developed in choice and demanding this increases the significance of continuous evaluation to specify the factors that satisfy customers or what they do not accept as being good. Senn, (1998) mentioned, the success of work is not specified by the product, but by the customer. In accordance with that, the airline and travel industry should be dynamic, so as to respond effectively to the many constant changing demands of customers (Gilmore & Pine, 2002).

Flight industries have been allowed to specify their price and enter and get out of the industry and fulfilling demands of insurance and safety. As a result of cancelling the organizational restrictions of the airline industry, competition became sharper. Moreover, customers' satisfaction became a primary demand to develop a competitive trait allowing security in strong competition (Dennett et al, 2000). Since the nineties, airline companies were mostly concerned with offering high levels of service quality. Most of airline companies started to submit different types of marketing drives to their customers, such as programs of permanent passenger place and employing the system of computerized-booking to build the loyalty of customers and supporting these ideas (Lee & Gunningham 1996; Miller, 1993).

Though what seems to have made a real true difference for customers of airline companies was service quality. Ostrowski et al, (1993) argued, that when there are identical prices at all flight companies and likeness of programs for permanent passengers, the company with the perceived service quality edge is better in perception and thus that able to attract more passengers – figures (1).

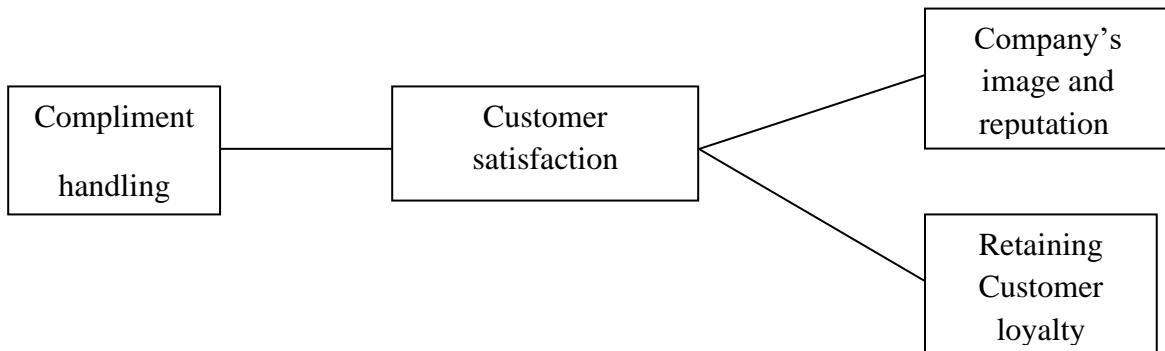


Figure 1: Important of Effective Complaint Handling

As illustrated in figure (1), the employed system to deal with complaints of customers is one of the main determinants of customers' satisfaction that affects the fame of the company and its picture (usually through verbal communication). This attracts attention to the extent of success of the Royal Jordanian Airlines in attracting new customers and also in conserving the present customers through using the effective machinery to treat complaints.

The Royal Jordanian Airlines – a brief history

The Royal Jordanian Airlines company was established on 1963 by hands of Late His Majesty King Hussein Bin Talal, God forgive Him, to the National Transporting of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and as provided in the wording of the Royal will that was issued by His Majesty in the Day of Establishing the company it stated: "We wish Alia/ The Royal Jordanian Airlines/ to be an ambassador bearing the flag of Jordan and all the Universe and as a bridge through which we exchange culture, trade, technology, friendship and understanding with the whole world and its people". And yet, in spite of this this, the property transformed to the public sector at the end of 2007 and it listed its shares on Amman Financial Market as a Limited Public Stock Company, but it remained considered to be the national transporting agency of the Kingdom, where the Jordanians possessed the majority of its shares. It was also one of the basic props of the national economy and a source of bringing in needed hard currencies, and its shares were about 3% of the gross local product of the Kingdom, besides which the main aim was to bring tourism to Jordan from all over the world.

During the course of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan it had witnessed consecutive developments across more than (52) years, either at the level of the fleet, and continuation of its modernization efforts, offering lines, employees, or the informatics system, meanwhile the pattern of these developments, and processes of modernization and development were accelerated during the reign of His Majesty King Abdullah 2nd Bin Al-Hussein's reign. He saved no effort on the path of raising the Jordan national transporter



and directing the company towards greater heights and supporting its competitive rank regionally and globally in light of all the successes it achieved through the past decades.

