
Emirates Airline Cultural Diversity Management

Abstract

As the Middle East largest air transport provider and the fastest growing airline worldwide, Emirates enjoys a rich diversity in its workforce, where staff come together from over 160 nations around the world, learn from each other, and contribute the astonishing performance of the company (Emirates 12). Having been fascinated by its unique and embraced cultural mix or as Emirates puts it “Adding Diversity To The Air” (Emirates 18), the airline has been delivery award-winning services globally for three decades to customers across six continents (Emirates 3 + Emirates 13). With a culturally diverse workforce, Emirates envisions to “making travel without borders” and aims to be the best air carrier around the globe by delivering award-winning services daily to customers across six continents (Emirates 3 + Emirates 13). In this paper, Emirates’ managerial approaches at the international level to manage the cultural diversity, while shedding light on the organizational culture assumed by the airline management, which has led to extraordinary success. Moreover, a number of practical recommendations were proposed to address some current pressing issues faced by the company with respect to its management across cultures.

Key Words: Cultural Diversity, International Management, Motivation, Women Inclusion?

Overview

Emirates Airline, a subsidiary of The Emirates Group, is one of the top major air transport carrier in the world. Headquartered in Dubai, it is wholly owned by the UAE government that started its first flights on 25 October 1985, using only two aircrafts (Emirates 4). Today, regarded as the fastest growing carriers in the airline business worldwide (Emirates 10), Emirates now owns and operates the world’s fourth largest fleets of 270 aircrafts, flying to 159 destinations around the world in 84 countries across the six continents (Emirates 3 + Annual Report 2019).

In 2014, Emirates was named by Brand Finance as the world’s “Most valuable airline brand” and the Middle East’s most valuable brand (Emirates 4). The company recorded revenues of 97,907 (approximately \$26,654 million) during the financial year ended March 2019, with an increase of 6% (Annual Report 2019).

While Emirates’ focus is on profit maximization, the rapid and aggressive expansion has been fueled by the UAE government efforts, contributing to transform Dubai into the world’s busiest airport and the new universal aviation hub of the century for international passengers (Emirates 8).

People

Employees

Emirates Airline employees a total of 63,594 employees and staff from over 174 nationalities,

where the airline considers such dynamically diverse workforce as “the heart of our success” (Emirates 3). The ultimate focus for the management in order to continue business success and maintain the competitive edge is the employment of highly talented and qualified personnel to join the multi-cultural team of over 174 nationalities (Source 24).

Characterized as the most valuable asset of the company, professionalism and teamwork are some key values embraced by Emirates, where a cosmopolitan mix of individuals from all over the world with the highest caliber are recruited to join the team (Emirates 13).

Apart from the requirement for empathy and positive attitude towards others, the company requires “a strong cultural awareness and the ability to adapt to new people and environments” (Emirates 19). The dynamically diverse staff brings various expertise and rich experiences from around the world to deliver top quality services and products to Emirates global customer base (Emirates 18).

Customers

Ever since its start, over 59 million passengers have flown on Emirates airline (Emirates 3). Despite cutthroat competition, Emirates has distinguished itself to become customers’ first choice by tailoring customer-oriented services and products along with satisfying the needs of clients across cultures through innovation (Emirates 13).

Combined with reliability of delivery and good corporate social responsibility, the airline strive to build emotional ties with its customers through the branding campaigns, where they are exclusively featured to admire the customers (Source XX marketing).

Leadership & Management

Even though the two terms are perceived by many to be synonyms to each other, (Source 22) has defined management as the “allocation of scarce resources against an organization’s objective, the setting of priorities, the design of work, and the achievement of results. It is about controlling”. On the other hand, he defined leadership as the focus on the “creation of a common vision” by motivating and encouraging people to contribute to it and align their “interests with that of the organization. It means persuading, not commanding” (Source 22).

For any given global brand, such as Emirates, the vision and mission are very crucial components for success as they shape management strategy and navigate the direction towards the future. Led by Sheik Ahmed Bin Saeed Al-Maktoum, Emirates Chairman and CEO, Emirates management and leadership has been playing a major role in the company success. The male-dominant executive team members consists of western educated Emiratis as well as experienced western gurus (Emirates 5b). The management has steered the growth and long-term success of Emirates through its transformation from a humble local airline operator to become one of the world’s largest and award-winning global air carrier (Emirates 5b).

