

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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## CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE FIVE PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES: A STUDY OF SOUTH WEST AIRLINES, USA

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DEAN & DIRECTOR  
LONDON AMERICAN CITY COLLEGE  
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

### ABSTRACT

*Five Performance objectives in business operations play a pivotal role in the development of the business as well as personal life situations. In case, the five performance objectives are not working well, it indicates that something is wrong with the organization. It is therefore, essential to look into the five performance objectives in all the operations and departments of the business. In this paper, the five performance objectives have been discussed and its applications have been used for an airline based company of the United States namely the South West Airlines. The characteristics depicting the competitive edge of the South West Airlines has been identified with reference to its five performance objectives. These 5 performance objectives will form the basis of critical success factors for the airline industry.*

### KEYWORDS

Quality, Speed, Dependability, Flexibility, Cost.

### INTRODUCTION

The Five performance objectives are the major objectives of performance rating evaluation for any industry and are specifically good for the airline industry. The operations decision requires to set certain objectives in order to meet the customer satisfaction. For instance, as an Operations Manager of an automobile company, you need to know the performance criteria to be achieved in order to satisfy the customers and contribute towards the competitiveness.

The operations manager of any company should look at and evaluate the five performance objectives of quality, speed, dependability, flexibility and cost.

### OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The main objective of this study is to analyze the five performance objectives and its application to an airline industry. It is a firm belief that the airline industry will operate efficiently provided it applies the five performance objectives.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper has been prepared by using secondary data information, mostly from the international data, books, magazines, newspapers etc and to some extent with the primary data collection from the passengers.

### FIRST PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES: QUALITY – DOING THINGS RIGHT

Quality is the first performance objectives to be achieved by any organization. Quality indicates the consistent conformance to customer's expectations that is, doing things right without any error and defect on the part of the people working in the organization and thereby delivering quality products and services. Quality should also be maintained inside the operations in order to deliver quality output to the external customer and for their satisfaction. Quality work aids in reduction of the cost of the operations. For example, if a Hypermarket's regional warehouse sends the wrong goods to the hypermarkets, it will lead to loss of staff time and cost, in order to sort out this problem. Increasing cost at any point of time indicates the development of poor quality. At the supermarket, in case the goods run out on the shelves with a resulting loss of revenue to the operation and irritation to the external customers will indicate the failure of quality. Sorting out the problem could also distract the supermarket's management from giving attention to the other parts of the supermarket's operation. The performance objective of the quality has both an external impact which influences customer satisfaction and an internal impact which leads to stable and efficient processes. (Source: Nigel Slack, et al 2007)

### SECOND PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE: SPEED - DOING THINGS FAST

Every organization and its operations manager should do things as fast as possible. The faster the customers can have the product or service, the more likely they are to buy it or the more they will pay for it or the greater the benefit they receive. For example, courier company customers are willing to pay more for the services which deliver faster. Speed is also important inside the operations. Fast response to the external customers is only possible through speedy decision making and movements of materials and information inside the operation. Speed reduces and controls the inventories of the organization. An example of the automobile plant is more pertinent in this situation. First, the steel is delivered as a part of batch operations to make possibly several hundred products. Subsequently, it is taken to the press area, pressed into shape and again it waits to be transported to the paint area. It then again waits to be painted until it is transported to the assembly line. Again these components wait until it is eventually fitted to the automobile. The material journey and its waiting time are far longer than the time needed to make and fit the product. It spends most of its time, waiting as stocks of parts and products. This leads to high level of inventory. In case of an airline industry, processing passengers quickly through the terminal gate at an airport can reduce the turn round time of the aircraft, thereby increasing its utilization.

### THIRD PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE - DEPENDABILITY – DOING THINGS ON TIME

Dependability means doing things on time for customers to receive their goods or services and fulfill the promises of the customers. Customers might judge the dependability of an operation only after the product or service has been delivered. No matter how cheap or fast a bus service is, if the service is always late or the buses are always full, then potential passengers will always look for alternatives such as taxis, etc.

Dependability should be focused inside the operation also very well in order to deliver dependability output to the outsiders. If inside the operations, the aircrafts are not maintained well or balanced well, it will affect the output and efficiency for the external customers.

Dependability also saves lot of time for the customers. For example, in case of the maintenance and repair centre at the city bus company, the manager will always have a plan of the centre's activities devised to keep the centre's facilities as fully utilized as possible, while ensuring that the bus fleet always has enough clean and serviced vehicles to match demand. But if the centre runs out of stock some crucial spare parts, the manager will need to spend time trying to arrange a special delivery of the required parts and this will affect and disrupt the other parts of operations. Dependability factor also saves money. Ineffective use of time will translate into extra cost. The spare parts might cost more to be delivered at short notice and maintenance staff will expect to be paid even when there is no bus to work on.