The Royal Jordanian Airline adopted a vision premised on it being “The preferred flight company to connect Jordan and the east with the world”, where the company today serves about (45) directions distributed over four continents through (26) modern planes starting from the main idea of its processes; Queen Alia’ International Airport lately witnessed a comprehensive modernizing process and a qualitative transference in the level of services offered to passengers. On the level of the fleet, the Royal Jordanian leads a permanent policy to continue in modernizing the planes, so that its fleet remains competitive. The fleets has advanced aircraft where through the last quarter of the year 2014 the first five planes of the Boeing (747) (Dreamliner) specialized to serve the medium and long range destinations introduced while two additional planes joined from this type at the end of the 2016, and another plane was introduced in 2018 (www.rj.com).

Objectives of Study

This study aimed at enhancing loyalty of customers through improving the machinery of dealing with complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines. This required achieving the following objectives:

1. Investigating the perceptions of processes in dealing with complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines.
2. Investigating customers' satisfaction levels about complaints handling in the Royal Jordanian Airlines.
3. Disclosing the main problems of the process dealing with customers complaints by the Royal Jordanian Airlines.
4. Specifying the possible methods to enhance the process of dealing with complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines.

Methodology of Study

This study aimed at unpacking in the issues related to the effectiveness of dealing with customers' complaints in the airline industry. The study of the Royal Jordanian Airlines case was employed to achieve this objective and the related research objectives. Besides that, it also submits a deeper analysis and understanding of issues been studied including evaluation of customers treatment of complaints and commitment of employees in treating complaints, and the process of receiving complaints and treating them in the Royal Jordanian Airlines. A deeper understanding is necessary so as to offer effective instructions employees and to train them to deal better with customers' complaints. Data was gathered by employing sources including *inter alia* documents, questionnaires, and company minutes of meetings.

Data was been gathered in two stages; the first stage, gathering data from customers (passengers). The objective was to understand customers' satisfaction about handling of complaints. A random sample of customers (passengers) was used to answer a number of closed questions by employing questionnaires. The questions were connected with the process of dealing with complaints and the extent to which their expectations were fulfilled in complaints handling. Additional open-ended questions were raised by the researcher and his assistants to gain a better understanding. Customers were randomly chosen at the office of registering the arrivals, and also at the office of the Royal Jordanian Airlines



at Queen Aliya' Airport where the customers were asked questions on a volunteer basis with no incentives give to them. They were asked the following:

1. Methods of informing about their complaint.
2. The stance of employees on their customers' complaints (such as interaction with the customer and showing concern with complaint).
3. Swiftness of response to complaints which had been announced.
4. Swiftness of dealing with the complaint/s.
5. Steps of receiving a complaint (type of information required from the customers).
6. Practical steps taken to treating the complaint/s.

The second stage related to collecting the data concerning the employees responsible for dealing with customers' complaints. This covered both administrative and non-administrative employees. The objectives of the second stage was thus to collect data to illustrate some points informed by customers and also to obtain more understanding of the process of treating the complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines. Semi-organized meetings/interviews were held with two of the managers and (15) employees (administrative and non-administrative).The meeting concentrated on the following:

1. Main points in dealing with complaints of customers.
2. Process of dealing with customers' complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines.
3. Employees' satisfaction / evaluation of dealing with complaints at their company.
4. Role of the person who had been met (employee) in treating complaints.
5. Factors that affect customers' satisfaction in what relates with treating complaints.
6. Measuring satisfaction of customers about dealing with their complaints.
7. Testing employees to deal with the complaint/s.
8. Training employees to deal with the complaint/s.
9. Perception of significance of dealing with the complaint and to what extent treatment of complaints are considered significant in different levels of the (organization).
10. Concern of higher administration with customers' complaints.
11. Concern of the company administration with achieving satisfactory treatment and resolution of customers' complaints.
12. Responsibility of treating complaints of customers (who is responsible for treating complaints of customers). Choosing the sample in both stages (the first and the second) from collecting the data with the nature of the case that uses "analytical" samples instead of "statistical" data. The idea in discussing the study of the case was to choose respondents who better fit with the nature of the research (Denscombe, 2000). The size of the sample is also affected to a great degree by the type of data that was been collected (Sounders et al, 2007). The researcher stopped gathering more responses when collecting data reaches a stage in which the data collected from partners was repeated and nothing new is added and thus saturation is reached (Yin, 2003).

