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WORK ENGAGEMENT AMONG EMPLOYEES IN THE INDIAN CIVIL AVIATION INDUSTRY: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: *The Indian aviation industry has evolved into a critical component of national infrastructure, economic growth, tourism and trade. Rapid expansion in passenger traffic, airport infrastructure and digital initiatives has intensified workforce demands, making work engagement a vital factor for service quality, safety and organizational performance. Given the high-pressure nature of aviation jobs, understanding employee engagement has become essential for sustaining competitiveness and operational excellence.*

Research Methodology: *The study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design to assess the existing level of work engagement among employees in the Indian aviation industry. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation of operational staff, cabin crew, ground staff, and administrative/managerial employees from selected airlines. Primary data were collected from 380 respondents through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data were sourced from research journals, books, government publications, and aviation industry reports.*

Findings: *The results indicate that aviation employees generally demonstrate high levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work. Most respondents exhibit strong emotional attachment, pride in organizational association, resilience under pressure, and willingness to exceed formal job requirements. These findings reflect a deeply engaged workforce. However, a small proportion of employees experience fatigue, reduced motivation, and weaker emotional involvement, highlighting the need for sustained HR interventions to maintain long-term engagement.*

KEYWORDS: *Work Engagement, Indian Aviation Industry, Human Resource Practices, Employee Performance*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the perception of civil aviation has evolved significantly. It is no longer seen merely as a mode of international travel, but increasingly as a critical means of ensuring connectivity across different regions of India. The aviation sector has emerged as a vital component of the country's infrastructure, playing a key role in supporting the growth of commerce, industry, trade, business, and tourism. By improving access to remote and underserved areas, aviation provides a strong impetus to business activities and overall economic development.

On January 15, 2019, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) published a report titled Vision 2040, which presented a strategic framework for the long-term development of civil aviation in India. According to the report, air passenger traffic is expected to grow nearly six times, reaching about 1.1 billion passengers by 2040, necessitating a fleet of approximately 2,359 passenger aircraft. Additionally, air cargo volumes are projected to increase fourfold to nearly 17 million tonnes by 2040. The report also anticipates a significant expansion of airport infrastructure, with the total number of airports rising to around 200. To support the viability of low-traffic airports, the government proposed the creation of a dedicated fund of about $2 billion. Furthermore, India aims to develop a domestic aircraft manufacturing ecosystem by 2040 (https://www.sps-aviation.com/story/?id=2758&h=Current-Scenario-in-India).

In addition, digital transformation has gained momentum in the aviation sector. By July 2025, the Digi Yatra application crossed 15 million downloads and enabled more than 61 million contactless passenger journeys across 24 airports since its launch in December 2022. The initiative is set to expand further with the inclusion of four additional airports, pilot projects for international travel, support for multiple Indian languages, and an ambitious goal of covering nearly 80 percent of domestic air passengers by 2028; https://www.ibef.org/industry/indian-aviation.

Although HR policies and practices themselves can be replicated, they play a crucial role in identifying, developing, and leveraging employees' skills, abilities, and knowledge, which ultimately provide organizations with a competitive advantage. Therefore, organizations are strongly motivated to implement comprehensive HR practices for effective employee management. In the aviation industry, the adoption of sound HR practices is not only a managerial necessity but also a response to external pressures that compel organizations to align with recognized best practices in human resource management.

Work engagement has become a critical focus in the aviation industry because of its direct impact on employee performance, service quality, and safety standards. It is defined as a positive and fulfilling work-related state of mind marked by vigor, dedication, and absorption in job tasks; Schaufeli et al. (2002). Within the Indian aviation sector, employees including pilots, cabin crew, engineers, and ground staff face high-pressure work environments characterized by long hours, irregular shifts, and strict regulatory requirements. Highly engaged employees exhibit greater energy, stronger emotional commitment, and a willingness to go beyond formal duties, all of which are crucial for delivering high-quality service and ensuring passenger satisfaction in a competitive market.

The rapid expansion of the aviation sector in India has substantially increased workforce requirements, making employee engagement increasingly important. Employees who are engaged typically demonstrate higher energy, stronger emotional commitment to their roles, and greater focus on service quality, all of which directly impact passenger satisfaction and the airline's reputation. Saks (2006) highlights that work engagement enhances job performance and lowers turnover intentions, a critical factor for Indian airlines that experience high attrition rates, particularly among cabin crew and technical personnel.

Leadership and organizational support are crucial in promoting work engagement among aviation employees in India. Practices such as supportive leadership, clear communication, and employee recognition help build trust and motivation, particularly in high-stress work environments. Research indicates that perceived organizational support enhances engagement by making employees feel appreciated and respected; Eisenberger et al. (2002). In an industry like aviation, where maintaining a strong safety culture is essential, engaged employees are more likely to follow standard operating procedures and actively participate in risk management initiatives.

