

# *Research on Strategies for Improving Employee Satisfaction in Domestic Airlines*

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**Keywords:** Employee Satisfaction, Domestic Airlines, Job Content, Salary Systems

**Abstract:** The most prominent issue in the current human resource management of domestic airlines in China is low employee satisfaction. Improving employee satisfaction can improve the quality of cabin services, increase passenger satisfaction, and ultimately attract customers, driving the sustained development of airlines. The reasons for low employee satisfaction in domestic airlines include: outdated management systems and lack of communication mechanisms, unreasonable salary management and performance evaluation, and single job content. Communication mechanisms, job content, salary systems, and performance standards can be improved based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, Hawthorne's experiment, two factor theory, and fairness theory.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, China's economy has continued to develop at a high speed, people's living standards have steadily improved, public transportation infrastructure has become more perfect, and travel modes have become more diverse. Air transportation is becoming increasingly popular among the public due to its high speed and safety. In 2010, the Chinese government proposed the "Civil Aviation Strong Country Strategy", investing a large amount of manpower and material resources to promote the rapid development of the civil aviation industry. At present, the scale of China's civil aviation industry has ranked second in the world, only behind the United States. However, behind the brilliant achievements of China's civil aviation industry, some problems have also been exposed. As a core part of the civil aviation industry, airlines face particularly prominent issues of chaotic human resource management, with low employee satisfaction being the primary issue. The employee satisfaction refers to the subjective psychological feelings of employees, and can also be considered as the difference between the actual value and expected psychological expectations of employees towards their work[1](P16). The larger the difference, the higher the employee satisfaction. But if the former is lower than the latter, employees will develop dissatisfaction

## **2. The negative impact of low employee satisfaction in domestic airlines and the importance of improving satisfaction**

The negative impact of low employee satisfaction in domestic airlines mainly focuses on the following aspects: Firstly, employees have poor working conditions. The poor work performance of

airline employees is generally reflected in two aspects, one is low work enthusiasm. This is mainly because employees, mainly consisting of cabin crew and maintenance personnel, believe that their work returns are too low, and their work income is not directly proportional to their work intensity and workload. Secondly, the level of collaboration and cooperation among employees is low, and they push each other off during the work process, which makes it difficult for them to cooperate well with each other to complete the work. This is not only reflected between different departments within the company, but also within the same department within the company. The former is reflected in the complex internal organizational structure of airlines, numerous functional departments, poor communication, and frequent conflicts of interest between departments. For example, between the Aviation Safety Management Department, Flight Squadron, Product Services Department, and Commerce Committee, the Commerce Committee requires the Product Services Department to develop new route products for performance needs. However, if the new route is too dangerous and may threaten flight safety, it may attract opposition from the Flight Squadron and Aviation Safety Management Department. The Product Services Department will then shift the responsibility for the problem to the Commerce Committee. This type of departmental conflict is likely to spread to employees in different departments. The latter is reflected in employees within the same department squeezing each other in their work for performance evaluation.

Secondly, the employee turnover rate has increased. The aviation transportation industry belongs to high-precision and hazardous industries, so airline employees must have high professional skills and high business proficiency. If these are missing, it will not only lead to a decrease in work efficiency, but also pose great safety hazards to air transportation safety. It takes an airline 8 years to cultivate a mature pilot, and 2 years to cultivate a mature maintenance and crew member. If these mature employees leave, it will reduce the company's strength and hinder its sustainable development. At present, the turnover rate of employees in domestic airlines remains high, far higher than that of transportation companies such as railways and highways. Although domestic airlines have attached great importance to high employee turnover rates and implemented some measures in recent years, these measures have not played a significant role. The root cause is still low employee satisfaction, and the company has not found the correct way to improve employee satisfaction. So domestic airlines should find the root cause of the contradiction and solve it to improve employee satisfaction, reduce employee turnover rate, and retain excellent employees.