Results of Study

1. The study of treating complaints process in the Royal Jordanian Airlines illustrates that managing complaints is unsatisfactory for customers.
2. All customers covered by the study informed of their dissatisfaction in the complaints handling by the Royal Jordanian Airlines.



3. Problems expressed by customers had been discovered and deeply studied with managers and non-administrative employees. The purpose of comparison among opinions of customers and employees points of view and specifying the main factors behind customers' dissatisfaction was unpacked.
4. Meetings held with employees and customers of the Royal Jordanian Airlines showed a number of problems that show the non-effective machinery/processes in treating complaints by customers. These problems are linked to the method with which the Royal Jordanian Airlines look at the complaints and their impact on the survival of the business, through the following points:

Non- commitment of the higher administration: with the effective treatment of customers' complaints this affects the method by which treatment of complaints is done in the Royal Jordanian Airlines. Unfortunately, the higher administration considers complaints as a personal criticism of the efforts of the company. This is reflected in the absence of an organizational philosophy which considers customers' complaints and an organizational strategy is absent together with procedures and clear rules to treat complaints. This is what the nature of the Jordanian personality justifies- as the higher administration argues – it listens the complaints and criticism even if theses are not true relating to any complaint. And so, dealing with complaints is not really taken seriously when it is related to Jordanian passengers (customers). However, complaints are looked at differently when submitted by non-Jordanians, since it is not their custom to complain unnecessarily.

The higher administration considers that the complaints submitted from non-Jordanians (especially the Americans/European) are dangerous for business and require consideration. It is said that these customers rarely criticize anything, unless there is a strong cause for criticism. In accordance with that, senior managers consider that the complaints submitted from non-Jordanians are objective and should be dealt with, and this is while the complaints submitted from the Jordanian customers are also likely significant. Jordanian customers are considered to be important by the higher administration as they are "businessmen and a first class considered source of income for the company of the Royal Jordanian Airlines". The higher administration is inclined to be interactive instead of being anticipating in treating complaints. Handling of complaints of customers is not done as a tool to obtain notes by customers and neither to improving processes. In dealing with the complaint/s, the administration and the different members in the organization forget that they behave as if this had never happened before. Specifically, the higher administration does not consider complaints as a tool to take advantage of for improving the quality of service.

Method of reaction for treating complaints: the imagination of the higher administration of customers' complaints is reflected in the comprehensive organizational philosophy for treating complaints, across different levels of the company, and dealing with complaints by employing an interactive strategy and not anticipating any issues. The interactive strategy for complaints treatment is at a number of levels:

Firstly: the main preoccupation is submitting a prompt solution that seems to be satisfying the complaining customer.

Secondly: analyzing the main causes and the subsidiary items of the problem do not form a source of anxiety for the administration.

Thirdly: complaints of customers are not considered an indicators relating to levels of quality of service, but are rather looked at as a personal and unwarranted criticism.



Fourthly: Using customers' complaints commentaries are not done to deal with the main causes of the problem, and so do not help in improving the service quality levels.

Fifthly: there is a decrease in the data base of customers' complaints that can be employed in treating complaints and improving service in the future. It can be said that dealing with complaints in the company of the Royal Jordanian Airlines is not a strategic instrument to improve the quality of service, improving customers' satisfaction, and building customers' loyalty and conserving it and this is not good for sustainability.

The weak net of communications is reflected in the slow dealing of complaints:

Communication represents a problem in different dimensions including communication between the higher administration and the lower levels of the business, and communication among the different administrations, and communication between the organization and its customers. Communication from the higher administration to different levels of the association, and vice versa, is an issue which sharply affects the treating of complaints. As discussed before, the higher administration does not view the complaints as a decisive matter. Dealing is not done seriously with complaints discussed with levels of the higher administration unless it has contact with a 'precious' customer, or a non-Jordanian. This sends a message to different organizational levels meaning that complaints of customers are not always "a priority". In addition to that, there is a decrease in integration among the different administration levels of the company, and it can be said that each department works isolated from other administrations. Every department concentrates on its own job ignoring the impact of other administrations and its impact on other administrations.