Job resources including training opportunities, career advancement, autonomy, and work-life balance initiatives are key factors influencing work engagement in the aviation sector. Indian airlines have increasingly focused on continuous training, leadership development, and employee wellness programs to mitigate fatigue and prevent burnout. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) note that providing sufficient job resources boosts employee engagement by helping individuals manage job demands effectively while preserving their psychological well-being.

In the Indian aviation sector, work engagement is strongly connected to the emotional labor required in customer service roles. Cabin crew and ground staff must maintain positive emotions even when facing difficult passenger interactions or operational challenges. Employees who are highly engaged are better able to handle these emotional demands and consistently deliver high-quality service. Elevated work engagement helps reduce emotional exhaustion and enhances performance in customer-facing roles, making it particularly important for aviation employees in India.

Maintaining work engagement in the Indian aviation industry is challenging due to factors such as long working hours, job insecurity, frequent organizational changes, and external disruptions like economic downturns and pandemics. These pressures can adversely impact employees' psychological well-being and their level of engagement. Schaufeli (2017) emphasizes that prolonged exposure to high job demands without sufficient recovery can result in burnout and disengagement, highlighting the importance of implementing sustainable HR practices within aviation organizations.

Technology and digitalization have recently become key drivers of work engagement in the Indian aviation sector. Tools such as digital rostering systems, e-learning platforms, and employee communication apps have increased transparency, flexibility, and access to organizational resources. These technological solutions help minimize uncertainty and encourage greater employee participation in decision-making. By effectively utilizing technology to enhance job resources, airlines can significantly boost engagement in fast-paced and dynamic work environments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Schaufeli et al. (2002) conceptualized work engagement as a positive and fulfilling work-related state characterized by three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. They developed and empirically validated

the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) as a reliable instrument to measure these components. The UWES has since become one of the most widely accepted tools for assessing work engagement and has been extensively applied in diverse organizational and Indian industry contexts.

Saks (2006) sought to address the limited academic research on employee engagement by examining its key antecedents and outcomes through the lens of social exchange theory. Using survey data collected from 102 employees across different organizations and job roles, the study distinguished between job engagement and organizational engagement. The findings revealed that perceived organizational support influenced both forms of engagement, while job characteristics specifically enhanced job engagement and procedural justice strengthened organizational engagement. Furthermore, both types of engagement acted as mediating variables between antecedents and important work outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and organizational citizenship behavior.

Bakker & Demerouti (2009) sought to present a modern understanding of the concept of work engagement. Their research identified work engagement as comprising three key dimensions—absorption, dedication, and vigor. They emphasized that when job demands are high, employees require both job-related and personal resources, which serve as essential predictors of engagement. The study also revealed that engaged employees tend to be more satisfied, happier, and more productive than those who are disengaged.

Jose & Mampilly (2012) concentrated their study on employee engagement, highlighting its growing relevance in today's organizations. They also pointed out that both conceptual and empirical research on this topic especially within the Indian context is still limited, indicating a significant gap in the existing literature.

Balakrishnan et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between employee engagement and retention using responses from 185 randomly selected employees. The findings offer insights that can be applied in similar airlines or organizations seeking cost-effective strategies to improve employee retention.

Tiwari and Lenka (2020) sought to construct a theoretical model of employee engagement in organizations that have undergone downsizing and to examine how this engagement connects to employer branding. Their study involved 220 middle-level managers from IT/ITES firms in India. Using structural equation modelling, they tested the proposed relationships in the framework. The findings show that factors such as internal communication, knowledge exchange, continuous learning opportunities, intrapreneurial behavior, and employees' satisfaction with communication positively contribute to engagement levels.

Gupta et al. (2025) investigated the key factors influencing employee engagement within financial offshoring organizations in India. Interviews were conducted with sixty employees working in outsourced financial service roles, and the data were examined using thematic analysis. Three major themes emerged from the findings: implicit benefits, organizational culture, and organizational policies. These insights hold significant practical value, as they can guide employers in designing more employee-centric policies and addressing the issues highlighted by workers.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY: To measure the existing level of work engagement of aviation industry employees in India.

RESEARCH DESIGN: The present study adopts a Descriptive and Exploratory Research Design.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE: The study employs Stratified Random Sampling. The population is divided into homogeneous strata such as operational staff, cabin crew, ground staff, and administrative/managerial employees from selected airlines.

SAMPLE SIZE: The sample size for the study is 380 respondents.

PRIMARY DATA: Primary data for the study were obtained from employees of selected airlines of the Indian aviation industry using a structured questionnaire.

SECONDARY DATA: The sources comprised research journals, books and textbooks, government documents, and aviation industry reports, which provided valuable insights into employee engagement.