Thirdly, reduced service quality and customer satisfaction. In the Chinese national concept, air transportation has always been regarded as a relatively high-end mode of transportation, so the expectations of its services are far higher than other transportation modes such as long-distance transportation and railway transportation. In order to increase passenger satisfaction, airlines take various measures to enrich service content and improve service quality. However, the measures they take usually come at the cost of strengthening employee work intensity and increasing work content, without improving employee work returns and ignoring employee satisfaction in this process. As a result, employee satisfaction decreases, and employees work with emotions, making it difficult to provide high-quality services. Therefore, passenger satisfaction continues to decline. The direct consequence of this is the damage to the company's brand and image. In order to restore the company's image, the company formulated measures to enrich its service content, ultimately forming a vicious cycle that had a negative impact on the development of airlines. From this perspective, improving employee satisfaction in the company is particularly important. When employee satisfaction is high, they will be more proactive in providing high-quality services to passengers, thereby improving passenger consumption satisfaction and further improving company performance. If airlines want to achieve sustainable and healthy development and enhance their competitiveness, they must rely on high-quality services and flight safety, and the implementation of these two measures cannot be achieved without the active participation and promotion of airline employees. If employee satisfaction

is low, it will directly lead to a decrease in employee work enthusiasm and work with negative emotions, which will inevitably affect service quality and flight safety. At the same time, passenger satisfaction with consumption is closely related to the service quality and flight safety of airlines.

In summary, improving employee satisfaction in domestic airlines is of great significance in ensuring employee work status, retaining outstanding employees, and providing high-quality services to passengers. The improvement of employee satisfaction in domestic airlines can ultimately enhance their market competitiveness and promote their sustainable development. As stated in management, "Without satisfied employees, there are no satisfied customers." Only when employees work with high satisfaction can customer satisfaction be improved. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research on employee satisfaction in airlines, analyze the reasons for their low satisfaction, and propose practical and feasible improvement measures to improve employee satisfaction, thereby promoting the sustainable development of airlines and the overall progress of the civil aviation industry.

### **3. Reasons for low employee satisfaction in domestic airlines**

#### **3.1. Backward management system and lack of communication mechanism**

Most domestic airlines in China have a national capital background, and many management leaders are transferred from other state-owned enterprises. The official rank standard ideology has always enveloped the company, so various management systems are relatively traditional and backward. Lack the awareness that employees are the most important. In various matters of the company, from the company's development strategy to daily flight cabin services, employees are required to absolutely obey and execute the orders of their leaders, and rarely listen to the opinions of the majority of employees. However, due to the fact that employees are usually only forced to execute, they lack work enthusiasm and low satisfaction. Sometimes it can also lead to conflicts between leaders and grassroots employees, which can lead to indifference and estrangement among work groups, and a suppressed work atmosphere.

#### **3.2. Unreasonable salary management**

The salary management is a key focus in enterprise management and also the most important issue for employees, it can greatly affecting employee satisfaction. At present, the salary management of domestic airlines is not very reasonable. Comparing the flight hour fees of domestic airline cabin crew with those of other similarly sized foreign airlines, the former has significantly lower flight hour fees than the latter. Comparing employees from different departments within the company, although the salaries of crew members are slightly higher than those of most other department staff, a comprehensive comparison of the workload, work difficulty, work danger level, vacation time, and other factors between the two is equally unreasonable. In this situation, employee satisfaction will be greatly affected and lead to obstacles in interdepartmental collaboration, affecting the normal operation of the company.

#### **3.3. Unreasonable performance evaluation**

At present, due to the lack of clear performance evaluation standards, the performance evaluation system of domestic airlines is not reasonable and fair. The direct cause of the problem is that the leader has a high degree of subjective arbitrariness and lacks corresponding supervision. For example, in the performance evaluation of pilots and flight attendants, as long as there are no serious accidents, it is entirely up to the captain and flight attendant to score freely. If a flight attendant on duty is very familiar with the flight attendant, even if their work is average, they will be given a higher score. In

this way, it is easy to attract dissatisfaction from other flight attendants. And performance is directly linked to employee compensation and promotion, which will greatly affect employee satisfaction.