There is a decrease in ability on the show of the organization as a whole and connection among different parts of the organization altogether. This is a strategic problem and it does not affect only the treating the complaints, but it also affects the quality of the gross operations of the company and so the quality of service, specifically, the non-integration among different administrations affects negatively on the quality of the service, customers' satisfaction and their loyalty. Communications from the business to the customers, and vice versa, are considered another problem negatively affecting the treatment of complaints. One of the common methods to treat the complaint/s submitted from the customer is represented in the personal relations, that is to inform of a complaint to an employee of the Royal Jordanian Airlines who is well known by the customer personally, this means that the customers will not be able to express their complaints as they really wish to. Moreover, it reflects an unfair way and biased method, and personal dealing with customers, that is, customers are not equally treated and do not enjoy the same rights. Another method of receiving complaints is telephone calls (without answer most of the time), and a complaint on the plane can be in the form of a letter or an e-mail to the department of customers' service. 14 customers out of 20 informed that their complaints had never been dealt with at all by the airline. Eleven customers informed that they did not receive a reply from the Department of Customers' Service. Therefore there is a dangerous problem in the integration of work among the different administrations and also between the airline on the part and the customers from the others, while each department is isolated from other departments, the organization itself is isolated from its customers.

Model of dealing process with complaints at the Royal Jordanian Airlines

The main problem in the Royal Jordanian Airlines is represented in the non-existence of an evident and conspicuous manner in dealing with the complaints, and this is well-known, and also understood and applied by different members of the company.

The proposed process that the effective management could use to facilitate complaints of customers include the following steps (Guide of the best practice, April 1st, 2009):

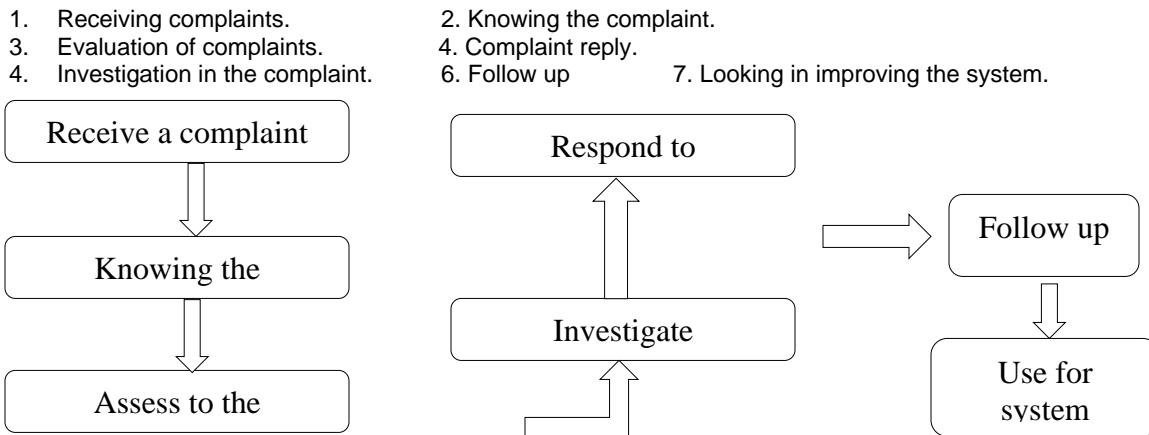


Figure 2. The Process of Handling Complaints

Better Practice Guide 1, April, (2009), Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling (Australia: Commonwealth Ombudsman)

Receiving Complaints

The first step of the effective dealing with complaints of customers is the availability of specialized employees and methods of receiving complaints. It is important for the customers to accurately know how and where to express their complaints and submit them. The e-mail, telephone, or communications, face to face, are replacement methods of receiving complaints. The recommendation with complaints using the post and letters in case of the Royal Jordanian Airlines observing the long time taken in the delivery of these and also the danger of losing the address during delivery is problematic. The significant thing is the enlightenment of customers with this method until they are able to express their complaints more easily.

