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Proactive Leadership and Workforce Management of International Airline Alliance Ground Staff

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ABSTRACT

Leadership plays a crucial role in the management of international airlines' alliance ground staff operations environment. Leadership that is transformational and proactive can serve to optimize the talents of a diverse and inclusive workforce and have the potential to affect an organization positively. This qualitative study was reinforced with the lens of the transformational leadership theory, as the purpose of this single case study was to explore the role of leadership in a U.S.-based international airline alliance, and their approach to leading ground staff operations, successfully. Managing a diverse workforce is often a challenge, as the aim is to ensure desired and optimal organizational effectiveness and performance, on which organizational sustainability and profitability hinges. The study entailed the collection of data using semistructured interviews in computer-mediated conferencing format with five airline alliance leaders located in the state of Georgia, who held at least 2 years of successful experience in leading a diverse workforce. The analysis using a process of constant comparison and thematic analysis yielded the principal theme of the importance of the proactiveness of leadership, in leveraging a diverse workforce, under the aegis of strategic human resources management, and leadership. A key recommendation is for airline alliance leaders to display astute transformational skills and align diversity, equity, and inclusion policies as a critical corporate human resources strategy. Optimizing employee performance is vital in gaining a competitive advantage in a field where service quality is a key differentiating factor in being superior among equals.

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international airlines' alliance international airlines' alliance international airlines' alliance **Introduction**

International Airlines in the United States (U.S.) underwent monumental transformational change after the events of 9/11. The Deregulation Act of 1978 was before those horrific events. The events of 9/11 led to the removal of several federal controls on airlines in terms of airfares, routes, and entry into the air transport business. The easing and removal of restrictions provided opportunities for airlines to provide low-cost offerings and innovatively compete with the major airlines (Subramanian, 2017). The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks however led to significant necessity for leanness in operations and restructuring and the forging of four major global international airline alliances (Seo, 2020; Wei, 2018).

To derive economies of scale, the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 compelled major U.S. airlines into the forging of international partnerships (Subramanian, 2017). Pursuant to demographic shifts in the population, consequent to globalization since the 1980s, at the ground level of operations, employee staffing was increasingly more diverse. The workforce management for organizational sustainability and competitive advantage in these international alliances necessitated adaptability and equitable practices in keeping with demographic shifts in the population of the United States (Burns & Ulrich, 2016; Clark, 2017). The reduction in flyers saw a decline in traffic and an 11% decline in the S & P stock

index, and the low patronage of air transport was with falling airline revenues after the September 2001 terrorist attack (Burch et al., 2016) increased airline alliances, where the aim was to benefit from code-sharing, antitrust immunity, enhanced pricing, cost/risk sharing, and offering improved value propositions to travelers (Bilotkach, 2019). The persistent business and management problem determined through research and analysis conducted for this study was that managing a diverse workforce is challenging, yet vital for organizational sustainability and profitability of the alliance, and the exploration of these challenges was the core focus of this study.

Organization management practitioners and theoreticians a long, have argued in favor of management strategies that are attuned to the workforce diversity in staffing, as organizational performance and competitive advantage hinge on rallying employees to contribute to the organizational mission and purpose (Kundu et al., 2019). The imperative is in hiring employees from various backgrounds in terms of culture, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. Adeptness in management can offset some management challenges, as most businesses strive at their level best to staff operations with a diverse workforce representation to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion in the firm. The recommendations of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) in the United States are

intended to enforce the nation's employment nondiscrimination laws, and Airlines in the US appear to follow these guidelines diligently (Daniels & Thornton, 2019).

Study Purpose and Objectives of Research

The objective of this study was to explore the management strategies implemented to manage a diverse workforce, in collaborative airline ground staff operation. A qualitative single case study was undertaken to explore the strategies U.S.-based airline alliance leaders in ground staff operations use to manage a diverse workforce, and therefore to ensure organizational sustainability and profitability.