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Analysis Related To Measure the Existing Level of Work Engagement of Aviation Industry Employees in India

Table 1: Response related to measure the existing level of work engagement of aviation industry employees in India

S. No.	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I feel energetic and enthusiastic while performing my job duties.	117 (30.79%)	171 (45%)	26 (6.84%)	43 (11.32%)	23 (6.05%)
2	I am proud to be associated with my organization in the aviation industry.	129 (33.95%)	175 (46.05%)	22 (5.79%)	36 (9.47%)	18 (4.74%)
3	I feel motivated to give my best effort, even during challenging work situations.	124 (32.63%)	172 (45.26%)	24 (6.32%)	41 (10.79%)	19 (5%)
4	My job inspires me to perform beyond basic requirements.	135 (35.52%)	174 (45.79%)	21 (5.53%)	35 (9.21%)	15 (3.95%)
5	I feel emotionally attached to my work role.	143 (37.63%)	170 (44.74%)	20 (5.26%)	33 (8.69%)	14 (3.68%)
6	I am fully immersed in my work activities.	150 (39.47%)	167 (43.95%)	19 (5%)	32 (8.42%)	12 (3.16%)
7	I willingly put extra effort into my work when required.	142 (37.37%)	164 (43.16%)	22 (5.79%)	37 (9.73%)	15 (3.95%)

Interpretation

1. Energy and Enthusiasm at Work: The findings indicate that most employees experience a high level of energy and enthusiasm while performing their job responsibilities. This reflects positive emotional engagement and suggests that the work environment is generally stimulating and supportive. Employees appear to feel mentally and physically involved in their roles, which is an important indicator of work engagement. However, the presence of some less enthusiastic responses points to potential issues such as work pressure, fatigue, or stress that may affect a small segment of the workforce.
2. Pride in Organizational Association: Employees largely demonstrate a strong sense of pride in being associated with their aviation organization. This sense of pride reflects positive organizational identity and suggests that the organization enjoys a favorable internal reputation. Such emotional attachment often contributes to loyalty and long-term commitment. Nonetheless, the existence of less favorable responses implies that a few employees may feel disconnected or dissatisfied with certain organizational practices or culture.
3. Motivation during Challenging Situations: The responses highlight that employees generally remain motivated even when facing difficult or demanding work situations. This reflects resilience, perseverance, and a strong internal drive to perform well despite challenges. Such motivation is essential in the aviation sector, where work conditions can often be demanding. However, the findings also suggest that some employees struggle to maintain consistent motivation during high-pressure periods, indicating a need for additional support mechanisms.
4. Inspiration to Exceed Basic Job Requirements: The results show that employees commonly feel inspired to go beyond routine job expectations. This indicates a high level of intrinsic motivation and suggests that employees find their work meaningful and rewarding. Such behavior is beneficial for organizational performance and innovation. At the same time, a smaller group appears less inspired, which may be influenced by factors such as job design, recognition practices, or limited growth opportunities.
5. Emotional Attachment to Work Role: Employees largely report a strong emotional connection with their work roles, reflecting deep affective engagement. This emotional attachment indicates that employees identify closely with their responsibilities and derive personal satisfaction from their work. Such attachment enhances commitment and reduces turnover intentions. However, the absence of emotional bonding among a few employees suggests that not all roles or work experiences foster the same level of personal connection.
6. Immersion in Work Activities: The findings reveal that most employees feel fully absorbed in their work, demonstrating strong concentration and psychological involvement. This level of immersion reflects a state of deep engagement, where employees are focused and attentive to their tasks. Such absorption is critical for performance and safety in the aviation industry. However, some employees experience difficulty maintaining focus, possibly due to workload imbalance, distractions, or job stress.
7. Willingness to Put in Extra Effort: Employees generally show a strong willingness to exert additional effort when required, indicating high dedication and commitment to organizational goals. This suggests the presence of

positive discretionary behavior, where employees go beyond formal job requirements. Such willingness often arises from supportive leadership and fair organizational practices. Nevertheless, a small number of employees appear reluctant to exert extra effort, possibly due to perceived workload pressures or insufficient recognition.

CONCLUSION

1. Employees in the aviation industry generally exhibit high levels of energy and enthusiasm at work, reflecting a positive emotional connection with their job roles, although a small section experiences fatigue or reduced motivation.
2. A strong sense of pride in organizational association is evident, indicating that most employees feel emotionally connected and value their membership within the organization, while only a limited group shows weaker attachment.
3. Employees largely demonstrate resilience and motivation even in challenging situations, suggesting a workforce capable of sustaining performance under pressure, though some individuals face difficulty maintaining consistent motivation.
4. The majority of employees feel inspired to exceed basic job requirements, reflecting strong intrinsic motivation and a willingness to contribute beyond assigned duties, despite a small group showing lower enthusiasm.
5. A high level of emotional attachment toward work is evident, highlighting deep involvement and commitment, although a minority of employees exhibit weaker emotional bonds with their roles.
6. Most employees experience a strong sense of immersion and focus in their work, indicating high psychological engagement, while a limited number face challenges in maintaining consistent involvement.
7. There is a notable willingness among employees to put in extra effort when required, demonstrating dedication and organizational commitment, though some employees appear constrained by motivational or situational factors.
8. Overall, employees derive a strong sense of meaning and purpose from their work, reflecting deep psychological engagement, even though a small segment does not fully experience this sense of fulfillment.

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