Complaints acknowledgment

What is the more significant than expressing complaints, is dealing with them. When customers express their complaints and do not acknowledge employees actually dealing with them, they lose their trust and confidence in the airline. The result is that the unsatisfied customers transfer business to another company. The quick confirmation of complaints is considered to be an important thing to raise the confidence of customers in dealing with their complaints and also fulfilling their expectations. The confirmation should specify the process of submitting the complaint and offer details of the customer's communication. It must clarify the expected time necessary to solve the problem, that is dealing with the complaint effectively. Sometimes, it is beneficial to employ a written confirmation to avoid any misunderstanding from both sides (the customer and the company). This is a very important matter especially with electronic complaints submissions. The electronic system can be programmed to send an automatic response to give confidence to the customer that the complaint had been delivered and will be handled. The automatic reply of the customer should save an address of electronic mail,



in addition to the identification number of the complaint (10) to be employed in the future contact direction. If the complaint has been submitted across the telephone and cannot be promptly solved, it is important to explain to the customer how to deal with the complaint and give them confidence by sending them an electronic mail.

Assessing the complaint

Early evaluation of complaint is important to effectively deal with it. Initial evaluation is important and it is the responsibility of the unit of evaluating the complaint. It is also beneficial to practice initial evaluation by a specialized crew, especially if the complaint is complicated or difficult to deal with, due to difference of the nature of complaints at a large range, it is also necessary to specify if it is obliged to be concerned with the priority of dealing with one side or more of complaints. Evaluation is significant to illustrate the nature of the problem and also to illustrate the real or legal conflicting issues. Some complaints can be solved by explanation or a mere apology; others look for a decision, policy or even some financial compensation. Due to the evaluation, it should give the priority to one side or more from the sides of complaint. For an airline company, such as the Royal Jordanian Airlines, it is beneficial when treating complaints to ask the customers (submitters of the complaint) about their expectations, that is the results that they are seeking. In some cases, customers' expectations are simple, such as for example a simple apology, restoring paid money, or some other compensation. In some other cases, customers have no self-interest and complaint to improve the welfare of the airline. For example, they may wish to merely be increasing awareness about a problem, or be assured that other customers will not confront the same problem.

Investigation

Recognition of complaints has no meaning unless an effective achievement is done aiming at reaching a fair and independent vision for issues that irritate the complaint and submit a remedy appropriate for the complaint to be solved. It is important at this stage to look at three principles: Firstly: Neutrality, secrecy and transparency. Neutrality is important to achieve justice, it is a vital matter for the credibility and success of complaints treatment. Neutrality reflects two important issues. Firstly, employees should not be defensively dealing with complaints about their company. Secondly: It is not obligatory to force complainants to prove that they are correct, or the company is mistaken, it should deal with the complaint objectively, ignoring the previous experience between the company and the complainant. It is important in dealing with the complaint to evaluate the submitted incidents from the complainant objectively, and the airline should show interest and additional investigation for the customers who complained before, concerning different issues. The investigation of a complaint related to an employee should be by a different person in the syndicate to avoid any type of personal favoritism. It is important to be certain that the customer will not confront any type of negative treatment because of his complaint, and this should be an important part from the policy of the Royal Jordanian Airlines. Concerning secrecy, it is a must to respect the privacy of customers and to investigate their complaint/s individually, and there should be caution in disclosing any details or acknowledging the complaint to others. In addition to that, transparency indicates that the complainant has a right to know how they are dealing with the complaint, the results of investigation and he or she should be informed of the steps in the process of submitting the complaint and given the opportunity to comment on the information, before rejecting any complaint.



Response

Keeping updating the results of an investigation owner of the complaint has great impact in raising satisfaction of customers and building an effective system to treat complaints. The more complicated the complaint is, the better it will be if the response is written. Usually verbal explanation is done if this was the method of communication, preferred by the owner of the complaint or had been adopted in the previous treatments. The reply should cover a detailed explanation for all the issues of the complaint, and this asserts that the complaint had been treated correctly and it works to build trust between the customers and the company. Privacy should not be a handicap in front of transparency and good inquiry. Treatment of complaints should be taken into consideration, and the possible treatments should cover a better explanation, apology, change of decision, haste in taking actions, and offering of financial compensation where deemed to be needed.

Follow up

Treatment of the complaint does not terminate with a reply to the complainant, instead of that, it continues in granting them the opportunity to demand revising how the treating of their complaints is handled, the follow up has an impact in building employees' loyalty and one of the follow up methods with customers, is represented by a simple telephone discussion between complainant and the supervisor who treated the complaint. Giving priorities to complaints is beneficial in the process of follow up and the more serious, critical and complicated the complaint is, the significance of follow up should be escalated. The follow up with complainers of routine problems and when repeated is a significant thing, because it transports a message meaning that the company is concerned with the welfare of all customers at the same level. This is important to build the future loyalty of customers.