For this study, the target study population consisted of five airline alliance leaders located in the state of Georgia, who had, achieved success and who held experience in using strategies to manage a diverse workforce to ensure organizational sustainability and profitability. Leaders and managers of organizations with a workforce composed of a diverse and multinational workforce could use the findings of the study to increase the organizational performance of operations.

The study sample was five, however, these were purposively drawn from the target population of 20 airline alliance leaders located in the state of Georgia, who held successful experience in using strategies to manage a diverse workforce to contribute to ensuring organizational sustainability and profitability. The research findings of this study may contribute to increasing knowledge of the imperatives and management practices, importantly, to reduce discrimination based on race, gender, age, and other human differences. Business leaders managing diverse and multinational workforces may find the knowledge and findings from this study useful to increase organizational operations performance.

Principal Research and Interview Question

The principal research question for this study was: What strategies do international airline alliance leaders use to manage a diverse workforce to ensure optimal performance in ground staff operations?

The critical interview question was: What kind of mentoring and training are necessary in this diverse workforce environment?

Theoretical Lens Underlying the Conceptual Framework

The theory of transformational leadership (TFL) proposed initially by Downton in 1973 underpinned this study. Subsequently, Burns later developed the term into a leadership theory in 1978. The benefit of adopting transformational leadership theory was that its postulations of charisma, vision, and integrity of the leader when applied in assessing management practices, are useful to mentor employees to develop a sense of competence and creative self-efficacy, which contribute positively to productivity (Frazier, 2018).

Transformational leaders are more likely to provide a workable framework for exercising diverse workforce management strategies because of the recognition given to individual circumstances of employees, the open-door policy for minorities, and employees with unique circumstances (Amina & Singh, 2017). As international airline, partnerships necessitate the hiring of a diverse workforce, the transformational leadership style has the potential to facilitate leveraging diverse workforce management strategies to enhance the achievement of the international airline partnership objectives (Mokhber et al., 2015). The postulations enshrined in the transformational leadership

theory are, therefore, pertinent in the contemporary management of diverse organizational workforce settings, when diligently invoked and applied.

Critical Academic and Practitioner Thoughts Analyzed

The globalized economy has given rise to multinational corporations, staffed with employees from diverse backgrounds, to satisfy the mandates of the EEOC requirements and to provide a cultural fit to stakeholders (Nickerson & Valerie, 2018). Some organizations enter into partnerships with firms in target markets for economies of scale, take advantage of reduced transaction costs, as well as access and deliver superior value to a broader customer base (Kuznetsova, 2016). Having a diverse workforce in international partnerships has thus become a business imperative that requires efficient management. The organization of the literature review in this study principally revolved around workforce management strategies in the international airline alliance ground staff operations and has four constituents.

Business Sustainability

The motivations for business initiatives are often to generate revenue, provide employment, and satisfy a particular need in the community. To achieve these objectives, it is sometimes necessary to adopt corporate governance that could sustain the organization as a profitable entity. Sustainability is thus imperative in business to achieve the medium-term and long-term goals of an organization (Silvestre et al., 2018). The concept of sustainability in business has evolved from a point where ethical, social, and environmental obligations were once considered peripheral or irrelevant to business (Vogt & Weber, 2019). Business sustainability in the 21st century must include environmental stewardship, human resources management, corporate governance, human rights, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and corruption prevention (Mahsud et al., 2018). In the pursuit of corporate growth, organizations, and airlines usually tend to adopt SBP, SCA, and (SHRM). While these sustainability initiatives may be conducive to business growth, there is the tendency to consider them as mere buzzwords that may not necessarily bring solutions (Groves, 2019).