With no doubt, Emirates talented executives – who most of them have been with the organization since the start – and their pioneering vision have made this possible through their innovative management techniques and the vastly skilled and diverse staff.

Organizational Culture

Edgar Schein (2010) has defined organizational culture as the “set of common beliefs and values that influence how employees think, feel, and act in the workplace”. In fact, it can heavily influence the behavior of individuals at all levels within the company (Schein, 2010). In addition, the embracement of digital technologies and the focus of inclusion and diversity are essential business strategies to create a strong and successful culture (Source 29).

For Emirates, stakeholders from a wide range of cultures come together and interact with one another in a multidimensional and cultural arena for understanding and communicating. In a rhythmic joint effort, employees and managers are constantly working with one another to improve products and services at every aspect that will eventually enhance customers' satisfaction. The unity to achieve goals wipe out cultural differences and generates pride and sense of organization belonging among the population, as a control mechanism without the oppressive effects of bureaucracy.

Schein (2010) has specified three specific areas/levels of organizational culture that help in analyzing, based on which a simple analysis of Emirates has been done in Appendix A. Combined with an organizational culture of innovation and pioneering spirit, Tim Clark, president of Emirates, characterized the airline management style as having an attitude of ‘make-it-happen’ (Emirates 14). Such corporate culture is shared throughout the company at all levels as a fundamental value, where a positive and encouraging social influence is made among the population in order to achieve the common goal (Emirates 13).

International Management

Deresky (Textbook) has defined international management as “the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling in a multicultural or cross-cultural environment”. Additionally, an effective international management possess the ability to lead and motivate a multicultural workforce as well as the anticipation of the needed requirements and expectations of customers that come from diverse backgrounds (textbook).

In a globalized world, management is shaped by the trending conditions, norms and cultures in order to achieve competitive advantage sustainability. By considering the GLOBE project findings, the “in-group collectivism” score among the various regions worldwide differs significantly (Source GLOBE). However, the culture in Emirates has influenced everyone in the organization, regardless of nationalities, to adapt a high level of organization's in-group collectivism, pride, and loyalty by sharing a strong cohesiveness to its values.

Performance and Motivation

Emirates Airline is known for their highly rewarding and motivating career opportunities through rewards, recognition, incentive and performance (Emirates 5c). The company offers competitive benefits with a wide range of opportunities in order to attract talents in order to continue their success (Emirates 12).

According to the Chairman, “no matter how many millions we invest in the latest equipment, it is our people that make the difference in terms of results” (Emirates 12). The strong

organizational cultural has effectively served as motivation approaches, which in return has resulted in highly acquiring enthusiastic and committed staff that strive to provide the best service and product to clients, collectively share the responsibilities as their own, and ultimately pursue united and aligned goals of the organization.

Consequently, Emirates management inspires talented and dedicated employees to bring their expertise and diverse experiences to deliver the best and most innovative products and services for the global customer base (Emirates 5a).

Managing Cultural Diversity

According to (Source 23), the term cultural diversity or multiculturalism refers to the “differences between foreign cultures” or those “differences within any given culture”. In a multicultural environment, management of such diversity is a fundamental element for doing business globally in today’s market. It is essential for managers of the organization to keep cultural factors into consideration.

Diversity in the airline market is inevitable given the type of industry in which it is operating and the variety of customers being served. Emirates’ customers make the ultimate component of the business and everything is centered on them. The global airline flies to over 159 airports in 84 countries around the world, serving a diverse customer base from different origins and backgrounds (Annual Report).

Emirates has embraced diversity through the process of enriching its workforce of a wide range of nationalities worldwide. The company indiscriminately recruit and endorse staff, where all people are treated with respect and given equal opportunities for career development. With a workforce mixture like no other, Emirates enjoys a rich cultural diversity environment of its employees that come from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds with different work habit and attitudes.

Such diversity, without doubt, is the leading driver for new ideas and innovation, which has enabled Emirates to obtain a great perceptive of cultures as diversity generates ideas from different perspectives and backgrounds, giving a larger pool of ideas that resulted in competitive edge.

Communication and Marketing

Effective communication for an organization is one fundamental element for its success in today’s world to convey and receive messages and information in all aspects of the business (textbook business com). In a globalized industry, such as air transport, communication issues can arise when multiple native languages exist. In such case, however, English is widely used for communication to overcome barriers and manage a culturally diverse stakeholders’ base, as a universal language that has been adopted by the industry throughout the world.