Using complaints for system improvement

The complaint may indicate a methodological problem in the company. What makes a difference between the effective system of treating complaints and non-effective ones, is if these complaints are used to improve the system, and thus the effective process to treat the complaints through solving the customer's complaint, but it extends to employing the information being collected through the complaint to improve the methodological problems that exist. The complaint may uncover the need to improve handling of the records of the syndicate or the need for training and supporting the employees best, and may also indicate the delay in solving the complaint into a problem in efficiency, integration between the different administrations or integration between the company and the other syndicates responsible for a complaint. The revision of policies and procedures of the company may bear a significant result in handling the complaint effectively.

The way to treat complaints more efficiently in the Royal Jordanian Airlines

Analysis of treating customers' complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines indicates that the company should take serious measures to improve the machinery and processes of dealing with complaints and this is necessary to transfer a message to the present customers that the Royal Jordanian Airlines has a culture of honoring the customers and has concerns about their welfare. The effect of this message is to conserve the present customers and gain new customers, in addition to enhancing loyalty of existing customers.



The following are some important procedures that the researchers recommend the Royal Jordanian Airlines could take to improve the current complaints handling system:

The central treatment of complaints:

Establishing a department for the management of customers' complaints is considered an important matter to increase customers' satisfaction and also to conserve the loyalty of customers. It must deal with all complaints centrally through this department. This department must be responsible for contracting the other administrations to take the necessary procedures to solve the problems for the passengers.

Building administration commitment with complaints treatment

The administrative stands are reflected in the employees' behavior and performance of the company, the commitment from the higher administration begins and extends to different levels from the business hierarchy, and can be achieved through carrying out the following:

1. It should be obligatory for the head of the Royal Jordanian Airlines (The Executive Head) to be responsible for making complaints treatment a priority for the company, that is through looking into dealing with standards for complaints as a main part of the labour-plan of the Royal Jordanian Airlines and general standards of service.
2. This can be achieved through receiving systematic internal reports about dealing with complaints quality and also time-tables for dealing with complaints and employing the complaints information in improving offered services.
3. Supporting managers responsible for dealing with complaints to improve their performance and through employing qualified employees and having comprehensive training for employees who handle complaints.
4. It is important to promote a strong internal net to empower employees in dealing with complaints of employees and support them with others and submit systematic reports concerning issues merging from dealing with complaints.
5. Motivate and drive for all employees to seek satisfaction for the consumer, and here begins the role of the administration in preparing policies and written procedures to treat complaints well, and these policies and procedures may guarantee solving complaints quickly and effectively.
6. The airline should guarantee the effective and clear communication of these policies and procedures to all administrations of the organization, and to extend the role of management to the regular review of the policies and procedures of complaint management. This review is necessary to improve the system of treating complaints, and grant a special concern to improving communications and have better meaningful coordination between administration of complaints and other administrations.

Customers periodical investigation

It is not necessary for the airline that seeks the satisfaction of customers to wait until the customers complain, but to rather pro-actively ask the customers periodically about their satisfaction with the level of service since this is the key to conserving their loyalty. The periodical investigational studies will uncover if the customers were feeling that they were served well through the procedures of complaints handling, they also help discover the



customers' evaluation of policies and different procedures. In addition to their satisfaction about the communication skills of employees and interactions face to face, notes of customers explorations are important to improve the level of service quality and support the satisfaction of customers and keep them loyal.

Training and developing employees of dealing with complaints

The requirement is not only training employees, but working constantly on developing employees, and development is a word larger than training. It aims at building the personal skills of employees instead of other issues, and training concentrates on improving communication skills and increases employees' awareness of customers' needs in accordance with the different economic classes, educational backgrounds, social classes and even cultural backgrounds. What we need is an effective system to treat complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airline as it depends on customers. This belief should extend to cover all employees to reflect the whole philosophy of the organization. Employees of the Royal Jordanian Airlines should be able to assign the legal complaints of the customers to the level of the concerned administration and support any necessary amendment in the policies and organizational procedures.