SBP usually entails adopting ethical, social, and environmental principles in the conduct of business (Iverson, 2018). As part of SBP, business leaders endeavor to match corporate workforce needs with business objectives. Over the years, the SBP construct has become an essential element of strategic management consideration, and business leaders often take account of this in planning (Mahsud et al., 2018). Accordingly, Delta Air Lines, a leading U.S. airline leader, often undertake to adopt human resources (HR) policies that promote a diverse workforce and partners in national social justice campaigns. To demonstrate the airline's commitment to sustainability, an amount of \$1 billion has been voted over the next 10 years to mitigate the potential deleterious effects of carbon emissions (Crabb, 2020). Various management models are used to measure SBP, namely, the Balanced Score Card, Triple Bottom Line, and Corporate Model of Sustainable Business, to mention a few (Mahsud et al., 2018). Merely generalizing the SBP concept to all organizations and industries may, however, not depict the reality of sustainability in business practice (Mahsud et al., 2018).

Transformational Leadership

The main tenets of the theory of transformational leadership revolve around idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized

consideration (Frazier, 2018). Transformational leaders ostensibly broaden and elevate the interests of employees by generating awareness and acceptance of the purpose and mission of the organization (Asencio, 2016). Transformational leaders invariably promote organizational commitment by aligning employees' values, beliefs, and motives with those of the organization. The positive traits of these leaders, such as inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, may render the transformational leadership style suitable for diverse workforce management (Amina & Singh, 2017). Individual consideration traits, in particular, may facilitate taking account of the circumstances of all the segments of the workforce in designing suitable and optimal management strategies.

Transformational leaders may increase cohesion, commitment, motivation, and trust, leading to positive effects on workforce performance. The intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation associated with transformational leaders could have a remarkable positive effect on strategic human resource management (SHRM). Eckhaus (2016) noted that there is a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and the financial performance of an organization. Despite the merits of the transformational leadership style, it is sometimes perceived as lacking in conceptual clarity (Shukla & Chotai, 2017).

Fourie & Höhne (2019) underscored a lack of realism in the TL theory, pointing at a particular heroic bias in the conception of the theory, that is at odds with the fact that all human beings are fallible. The positive effect of transformational leaders on employee task performance has come under scrutiny, following perceptions that the leadership theory may not be as effective as often presented to be. Siangchokyoo et al. (2020) noted that, while some positive outcomes may be associated with transformational leadership, the desirable effects of the leadership style on employees may diminish beyond a certain threshold. The economic theory of diminishing marginal utility could explain the reducing influence of transformational leaders beyond a certain point, which is depicted as a curvilinear pattern of relationship between transformational leadership and positive employee task performance (Chen et al., 2018). Some scholars have also questioned the effectiveness of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire in the data collection used in evaluating the transformational leadership style.

Strategic Alliances

Strategic alliances are flexible arrangements for cooperation between companies, which can benefit from the strengths of the partnership to solve organizational problems (Kuznetsova, 2016). Some business entities can leverage these benefits for competitive advantage. In the global e-commerce environment, companies encounter threats from local and overseas competitors (Winata et al., 2016). To cope with challenges and derive economies of scale, and offer customers better value for money, while penetrating new markets, some organizations engage in forming strategic alliances. Some of the governance structure options for strategic alliances include joint ventures, minority equity alliances, and contractual alliances (Teng & Das, 2008). Strategic networks in the air transport business involve a high level of competition, industry standards, and entry barriers (Kuznetsova, 2016).

The advantages of forming international strategic alliances are many and varied, justifying, thereby, the existence of such business and strategic initiatives. It may,

however, be worth noting that the legal, political, and sociocultural circumstances of each country are different, and the organizational culture of each firm participating in an international strategic alliance may often be different (Kraus et al., 2018). Partnering with foreign companies in a business initiative invariably comes with cognizance of language, cultural, legal, and policy differences that could constitute challenges and strategies to surmount these for the smooth running of the alliance. The alliance difficulties of Honda/Rover and Alitalia/KLM demonstrate the uncertainties associated with international strategic alliances (Bilotkach, 2019).