**FOURTH PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE – FLEXIBILITY – ABLE TO CHANGE AND BEING ADAPTABLE**

Flexibility is the way of managing change and adapting to the situation. Customers need the operations to change so that it could meet the under-mentioned four types of requirements. (Nigel Slack, et al 2007):

- 1) Product/service flexibility- the operation's ability to introduce new or modified products and services
- 2) Mix flexibility- the operation's ability to produce a wide range or mix of products and services
- 3) Volume flexibility- the operation's ability to change its level of output or activity to produce different quantities or volume of products and services over time.
- 4) Delivery flexibility- the operation's ability to change the timing of the delivery of its services or products

One of the main purposes of flexibility is to do different things for different customers. Therefore, high flexibility gives the ability to produce high variety of products or services. Some companies have developed their flexibility in such a way that products and services are customized for each individual customer. Yet they manage to produce them in a high volume to keep costs down. This concept is called as mass customization. For example, Dell is the world's largest volume producer of personal computers and also allows each customer to design their own configuration. The Paris Miki, an up market eyewear retailer, has the greatest number of eyewear stores in the world and uses its own Mikkissimes Design Systems to capture a digital image of the customer and analyze facial characteristics. Together with a list of customer's personal preferences, the system recommends a particular design and the displayed frame is on the image of the customers face. In consultation with the optician, the customer can adjust shapes and sizes until the final design is chosen. Within the store the frames are assembled from a range of pre-manufactured components and the lenses ground and fitted to the frames.

Flexibility is important inside the operation also and flexibility speeds up the response. For instance, if the hospital has to cope with a sudden influx of patients from a road accident, it clearly needs to deal with injuries quickly. Under such circumstances a flexible hospital which can speedily transfer extra skilled staff and equipment to manage the Accident and Emergency situation.

Flexibility also saves times for the customers. For instance, staff in the hospital should treat a wide variety of complaints. Fractures, cuts, or drug overdose do not come in batches. Each patient is an individual with individual needs and preferences. The hospital staff cannot take time to get into the routine of treating a particular complaint. They must have the flexibility to adapt quickly. They must also have sufficient flexible facilities and equipment so that the time is not wasted waiting for the equipment to be brought for the patient. The time of the hospital's resource is being saved because they are flexible in changing over from one task to the other.

**FIFTH PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE – COST – REASONABLE COST**

The main purpose of cost is to reduce the cost of producing goods and services and provide a lower price to the customers. The ways in which operations management can influence cost will depend largely on where the operation costs are incurred. The operations department spends its money on staff, facilities, technology and equipment and materials

Many of the hospitals costs are fixed and will change little for small changes in the number of patients it handles. The car factory's payment for materials and other supplies will by far outweigh all its other costs put together. Conversely, the bus company will pay very little for its supplies, fuel being one of its main bought in items. At the other extreme, the supermarkets costs are dominated by the cost of buying its supplies.

**A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH WEST AIRLINES - INTRODUCTION**

On March 15, 1967, Air Southwest Co. was incorporated in Texas by Rollin King and Herb Kelleher to provide service within the state of Texas. On March 29, 1971, Air Southwest Co. Changed its name to Southwest Airlines Co. On June 8, 1971, the company completed an Initial Southwest Public Offering of 650,000 shares of stock at \$11 per share (\$6.5 million). Operating from its Dallas, Texas Love Field headquarters, Southwest Airlines began customer service on June 18, 1971, offering service to the Texas cities of Houston, Dallas and San Antonio using Boeing 737 Aircraft. The early years of Southwest Airlines saw operating losses. On May 13, 1972, Southwest sold its fourth aircraft to Frontier Airlines in order to cover payroll and other expenses. Southwest continued to operate a schedule predicated on four aircraft but using only three. In this way, the "ten minutes turn" was born and became the standard ground time for many years. (Source: South West Airline Web Report). In 1973, Southwest announced its first profitable year and continued in the same fashion to this date.

Southwest achieved record breaking traffic statistics for 1980 reflecting a 28% increase in revenue passenger miles and a 20% increase in passenger boarding to 5,976,621 compared to 1979 results. In the 1980s its services financed the expansion through issuance of corporate debentures. It also acquired several Boeing 727-300 aircrafts to keep up the pace of its growing business.

As Southwest grew steadily in the 1990s, it started to focus on establishing its corporate culture and public image. In 1998, Southwest launched the "Kids Fly free" vacation program with Disney land. The 'Give Your Heart Wings' program of 1999 encouraged Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards members to donate valid unused award tickets to Southwest Airlines ranked first of Fortune magazines' 100 Best Companies to Work for in America' list. During this period, Southwest further expanded its service to the south and northeast part of America. In the early 2000s, while the airline industry as a whole was severely impacted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Southwest Airlines was able to recover quickly. Three days after the attacks, Southwest resumed service. Over the following days, weeks and months other airlines laid off thousands of employees and reduced flight schedules, but Southwest maintained both employment and its schedules.