### **3.4. Single job content**

Front line employees of airlines, such as ground service personnel, pilots, and flight attendants, have reported that their workload is much higher than that of other department personnel, with insufficient rest time and fixed work content all year round, all of which are repetitive tasks with low work interest.

## **4. Theoretical and specific measures to improve employee satisfaction in domestic airlines**

### **4.1. Improve communication mechanisms based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory states that human needs are divided into five levels based on their living conditions. Among these five levels.[2](P57)The lowest level is physiological needs, which are necessary for everyone to continue their life. Secondly, safety requirements refer to people's desire for a safe working environment during the work process to avoid occupational diseases and work-related injuries. Physiological and safety needs correspond to the stage of food and clothing, both of which are relatively low. On top of security needs is social needs. In contemporary society, whether it is work or life, everyone needs social interaction, and individuals are not completely isolated. They all crave the love and care of parents, friends, and friendship to convey emotions. At a higher level than social needs is the need for respect, which means that people hope to receive positive feedback and attention from others through their work performance. Once their need for respect is met, it can greatly enhance their work enthusiasm. Social needs and respect needs correspond to the stage of a moderately prosperous society. At the highest level is the need for self-actualization, which can be summarized at a macro level as the happiness that individuals achieve by fulfilling their dreams, unleashing their potential, and achieving their life goals. Self-actualization needs belong to the needs of people in the affluent stage. Meeting self-actualization needs can greatly enhance people's subjective initiative and creativity in work.

The overall social development status of China is in a moderately prosperous stage. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, it is necessary to meet the social needs and respect needs of employees in order to improve employee satisfaction in airlines. Airlines, like other companies, are composed of multiple people, and communication is inevitable when multiple people are together. Therefore, communication is an indispensable part of the normal operation of airlines. In a company, communication plays a crucial role, mainly in promoting understanding and resolving conflicts between leaders and employees. Leaders are not clear about the abilities of their employees, do not know the strengths and weaknesses of each employee, and blindly assigning work tasks will inevitably lead to waste of employee resources, and even attract complaints and dissatisfaction from employees. And of course, employees do not understand the reasons and purposes behind the leader's arrangement of work.

At present, it is evident that airlines have not met the social and respect needs of their employees. The relationship between leaders and employees did not achieve unity, cooperation, harmonious coexistence, and smooth communication. Due to the serious the official rank standard ideology of airline leaders, they generally hold the view that managers and employees have different positions, roles, and roles within the company. Managers are responsible for making decisions, while employees are responsible for executing them. Therefore, when making decisions and assigning work, leaders generally do not communicate with employees to listen to their opinions and suggestions, and rarely think from other perspectives, Consider employee feelings from different perspectives. Compared to

employees, since the manager did not communicate with me, if the responsibility for any problems lies with the leader and I do not have a sense of participation, it will seriously affect the enthusiasm of employees and reduce their satisfaction.

To meet the social and respect needs of employees, leaders should first respect and care for them, and pay attention to every employee as much as possible. After employees have completed their work tasks excellently, they should be verbally praised or given material rewards to establish an exemplary image. Secondly, in order to address communication issues between airline leaders and employees, leaders should regularly hold communication meetings or other communication platforms to encourage employees to open up and express their inner thoughts, provide feedback on work issues, and provide reasonable suggestions. Leaders should abandon their official rank standard ideology and not put on airs when communicating. They should lower their stance, otherwise communication will become superficial and ineffective. Excellent leaders will respect and care for every employee in the company, and communicate with them to improve employee satisfaction. Employees will choose the former between humane leadership and rigid and strict leadership.

Modern enterprise management advocates humanized management with a people-oriented approach, requiring leaders to respect employees and treat them as a member of the company's big family, caring about their work and life. This way, employees can see the airline as their home, rather than just a place to earn money and make a living. Only when employees feel the respect and care of the company's leadership can they consider themselves a member of the company's big family and work more actively and proactively. After mutual respect and smooth communication between employees and leaders, employee satisfaction with the company's workforce naturally increases, and work efficiency will also increase accordingly.