In the globalized economy, some airlines have entered strategic alliances to extend their reach for customers, reduce operational costs, and increase competitive advantage (Subramanian, 2017). Four major global international airline alliances have emerged over the years, namely Star Alliance, SkyTeam, OneWorld, and Wings (Seo, 2020). The international operations of US airlines involved in international strategic alliances and the diverse demography of the US population have led to workforces comprising many different nationalities and ethnicities (Mishra et al., 2017). One key operational level of the strategic international airline alliances is the management of combined ground staff operations of these alliances, which are often comprised of a racially and ethnically diverse workforce.

Diverse Workforce

In the globalized economy, workforce diversity has become a common feature of international business because of the changing demographic nature of populations and the need to have a staff that matches corporate customers' profiles (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). The 21st-century US workforce is comprised of employees from diverse sub-groupings of race, geographic origin, ethnicity, gender, age, functional/educational background, physical and cognitive capability, language, lifestyles, beliefs, cultural background, economic category, and tenure with the organization (Zhuwao et al., 2019). While a diverse workforce could enhance corporate competitive advantage, the differences associated with diversity could be a source of distraction and conflict and, thereby, retarding progress (Goswami & Kishor, 2018). Members of a diverse workforce require intercultural competencies to be effective (Schreier et al., 2019).

Diverse Workforce Management Imperatives

Managing a team composed of members with varying backgrounds is a particularly challenging undertaking. A well-managed diverse workforce brings about a competitive advantage (Schreier et al., 2019). Diverse workforce management is, thus, often considered a challenge for HR management, entrusted with placing importance on ensuring organizational justice (Ardakani et al., 2016). An organization's international expansion requires (SHRM) with an emphasis on cultural awareness (Karadjova-Stoev & Mujtaba, 2016). The absence of (SHRM) in Euro Disney's initial strategy was the reason for the project's failure in Europe (Karadjova-Stoev & Mujtaba, 2016). Companies that have diverse, inclusive, and talent management strategies appear to outperform competitors on both talent and financial outcomes (Burns & Ulrich, 2016).

A workforce composed of various age, gender, cultural, religious, and disability groups, therefore, needs diverse workforce managers to understand and use the four HRM orientations namely ethnocentric, regiocentric, polycentric, and geocentric approaches to vary HR strategy to suit the specific business circumstances of an organization

(Karadjova-Stoev & Mujtaba, 2016). The importance of inclusiveness in contemporary business constitutes the basis for increased programming and policy implementation in the US public sector, for improving cultural awareness (Carrizales et al., 2016). Cultural competency at the organizational level often translates into specific actions and policies that a company leverages to be effective in serving its diverse populations. The pursuit of cultural competency in a business entity may help promote organizational change, good governance, and effective service delivery (Davis et al., 2016). The HR role of business leaders is critical to ensure diverse workforce management by implementing equal employment opportunity (EEO) policies in corporate HRM practices.

An interview protocol was used in the study to ensure orderliness in the research project. The interview protocol was also useful to ensure efficiency in managing time. An interview protocol is a detailed set of activities and research procedural prompts to follow for ensuring ethical research compliance (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yeong et al., 2018). An interview protocol is useful in documenting the data collection process and in aligning the interview questions with the research question (Heydon & Powell, 2018; Yin, 2018). The use of the interview protocol also facilitates time management and planning an effective exit strategy from the interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yeong et al., 2018).

An important role of the researcher is effective interpersonal relations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2016). Qualitative researchers interact with many people during a study, namely research grounds gatekeepers, research participants, and research assistants (Johnson et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Communication with the stakeholders was devoid of excessive formal expression to encourage relationship-building. The objective of the research and the rights of participants were communicated to participants with the assurance of confidentiality and informed consent and explicit portrayal of the measures in place to ensure this.