As Emirates operate globally, its website has been made available in 26 languages with new languages added frequently, reflecting the needs of the global customer base (Annual Report 2019). Additionally, on any of its flight, cabin crew would consist of 10-12 nationalities, speaking a minimum of 10-15 languages among them (Emirates 15).

Moreover, the airline has connected with its global audience while keeping in mind and successfully considering in the process the cultural differences in backgrounds, languages, and state in mind. Consequently, it has adopted a variety of slogans for instance: “The finest in the sky”, “Fly Emirates”, “Keep Discovering”, “Hello Tomorrow” and many more (Emirates 17), while respecting cultural differences and balancing between localization and globalization in an effort to unify brand messages across cultures (Source 27).

De Mooij (2010) emphasized that the applied messages rely on the targeted audience and should be made relative to the receiving culture (Source 26). Different medias have been used by the company to communicate the message about Emirates delivered high quality services. The effective and efficient usage of various integrated marketing communication tools like the different types of advertisement, building relations based on public interests, and sponsorships of events by different Medias, the airline has gained an astonishing market position in the minds of people worldwide (Source 25).

As a result, the airline has successfully demonstrated the concept of multiculturalism in its marketing techniques to advertise the high-quality services and products that Emirates has to offer and also to ensure such messages are consistently and effectively delivered to the targeted audiences across the globe.

Recommendations

Effective leadership and management opt to be “very situation specific” (Unit 1 – Source 6). For Emirates, executives have created a strong organizational culture of their own, which seems to work well for them. However, it is vital to keep in mind that the impacts of global forces on organizations is increasingly tremendous. According to (Deloitte Source 29), the four sweeping global forces that are reshaping the workplace are the demographic upheavals that makes diversity an inevitable reality, the digital technologies that changes delivery methods of products/services, the accelerated rate of change dictating the need to respond and/or reposition, and the new social contract driving major changes in employers-employees relationships.

Given the success of Emirates in managing its multicultural stakeholders and operations, management should consider the fact that diversity comes with risky effects that need to be continuously evaluated to redesign techniques and renovate workplace as necessities arise. Such evaluation can be performed by incorporating a high-level engagement, as a top priority, with its employees and customers as listening tools (Source 29). Moreover, through the literature and practical research done, we have come up with some specific recommendations that address current issues as the following:

Women Inclusion

Given the tight culture of Middle Eastern countries with traditional behavioral norms are rigid towards male preferences (Source 28), there has been far less women in leadership positions than any other region. According to GLOBE research findings, gender inequality practices is a major norm in Middle Eastern societies with a significant male domination encouragement (Source Globe). Deresky (2016) states that the reasons for scarce opportunities for women in international management are traced to the cultural values of the country.

Even though Emirates embrace diversity and operates on an international level, it seems that some local Arab cultural norms are prevailing in its management style despite the celebrated multiculturalism diversity in the country. According to (IATA Report) (2018) of gender diversity in executives positions in the airline industry, the Middle East region scored the least at 4% of senior executive roles are filled with women.

Surprisingly, the airline's leadership roles have been exclusively dominated by men, ever since the birth of company 34 years ago (Emirates 5b). Accordingly, IATA has called on MENA airlines, including Emirates, to increase gender diversity for women who have been under-represented (Emirates 21). Therefore, it is important for Emirates to diversify its line management with the inclusion of women, which in return, can promote the introduction of new and innovative ideas that contributes to the sustainability of the airline competitive advantage legacy.

Recruitment of Locals

Regardless of being the largest airline in the region with a workforce of over 63 thousands employees from 174 nationalities, the share of Emirati locals of that population is only 3%, mostly in managerial positions (Emirates 20a). The reason being is the strong belief by locals that such profession is beneath their status and societal figure. In particular, this belief is reflected in reality as out of the total 23,000 cabin-crew staff, only 50 of them are Emiratis despite the great pay and privileged benefits to attract locals.

In an effort to encourage Emiratization and change the trend, the airline expects to hire 3,000 cabin-crew next year with the goal of recruiting more Emiratis (Emirates 20b). Yet, that actually can be very difficult to achieve due to long-held beliefs and cultural norms, which view such profession with an inferiority perspective, preventing many young locals from pursuing that career. In fact, those who do will face discouragement from family members or forbidden what is locally coccordingly.