#### **4.2. Improve work content based on Hawthorne's experiment and two factor theory**

American management scholars conducted a study on the relationship between employee work efficiency and employee satisfaction at the Hawthorne factory in order to study the factors that affect production efficiency. This study was based on behavioral and interpersonal theories and later became known as the Hawthorne experiment. Firstly, traditional management studies in the past believed that employee work enthusiasm was only influenced by economic factors such as salary and bonuses, and the two were positively correlated. The higher the economic reward, the higher the employee work enthusiasm, and vice versa. However, the Hawthorne experiment refutes the traditional view that although economic factors have a significant impact on employee work enthusiasm, they are not the only influencing factor. Employees also have psychological factors such as social identity and self-actualization. Secondly, this experiment demonstrates that employee work efficiency is not only influenced by work technology and working conditions, but also by employee initiative and enthusiasm, which are determined by employee satisfaction. Meanwhile, employee satisfaction is more important than work skills and working conditions.

The two types of factors in the two factor theory, namely health factors and motivational factors, can affect employee satisfaction and subsequently work motivation. The former consists of interpersonal communication, work safety, work compensation, and corporate management regulations. The latter consists of job promotion, job content, and job achievements. This theory suggests that employees have various needs, but not all behaviors that satisfy employee needs can significantly improve employee satisfaction. If only health factors are satisfied without motivational factors, although employee satisfaction will not experience negative situations, it will not be significantly improved. If there are only motivational factors without health factors, employee satisfaction may be negative. If both are present, employee satisfaction will significantly increase. That is to say, health factors are the foundation that can ensure the smooth operation of enterprises,

while incentive factors can effectively improve employee satisfaction, work efficiency, and work enthusiasm.

Hawthorne's experiment shows that employee dissatisfaction with job content can also reduce work efficiency. According to the two factor theory, job content belongs to motivational factors. If the stability of health factors can be ensured, improving employee job content can significantly improve employee satisfaction and work efficiency.

If people keep doing the same thing for a long time, they will definitely feel bored and boring, even if the thing itself is very interesting. Employees who work in the same position for a long time, day after day, may even develop aversion, leading to a decrease in employee satisfaction. Currently, airlines only have job exchange and secondment systems. The job exchange system is mainly aimed at enabling employees from different positions within the company to get to know each other and facilitate business collaboration. The secondment system refers to the temporary transfer of employees from other departments within a company, as one department urgently needs personnel. Although both of these systems can provide employees with short-term exposure to fresh work content, they cannot fundamentally solve the problem of employees repeating the same work content for a long time, which is boring and boring.

To address this issue, airlines may consider adopting an employee rotation system. Airlines have a large organizational structure and numerous job positions. Whether an employee is suitable for a job position requires a comprehensive examination of various influencing factors such as personality, professional direction, and professional ability.[3] The most important thing is that they also need to enter the practical work position. It is likely that these factors, such as personality, professional direction, and ability, are more suitable for a certain position on the surface. But when employees actually start working for a period of time, they find it unsuitable. This situation is particularly prominent among the employees recruited by airlines on campus. If a rotation system is not implemented, employees will work in positions that are not suitable for them. Over time, the results will be two types: one is employee resignation, and the other is a decrease in employee satisfaction without resignation, resulting in a lack of interest in work and passive work. To fully utilize the abilities of employees, it is necessary to place them in positions that are suitable for their own development. Only when they are suitable for their development can employees have the awareness of developing themselves and the idea of self-improvement. To achieve this, airlines need to carry out job rotation adjustments tailored to local conditions, which means using suitable employees in appropriate positions. This not only maximizes the effectiveness of employees. At the same time, it also further enhances employees' awareness of the company. Although airlines prioritize transportation safety as their primary principle of operation and require highly professional employees, except for special positions such as pilots, operational controllers, and maintenance personnel who require long-term training and certification through national exams, other positions such as marketers and ground service personnel can be quickly and low-cost trained for rotation, and the replacement cost is not high. Although employees in other positions cannot rotate to flight and operational control positions, special positions such as flight can rotate to other positions.