Participants

Qualitative research often serves to gain an in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon by collecting and analyzing data through interviews and other sources (Johnson et al., 2020; Mohajan, 2018). Accessing reliable data requires participants with relevant knowledge and experience with the phenomenon under study (Khatamian Far, 2018; Yin, 2018). Participants were purposively selected from a population of 20 diverse workforce managers. The purposive selection method was used to draw a sample of five managers from the population for the study. The justification for purposive selection is that it is a nonrandom sampling method that presents the researcher with the opportunity to select participants with the knowledge and lived experiences that are relevant to the subject under study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2016).

Determining the sample size in a research study depends on various factors, namely research method and design, the size of the pool of participants, and the need to collect rich data (Johnson et al., 2020; Mohajan, 2018). As the research was a qualitative single case study, the purposive sampling method was used to select five managers from a small population for the study. In qualitative studies, the emphasis in selecting study participants must be on gaining insight into the depth of experience, knowledge, and perspectives of the individuals chosen, in relation to the study phenomenon, rather than many participants (Khatamian Far, 2018). For this study, the selection of five participants was specifically

contemplated, and thereafter the research was undertaken, as the aim was to collect depth and quality information from a limited population. The richness in the perspectives and the quality of data desired were reached and supplemented with measures to reach data saturation and acquire in-depth information. Several researchers have subscribed to the quality of participants over a large number in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2016).

Data Collection Technique

In the quest to collect data to fulfill the research goals and objectives, qualitative researchers often conduct semi-structured interviews to gather data. The flexibility of the semi-structured interviews facilitated asking follow-up questions to gain clarity and an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Gordon, 2020; House, 2018). The qualitative research method and the case study design are compatible with data triangulation, and, therefore, useful in ensuring accuracy and validity in research (Mohajan, 2018; Walby & Luscombe, 2017).

There are some advantages and disadvantages of the semistructured interview as a data collection method. Researchers are often able to leverage the semistructured interview technique to interrogate participants with open-ended questions to gain a deep insight into the phenomenon under study (Johnson et al., 2020; House, 2018; Alase, 2017). The semi-structured interview is effective to engage the participant in a relaxed communication situation that could facilitate asking follow-up questions and exploring new themes for a better understanding of the subject under study (Davis et al., 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

To ensure the integrity, validity, and reliability of the study, transcribed interview data and its interpretations were made available to participants for review and validation as an accurate representation of views expressed in interviews. Researchers often use a transcript review to ensure data accuracy and the ethics of collaborative practice with participants (Saunders et al., 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Member checking, denoting the procedure of sharing the interview data interpretations with participants for validation is a technique that has the potential to enhance the trustworthiness and accuracy of the study (Birt et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2020; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data Organization Technique

The transcribed data was uploaded into NVivo qualitative data analysis software, which helped to identify themes, patterns, and categories. The output from the NVivo is stored in a password-protected personal computer with a backed-up copy on an external hard drive and the Cloud.

Organizing the research data in the manner described facilitated analysis.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an effort to bring order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data (Belotto, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016). Various qualitative data analysis procedures exist for research, notably content, and thematic analysis. The various tasks involved in qualitative data analysis are usually organizing the data, immersion in the data, generating case summaries and possible categories, coding the data, identifying themes, providing interpretations using analytic memos, and identifying alternative meanings (Yin, 2018; Percy et al., 2015). For a thorough analysis of qualitative research data, it is essential to first organize the data into a comprehensive and retrievable system (Saunders et al., 2016; Marshall &

Rossman, 2016). In this study, a content analysis approach was used to analyze the primary research data.

Practical analysis of qualitative data requires that the researcher becomes familiar with the large mass of data by perusing it (Kaye, 2019; Belotto, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using the content analysis approach, the data will be categorized, tabulated, and recombined. It was necessary to review the data in search of patterns, insights, and concepts (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018). The primary and secondary data in the study were read and reread for gleaning detailed perspectives and insights from the information collected. Patterns, concepts, and themes were sought by juxtaposing transcripts from different interviewees and using a process of constant comparison to facilitate the emergence of common themes evident in participant responses.