Building a system which is integrated

The necessity of the existence of an integrated system for the different administrations of the airline is vital. The system of dealing with the complaints must be transparent and allowed to facilitate the service of the customers and coordination among the different administrations is a necessity to conserve an effective system to treat complaints well. This integration will not be achieved without the higher administration's commitment. The commitment of the higher administration and its support to the administration of complaints to different levels of administration must be reflected in developing an organizational philosophy that values complaints and confirms that their management is the cause behind the organizational remaining stable. One method of spreading this philosophy inside the airline and transferring it to the customers is through the use of stickers and marks of Royal Jordanian Airlines that contain a message reflecting the significance of the customers and their complaints, and use these markers in zones of sales and services, and on tickets and coupons of sales, advertisements, marks of tickets and their envelopes and in electronic mails. This will allow prompt attention to be given to passengers.

Applying the list of self-review of a complaint

The list of this review aims at evaluating administrations and different departments in what relates to effectively treating complaints, and it also aims to realize the evaluating compliance with policies and new standards laid by the higher administration. This should be done regularly and periodically until the system is firmly established and understood by the different members of the company. This benefits in improving the system through collecting the information about the factors that cause customers' dissatisfaction. The list of review should be developed due to factors that cause customers' satisfaction in general together with concentration in particular, on the factors that have caused the dissatisfaction of customers with the Royal Jordanian Airlines. The previous performance of the Royal Jordanian Airlines is significant in specifying these factors.



Limitations of the study

This study offers important results in what relates with treating complaints of customers in flight industry. The study has been done in the Royal Jordanian Airlines only and this makes it difficult for it to be significant in other airline companies although it may have some value. Moreover, the study has been done at only one branch of the Royal Jordanian Airlines in Jordan. It is important to conduct more studies about issues in this researcher in the other branches in the other Jordanian governorates (such as Amman and Aqaba) so as to be able to generalize the results of this study on the Royal Jordanian Airlines. Doing the same study in other branches of the Royal Jordanian Airlines may lead to the showing of problems and new points of weakness in the system, and at the same time, the results of the study are confined to only Jordan.

Results and conclusion

1. Submitting complaints to the companies is an opportunity to correct the problems, and mostly they offer constructive ideas to improve products, adapting practices of marketing, promoting services, or help amending the promoting subjects and the product information.
2. The study summarizes the how enhancing loyalty of customers by satisfaction of customers is important so that the airline can also acquire new customers because the cost of conserving a present customer is less. It is said that customers' satisfaction and loyalty are both important to achieve benefits, in accordance with that, the satisfaction of customers must be the main objective for the organizations in service industries, this means less complaints arise and it costs less in treating cases of failure.
3. One of the main determinants 'of customers' satisfaction, that affects the fame of the company is the system and processes used for dealing with customers' complaints, and the air-transport has a vital role in transporting persons, or products from a place to another, either be it locally, or internationally.
4. Airline companies must be extremely concerned with having a high level of service quality, since it is the service quality provision that is the most critical aspect of business operation.

The study aimed at enhancing loyalty of customers through improving the machinery/processes of treating complaints in the Royal Jordanian Airlines. The study showed the process of dealing with complaints was not satisfactory for the customers, and this is because of the method which the Royal Jordanian Airlines uses in the complaints handling and its impact in the survival of the organization. The researchers recommend employing a process consisting of seven steps to facilitate and improve management of customers complaints at the Royal Jordanian Airlines and treating complaints effectively. The Royal Jordanian Airlines needs to apply a central system to treat complaints, and build a commitment from the higher administration in this regard, and it must also employ periodical questionnaires for the customers to answer on service quality, and use the list of self-review for complaints. There is also a necessity of ongoing employee training and development in order to guarantee the desired loyalty of customers to the airline. Airlines globally are progressively focusing on building stronger long-term relationships with passengers, and they offering customers quality service and attend to complaints rapidly and in due course retain these customers building the airlines sustainability. Retaining customers involves establishing and preserving long-term relationships with customers. There is a clear and important association between whether customers have a



relationship with any airline and their loyalty towards that airline. Airlines make a special effort to build relationships with their existing customers, rather than to continually try to acquire new customers. Before attempting to build relationships with customers, airlines should continuously offer quality service to increase customer satisfaction. Royal Jordanian Airlines must put in place carefully crafted service recovery strategies in place when there are complaints that are warranted and should act immediately to make customers happy. Royal Jordanian Airlines can gain a strategic competitive advantage by anticipating and then dealing with passenger complaints well quickly and transparently. But to do this they need to have the correct data so that the processes of complaint handling can be used to augment the passengers experience..

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