Southwest Airlines operates more than 3,400 flights per day and has more than 46,000 employees as of August 2012. Southwest Airlines have scheduled service to 78 destinations in 39 states. This has enabled the airline to offer low fares and reliable services. Their average aircraft trip is 509 miles and with an average one-way fare of \$85. This fortune 500 company is headquartered in Dallas, Texas and employs approximately 31,000 people. (Source: South West Airline Web Report)

It is therefore, important to review the five performance objectives of the operations of the South West Airlines as under:

**QUALITY**

- Southwest ranks first in on-time arrivals, baggage handling and has the least number of customer complaints per passenger
- It has won the industry's Triple Crown award for the Best airline five times in a row.
- Personalized interactions with customers
- Southwest is widely hailed as a leader when it comes to the ongoing development of its employees
- Built an operations strategy that fits the dynamic competitive environment and improves customer satisfaction
- Employees are encouraged to try new things
- Commitment to employees and customers has helped them achieve a team spirit which others can only envy.
- The first major airline to offer a 24 hrs medical emergency service to its in flight customers
- Use of technology to enhance customer convenience

**SPEED**

- Without seat assignments, the airline can turn planes more quickly at the gates
- The fifth largest airline in the U.S. applies its mantra of speed and efficiency to cargo business as well
- Shipments at all airports arrive earlier
- Gets planes out of the gate faster than other major U.S airlines and serves more passengers
- Fast gate turn arounds
- Point-to point systems result in direct routes, reducing connections and overall trip time.
- CrewSolver™ software, which enables the Company's pilots and flight attendants to return to their original schedules quickly after any delays.
- Powerful optimization and business rule software components generate a crew schedule in seven to 10 hours far less than the previous 36 to 48 hours.



**DEPENDABILITY**

- Has the best safety record in the industry.
- Southwest boasts the best baggage handling and fewest customer complaints in the airline industry
- Southwest is the nation's No1 airline for on-time arrivals.
- Cheap, safe and reliable service has turned millions of travelers into loyal customers.
- They promote a safe, reliable and low-cost fare with outstanding service
- Commitment to this promise has earned them credibility and the airline industry's best cumulative customer satisfaction record.
- Helpful and knowledgeable employees have enhanced customer satisfaction
- Security and safety of the passengers on board are the most important goals of the organization
- Convenient flights, dependable operations and attentive service have been the key to success

**FLEXIBILITY**

- Adds about one or two new city destination every year.
- Emphasizes a freedom theme offering schedules which ensure that customers have the flexibility to fly where they want and when they want.
- Southwest has ordered more next-generations Boeing Jets.
- Southwest has sought to simplify procedures, boost innovation, keep costs down while retaining a high degree of teamwork and communication
- They constantly re-invent their processes to adapt to the changing environment.
- Became the world's first airline in 1997 to take delivery of Next-generation Boeing 737-700.
- Efficient crew scheduling system allows southwest to address unexpected operational changes.
- Southwest airlines give a nod to the past and looks at the future with new coat paint.

**COST**

- Southwest advertises itself as a low fare and no frills airline
- Continuous to the least expensive airline in the market by offering
  - ✓ Single class
  - ✓ Open Seating
  - ✓ No meals
- Standardized fleet of 737 to minimize maintenance costs.
- Its low cost strategy of saving customers' time and money carried over to the web.

Based on the above performance objectives, the following conclusion fits very well for the South West Airlines.

**CONCLUSION**

The application of the five performance objectives on the airline industry provides an impetus on the airline operations. The airline operations will be able to survive with the application of these five performance objectives. Therefore, the application of the five performance objectives on the South West airline has lead to the following conclusion.

- ✓ To date the organization has been very successful with its plans and business strategies, which indicate managing speed and dependability very well.
- ✓ Ranked as a top-10 US airline and has received many awards for its excellence in customer service, which indicates quality management
- ✓ The organization has been profitable for several years in a row.
- ✓ Since, inception, cheap, safe and reliable services have helped the organization turn millions for travelers into loyal customers, which has contributed to quality
- ✓ Frequent reliable departures, very low ticket prices and fat gate turn-around have been the key to success.
- ✓ Determined to meet the challenges that lay ahead
- ✓ Continue their disciplined and austerity efforts to keep costs low and Customer Service high, so that they can bring many generations to come to Fly which indicate efficient cost operations.

The above conclusions could be a useful platform and an example for managing airline industry efficiently.

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