The interview data were transcribed and uploaded into the NVivo qualitative research software for analysis, using a systematic process of data reduction and constant comparison, resulting in the emergence of three major themes conveyed in the most frequent perspectives expressed during the interviews. The data collected were initially analyzed and later triangulated against secondary data such as airline industry reports and peer-reviewed publications, leading to the principal emergent theme of the importance of proactive leadership. The data analysis process involved a comprehensive process of comparing interview notes, interview transcripts, and triangulation against airline industry reports and other sources of credible information to ensure an enhanced level of validity and reliability.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for the study was: "What strategies do international airline alliance leaders use to manage a diverse workforce to ensure sustainability and profitability?" The views of five U.S.-based international airline alliance leaders in ground staff operations regarding strategies to manage a diverse workforce included diversity and inclusion, (SHRM), and leadership. The interviews were semistructured with open-ended questions to enable the participants to provide in-depth information about diverse workforce management.

The analysis of the interview data resulted in the identification of themes that were frequent in the perspectives expressed by the participants in the semi-structured interviews. The overarching research question was a point of reference in identifying relevant themes during the data analysis, and I used the conceptual framework to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the research data. Using the overarching research question as a lens, the principal theme emerged, which was the importance of Proactive Leadership.

Theme: The Importance of Proactive Leadership

Leadership is a key corporate ingredient that provides direction and influence in the operations of an organization (Shkoler & Tziner, 2020):

P3 noted,

So, the manager must consider a participatory style of leadership so that everybody becomes part. He must understand emotional intelligence to be able to deal on an individual basis with his staff, and a manager must develop his staff through delegating and assigning them responsibilities for them to achieve something. That is in itself motivating the employee.

P4 stated,

So, one of the most important ingredients for managing a diverse workforce is that there has to be

what we call institutional buy-in or buy-in from leadership. So there has to be an institutional commitment to ensuring that diversity is not just a buzzword within the workspace and it's something that is actualized. So, that is no.1, you start from the top— leadership matters in issues of diversity. So, that is a crucial strategy to have.

P5 affirmed,

I think we sometimes have to be a little more proactive than we traditionally have been in terms of leadership, whether it's just a supervisor of a department or the leadership of a corporation. I think it has to always be looking at the team members that they are overseeing to help to identify what their strengths are to help them. And you know, sometimes they are not aware of, to help develop those skills and to help them become aware of how those skills could be used in the positions within the company.

The NVivo-generated word density cloud in the Figure below shows the dominant views participants expressed during the research interview.

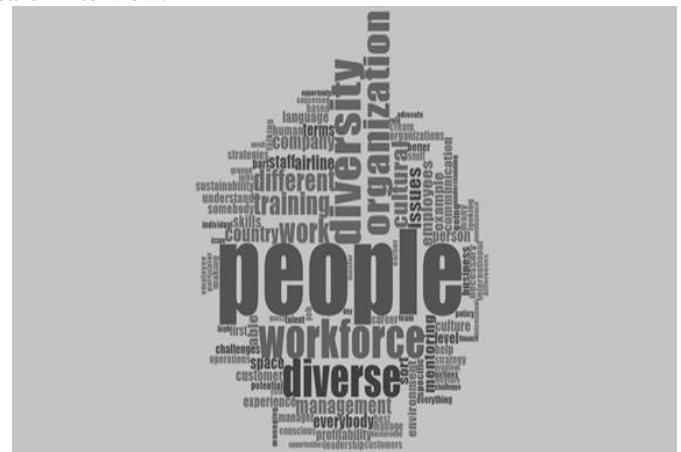


Figure 1.Word Density Cloud Depicting Participants' Responses Regarding Leadership

Participants' views displayed congruence with the tenets of TFL, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (see Frazier, 2018). Idealized influence represents the position of the leader as a role model and leveraging that position to influence the workforce to adopt the high moral standards of the leader. Inspirational motivation refers to the high expectations that transformational leaders convey to the staff through motivation so that the organization's human capital could share in the corporate mission and vision (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018). Intellectual stimulation constitutes the reassurance that the transformational leader inspires the workforce to be creative and innovative to review beliefs and values in ways that bring practical solutions to challenges at work (Crede et al., 2019). The individualized consideration is about the open-door policy in the transformational leadership style that creates room to provide a forum for segments of the staff with peculiar needs such as minorities to seek assistance in the organization (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018).