Adopting a job rotation system can not only solve the problem of decreased satisfaction caused by employees engaging in the same job content for a long time, but also help employees coordinate work and life issues reasonably. For example, frontline employees of airlines, such as pilots and flight attendants, have irregular rest times and work outside for a long time. If they encounter elderly or sick children who need long-term care, they can only apply for long-term personal leave under the current system. But if a job rotation system is implemented, they can apply for job rotation to ground level positions, thus achieving a balance between work and life. This not only reduces the waste of human resources, but also enhances employees' sense of identification with the company and improves satisfaction.

In order to improve passengers' satisfaction, airlines have always followed the principle of improving service quality and service first, but this is at the cost of increasing staff's work intensity and workload. For example, flight attendants are required to clean the toilet every 15 minutes, increase the number of flight food supply times, not only deliver dinner but also Dim sum and drinks, and ground service personnel increase checked baggage packing services. Although the purpose of airlines to improve service quality is not wrong, the work intensity and workload arrangement of employees are not very reasonable. Taking the airline's Beijing to Shanghai route as an example, the flight time for this route is about 100 minutes. Fifteen minutes before take-off and landing, to ensure the safety of flight attendants, they must sit in their seats and cannot provide air services. In the remaining hour or so, flight attendants are unable to handle the work arranged by the company. The airline needs to rearrange the workload and intensity of its employees, reassess the necessity of job responsibilities, and delete some non-essential job responsibilities. Even if in order to adhere to the principle of improving service quality and not delete the work content of existing employees, it is still possible to consider increasing the number of employees to share the workload and workload of other employees.

#### **4.3. Improve the salary system and performance standards based on fairness theory and expectancy theory**

Fairness is indispensable in modern society. American scholar Adams' theory of fairness analyzes employee satisfaction from the perspectives of fairness and reasonableness of job compensation. He points out that employee satisfaction is not only linked to their own compensation, but also compared to the compensation of other employees in the same industry. If their own compensation is generally fair compared to others, employee satisfaction is higher, and vice versa. Fairness can be roughly divided into individual employee fairness, internal enterprise fairness, and external enterprise fairness. Individual employee fairness refers to the fairness and reasonableness of their own work performance, education, and remuneration, that is, the better they do, the higher their education, the more they earn. Internal fairness within a company refers to ensuring that the remuneration of other employees is fair and reasonable in relation to their work performance and educational background. External fairness of the enterprise refers to the comparison of the income of employees in the enterprise with that of other employees in the same industry, and the observation of whether it is fair and reasonable. Enterprises should take reasonable measures and establish a fair and reasonable income distribution system. At the same time, they should timely understand the income situation of other employees in the same industry, improve their work remuneration in a timely manner, and meet or exceed the industry average standards.

The Expectancy Theory was proposed by American psychologist Fromm in 1964.[4](P42) This theory refers to employees making various behaviors in their work based on their expected outcomes and values. If the behaviors they make can achieve the expected results and rewards, their satisfaction will increase. The main focus of this theory is the relationship between employee job compensation and satisfaction. Employees naturally work to obtain job compensation and have an inner expectation of compensation. If the final job compensation is lower than their inner expectation, employee satisfaction is lower, and vice versa. So companies need to timely understand the inner expectations of employees and design a reasonable salary system as a motivating force. Expectancy theory can be transformed into mathematical formulas, where the motivational force is equal to the product of the target valence and the expected value, which is equal to the motivational force. If either of the two is zero, then the motivational force is also zero. Only when both scores are relatively high, will the motivational force become greater. Target valence refers to the value of a goal in meeting individual needs, which is influenced by factors such as the environment in which the target is motivated,

whether the goal is necessary for the target, and so on. Different people, and even the same person at different times, have varying needs, so the same goal has different valence for different people and times. Expected value is a function of objective environment and personal experience, which is an individual's judgment of the likelihood of taking a certain behavior to achieve a goal based on their own situation. Employee satisfaction is influenced by their own needs, and the influencing factors of their own needs may have individual differences due to individual factors such as age, education, and length of service. However, they can generally be summarized as work environment, work group, work content, corporate background, and work return. Among all the factors that affect employee satisfaction, job return plays a decisive role. Mainly including salary, vacation, rewards, and promotion opportunities. Employees not only care about the amount of return on work, but also whether it is fair and reasonable.