Supplemental research information accessed from Data USA (USA Data, 2020) for triangulation showed that the U.S. airline industry is grappling with ways to improve diversity and inclusion; 92.3% of U.S. airline pilots and flight engineers are White and 93% are male. Women involved in the global airline industry are less than 5% as CEOs and fewer than 13% as top executives. The low level of minority representation is not limited to airlines, but technology and

financial institutions are also making efforts to address the issue of diversity in the workforce (Brodock & Massam, 2016). The study findings serve to enhance, cultivate diversity, and foster a culture of inclusion to improve the representation of the various segments of the U.S. population in these organizations. The Wall Street Journal for checking on the diversity status of the top 10 technology companies could also be adapted to the needs of other industries.

As multinational corporations, U.S.-based international airline alliance partners often constitute global teams to collaborate on projects involving partner airlines. Global teams experience uncertainty and complexity due to differences in time, distance, and culture (Browne et al., 2016). Remotely coordinating multicultural virtual teams may require skills in diversity and inclusion as well as project management and cultural intelligence. The business case for diversity is that it brings the hope of greater innovation, enhanced engagement, workforce retention, extended customer, and market connection. Research on effective leadership and talent practices has consistently found that a commitment to diversity is one of the key differentiators of companies that both build talent and perform well (Burns & Ulrich, 2016).

Study Findings through the Lens of the TFL Theory

The research data analysis revealed that participants emphasized the importance for U.S.-based international airline alliance leaders in ground staff operations to be intentional and proactive in the execution of strategies to ensure organizational performance, profitability, and sustainability. The themes that emerged in the data analysis were related to literature and contextualized in the TFL theory and diverse workforce management framework as the lens guiding the study. TFL is considered a critical success factor in the global supply chain environment because transformational leaders are likely to leverage strong empowering influence on their teams, secure stakeholders' engagement, and deliver performance beyond expectations (Zaman, 2020).

Business leaders in a diverse workforce environment are relatively more successful in executing diverse workforce management strategies in a TFL framework due to the recognition given to individual circumstances of employees, the open-door policy for minorities, and employees with unique circumstances (Amina & Singh, 2017).

The TFL tenets of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration were, thus, relevant in the identification of the three major strategies for diverse workforce management. The usefulness of TFL to diverse workforce management was established in the review of the professional and academic literature in terms of high-performance work systems, increased cohesion, commitment, motivation, and trust.

Leveraging diversity management strategies in the globalized economy is vital for economic and organizational justice reasons, and the study findings confirm the current literature on the subject matter. Wells et al. (2021) noted that employer branding of a positive diversity status of an organization demonstrates an excellent corporate image and a workplace where employees are likely to enjoy job satisfaction. Indeed, inclusionary practices in a diverse workforce may often generate synergy and cohesion, creating a pathway to improved organizational performance.

Ensuring workforce cohesion and synergy is a campaign being pursued all over the world. In November 2012, the European Commission (EC) initiated recommendations for

gender balance in companies listed on European-based stock exchanges (Wawryszuk-Misztal, 2021). The groundbreaking initiative of the EC has tremendous human resources management implications that underpin organizational performance. The business rationale for diversity is that it brings the prospect of greater innovation, enhanced engagement, employee retention, expanded customer base, and market connection.