In recent years, China's economic level has been continuously developing, and living standards have been getting higher and higher. The salaries of employees in the vast majority of industries have also been on the rise. In the same industry, airports, air traffic control, and others have also increased salaries for employees. However, the salary income of frontline employees in airlines has not increased significantly, only the salary income of leadership has increased, and the salary gap among airline employees has been widened. According to Adams' theory of fairness, employees first compare their job responsibilities and performance with their income to observe whether it is fair and reasonable. As mentioned earlier, airlines have increased the workload and workload of their employees, but have not increased their salaries. Secondly, employees will compare their salaries with those of other airlines, and some positions in airlines have lower salaries than those of foreign airlines. After the comparison, the airline will consider that the return on their work is not fair and reasonable compared to what they have put in, resulting in a decrease in employee satisfaction. According to the two factor theory, if the return on work as a health factor is not satisfied, employees will suffer from passive work and decreased work efficiency.

To solve this problem, first of all, airline salary makers should pay attention to the objective phenomenon of the continuous rise in China's price level, actively investigate the salary system and situation of employees in the same industry, and not make the salary of our company's employees lower than the industry average. This allows employees to devote their valuable energy and wisdom to better work, rather than calculating personal salaries and finding ways to resign or switch jobs. Secondly, salary makers need to establish clear salary provisions and legal basis before formulating the salary system, and publish them so that all employees of the company can access them. In implementation, the principles of unity and fairness should be followed, and special treatment should not be given to certain employees. [5]At the same time, we must also follow the principle of transparency and increase the transparency of salary management. It is necessary to timely disclose the assessment results when distributing salaries, and it is best to include the assessment standards on top of the assessment results, forming assessment details to reduce employee confusion, distrust, and questioning, and make employees feel satisfied. Finally, employee compensation should be linked to their job responsibilities. Domestic airline employees have high work intensity and heavy workload, but they do not receive compensation equivalent to their work intensity. The salary of employees is usually directly proportional to their work intensity and workload. However, this has not been reflected in domestic airlines. This is also an important reason for low employee satisfaction. Domestic airlines should refer to the practices of foreign airlines in this regard, absorb and learn from the salary systems, systems, assessment and evaluation methods of other airlines in this area, and strive to achieve fairness and reasonableness.

Performance evaluation is a scientific method used to evaluate the work performance of employees in a company, including their performance, value to the company, and contribution to the company. It is necessary to conduct a certain skill assessment on employees, so that they can feel fair, just, and

open, thereby promoting them to work more actively. Given that domestic airlines currently face unfair performance evaluations that favor acquaintances as mentioned above, the company needs to clarify performance evaluation standards. When formulating assessment standards, we should follow the principles of quantification, specificity, and reality. The principle of quantification means that evaluation criteria must be explained in a quantifiable manner, using quantitative measurements as much as possible in order to accurately evaluate employee behavior and provide timely feedback on employee behavior. The specific principles and language used for assessment standards should be clear and specific, and function words should be avoided as much as possible to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The principle of reality is to establish evaluation standards, mainly to mobilize the potential and enthusiasm of employees, in order to effectively achieve relevant goals.

## 5. Conclusion

Domestic airlines in China are committed to providing high-quality transportation services for national travel and contributing to the Chinese government's strategy of building a strong civil aviation country. However, in recent years, employee satisfaction in domestic airlines has generally been low, resulting in high employee turnover rates and average work conditions, which have had a significant negative impact on the company. These all indicate that there are loopholes in human resource management in domestic airlines. The main reason is that domestic airlines generally have problems such as outdated management systems, lack of communication mechanisms, unreasonable salary management and performance evaluation, and single job content. The above reasons comprehensively lead to low employee satisfaction. According to management theories such as hierarchy of needs theory, two factor theory, fairness theory, and expectation theory, domestic airlines should improve communication mechanisms, job content, compensation systems, and performance standards to enhance employee satisfaction.

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