The essential role of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) in organizing a diverse workforce is replete in current literature. Wawryszuk-Misztal (2021) argued that there is a relationship between DEI and meaningful individual and organizational outcomes. Both employees and companies could benefit from diverse workforce management strategies in terms of organizational climate and organizational performance. Career planning and career advancement of women and other minorities are likely to thrive in a workplace where (SHRM) promotes DEI (Brown et al., 2021). In the globalized business environment, instituting (SHRM) measures to ensure diversity and inclusion could often play a significant role in gaining a competitive advantage.

An effective DEI practice in a workplace begins with leadership, especially at the board level. A substantial body of research has thus been dedicated to board diversity. Rania et al. (2021) argued that board gender and age diversity positively correlate to corporate governance, human resources, human rights, and environmental activities. Diversifying the board and the management team is thus an expression of support for corporate diversity policy and, therefore, likely to reflect positively on the pursuit of this policy throughout the organization. The underrepresentation of women on the corporate boards of Brazilian firms prompted the senate in Brazil to pass bills to mandate adequate women representation on boards (Prudêncio et al., 2021). As board composition could have symbolic significance, board characteristics may be associated with corporate social responsibility (Rania et al., 2021). The role of leadership in organizing the workforce to develop a corporate vision and mission with an emphasis on DEI is critical in executing diversity management strategies.

Recommendations Derived from the Findings of this Study

There is a compelling case for hiring culturally diverse, gender diverse, age-diverse, and linguistically diverse staff in international airline strategic alliances. The study findings and the knowledge presented herein, may serve to create awareness of the importance of diversity in the ground staff operations of a global airline strategic alliance. The understanding of organizational performance and business sustainability will require some specific actions, and recommendations which are presented herewith.

Institutional Buy-In

Implementing diverse workforce management strategies is likely to be more effective in an organization where there is institutional buy-in into pursuing diversity and inclusion. This buy-in ostensibly means the company's leadership, including the board and management team, would have discussed this issue, and based on the stakes in the business operations, decided firmly, that adopting diversity and inclusion policies could create the synergy that is likely to enhance profitability and sustainability. The institutional buy-in will need to filter into consensus-building regarding vision and mission statements as well as other relevant policies. Essentially, it may be beneficial if the institutional buy-in results in

diversifying the composition of the corporate board and the management teams.

Diversity Hiring and Inclusion Measures

Management would need to institute talent sourcing, interviewing, and hiring processes devoid of conscious and unconscious biases. Men and women need to have equal chances in these processes, and the wording of job descriptions would need to be less discriminatory. The machine intelligence tools used to link developers and data scientists to hiring companies will need to be changed to avoid weighted features and controls. Determining hiring criteria beforehand and diversifying the hiring committee will contribute to scaling down monochromatic tendencies. The use of workplace diversity and inclusion reporting metrics such as diversity scorecards, dashboards, and annual culture surveys could enhance the pursuit and assessment of workplace diversity.

Align HR Policies with Corporate Strategy

This recommendation connotes that the organization may benefit from an HR management initiative to harmonize human capital policies and objectives with corporate business strategy. This strategic management action has the potential to enhance organizational performance by adopting goal-aligned and performance-based HR practices that may lead to competitive advantage, profitability, and sustainability. As HR programs and job designs are in sync with corporate strategy, there is a greater likelihood of ensuring staff retention, which creates stability for the organization and employees to engage in career and succession planning effectively.

Conclusion

International airlines operating in strategic alliances could benefit from economies of scale, access to international markets, and globally integrated transportation services. Other perks of airline international alliance include joint sales and marketing coordination, co-location of airport facilities, reciprocal code sharing, reciprocal loyalty programs participation, airport lounge access, airport ground handling arrangements, aircraft maintenance insourcing, and joint procurement scale. Supporting global air transport operations requires adequate staffing to map to the diverse workforce requirements of multinational corporations. While a diverse workforce is a business imperative in 21st-century international business, there is a need to adopt effective workforce management strategies to ensure profitability and sustainability. The three strategies that emerged in this study are diversity and inclusion, strategic human resources management, and leadership. These strategies need to be pursued intentionally and proactively for effectiveness.

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