

投稿類別:英文寫作類

篇名:

Flight Attendants strike event

作者:

林紋琪。臺南高商。應外三甲

林意然。臺南高商。應外三甲

陸儀柔。臺南高商。應外三甲

指導老師:

鄭舒尹老師

I. Introduction

From an objective perspective, flight attendants' working environment is of high quality, and they have high salaries. People do not realize the hidden side of their careers. To let people understand the different sides of flight attendants, we would like to conduct a study to investigate the two strike events by China Airlines and EVA Air, respectively. Because the events had a great impact on Taiwan, we chose to discuss the problems deeply. People were not aware of the importance of the issue, and they only got the information on the news. Due to the flight attendant strike events that occurred in Taiwan in recent years, individuals have different opinions on the profession. Outsiders thought this job was bright, glamour, and easy to work on, but they did not know the hardship behind the job. The job was not that good as they thought. Lots of factors caused a severe protest. The research questions that this study tries to answer are as follows: (1) What are the causes of the strike event in the aviation industry? (2) What is the general public's perception of the strike event? (3) What is the professionals' perception of the strike event? (4) What are the pros and cons of the strike event?

We conducted lots of researches on news and social media to make a deeper understanding of flight attendants' strike. After comprehending the resources from researches, we sort out all the information. Then, we made two questionnaires. One is for people in general, and another is for professionals who worked in an airline. We would like to know people in different positions to share their perspectives about the flight attendant strike. After gathering all of the information from questionnaires, we analyzed data about people's responses. In addition, we interviewed two professionals for their perceptions of the event. By tapping into all of the collection, we would rationally analyze the pros and cons of strike action and interpret the results of the data collected. Then, we proposed some suggestions, and conclude our findings.

II. Body

II.1 Causes of the strikes of China Airlines in June 2016

First, we analyze the strike by China Airlines cabin crew in 2016. Working hours are one of the keys to the strike. China Airlines flight attendants' typical working hours tend to be up to 11 hours and 50 minutes per day, just 10 minutes away from the legal limit, which has shown the company's strong intention to save money (林揚軼、呂苡榕、李志德, 2019). The seven demands of the union were:

1. To end the new requirement of having cabin crew to report for duty at Taoyuan Airport instead of at Songshan Airport in Taipei
2. To ensure task assignment not to violate Article 84-1 of the Labor Standards Law, which serves to reduce excessive overtime
3. To raise in station fees from US\$2 to US\$5 per hour
4. To offer double-time pay for work on national holidays
5. To conduct a two-way evaluation of performance by unions and management
6. To guarantee an annual leave of 123 days, with eight days off per month, and 30 days off per season
7. To offer union representatives paid time off to attend union meetings (Brian Hioe, 2016)

The strike came to an end after 22 hours. The consensus of the negotiation between the union and the company were:

1. The company will not change the sign-in place of the employees and the way of count hour: All staff and flight crew start calculating work when they arrive at headquarters.
2. The shifts arrangement of the routes, long or short haul, are on rotating schedule. They will follow the Labor Standards Act, ensuring compensation on mandatory leaves and night shifts. Shifts are available on both overseas and regional routes.

3. Signing up the Article 84-1 of the Labor Standards Law, flight attendants will be given US\$3 per hour in station fees, which will be better than other competitors in the industry.
4. Since national holidays have been moved to other days, there was no problem with double-time pay. If laborers are attendance for the rest of the day, the company will offer double-time pay.
5. The company agree to negotiate with the union for grading items and their proportion to percentages. The three-phase evaluation process is believed to be the most appropriate method.
6. To guarantee an annual leave of 123 days, with eight days off per month, and 30 days off per season: Signing up additional terms of the Article 84-1 of the Labor Standards Law, flight attendants shall be given the annual leave of 116 days (excluding the number of days of rest in the outstation), and ensure with eight days off per month. If the employees work extra days, the company will pay full wages.
7. The Taoyuan City flight attendant professional union does not only need to deal with the business related to China Airlines, so it is unreasonable to give all paid time off to attend union meetings. But China Airlines agreed to a conditional way to give paid time off. (賴文萱,2016)

Three months later, the Taoyuan City flight attendant professional union went to the Ministry of Labour to protest. They accused that China Airlines fail to fulfill six out of seven of the consensuses the union and the company reached in late June. In August, China airline began to default on a number of occasions, which resulted in a union attack and a second strike. Followings are the matters China Airlines did not complete:

1. The part of the extension of the external station allowance has been fulfilled by China Airlines, but the "no free ride clause" has been ignored. Whether to be a member of union or not, you can enjoy the rise of the extra station allowance.
2. The mutual evaluation of the work of both employers and employees was completed on August 24th, but the contract of the Article 84-1 of the Labor Standards Law which is signed with the new employees has not been completed by China Airlines.
3. The company guaranteed to let flight attendants take eight days off every month and 30 days per quarter. Although above was reached, the workload of each person increases as the company reduces the number of people on duty per shift.
4. To offer union representatives paid time off to attend union meetings, but only giving base salary. (林芮緹,2016)

II.2 Causes of the strikes of Eva Air in June

2019 Inspired by the cabin crew strike of China Airlines in 2016, employees of EVA Air finally set up the first union. With the Taoyuan City flight attendant professional union called a strike, EVA air did not yield to the loss of the strike. Instead, with a quick inventory of flights in July, Eva air assisted the cabin crew to re-apply for a passport and other actions. Labors said that strike is the last resort. (林哲良,2019) Since the company's inability to agree with the union's eight demands, the union-declared the first strike in June 2019. (聯合新聞網,2019)The eight demands of the union were:

1. PER DIEM should be raised to NT\$150 per hour, which is not available to non-members.
2. A single flight time (FT) is more than 3 hours, and flight attendants are required to stay overnight at the station. Because the working hours are too long, they need to take an overnight rest.
3. Open up the mechanism of trade union membership assessment and have the right to speak and vote.
4. Allowing labor to participate in corporate governance and provide the necessary information for operations.
5. Employees should be paid twice as much for their attendance on national holidays.
6. There should be no more than two foreign crews on each flight.
7. The company gives union members public holidays.

8. If the flight attendant's existing working conditions and working rules are changed, the company should consult with the trade union in advance. (徐子晴,2019)

Here are the final responses from EVA Airline:

1. Avoid flights that are causing overwork, by adding overnight stays in flights to Tokyo or Beijing and review on the current package.
2. Involve labor participation in corporate governance: Allowing labor to attend monthly company meetings to update latest information of the company operation. Furthermore, they will be invited to attend director meetings quarterly to review the schedule arrangement and service process every six months.
3. PER DIEM: The company insists not to adjust the daily fee but agrees to provide additional service bonus of Flying Security.
4. The ban of free-riding: Agree not to use Compensation Package as the ban of free riding for differential treatment and replace it with other alternatives to promote union solidarity. The union emphasized that the spirit of “ the ban of free-riding, ” which is to hope that members who have participated in the struggle and know to fight for rights can continue their efforts without being suppressed by the company. (趙安平,2019)

After review the causes and results of the strikes of the two airlines in Taiwan, we can clearly see that the excessive working hours and the miscommunication between labor and management are the main reasons caused to the aviation strike. For labors, strike is the last resort after their positive effort. Moreover, employees also have to balance family factors with financial difficulties and the possibility of being laid off. That is to say, going on strike is risky and challenging.

II.3 The general public's perception of the strikes

After getting to know the causes of the strikes, we would like to understand the general public's and the professionals' views on the strikes. We designed two questionnaires: one is for the public, the other is for the professionals who worked in the aviation industry. The first questionnaire is composed of 59 respondents; most of the questionnaire is filled out by students. We have collected much information from people in different professions. For instance, student, teacher, civil servant, housewife, engineer, agency, tutor, manufacturer, technician, said service industry, draftsman, and office worker. Their age ranges from 17 to 50 years old, and their views on strike events vary from age to age. We collected a number of careers to know more opinions from different generations and career viewed on strike.

After analyzing the questionnaire we have made, the result was far from what we originally thought. We found that the opposition rate of the strike was different from what we thought previously. We thought more people would support the strike, but from the research form, we found that many people opposed it. The support-to-opposition ratio is 56.3 to 43.8. The ideas of the supporters are roughly divided into three. Some people thought of the personal interests of employees and thought they should fight for their rights. Others considered working hours for fear of affecting flight security. Still others, in order to avoid obeying the boss and promising the boss' unreasonable demands, the strike is the last result of the flight crew. Compared to those who oppose the strike, they thought the strike would cause inconvenience to staff and passengers, as unannounced strikes could affect passengers' scheduled journeys. However, due to the staff shortage, only a few of the ground crew could assist passengers in changing their flights. Another reason was to hurt the company's reputation. It seemed that internal employees were not united, and some thought it was the boss that exploited employees. At last, many people thought that the means were too rational and too aggressive. Many people think the aviation industry is being treated well, but they are still on strike.

II.4 The professional's perception of the strikes

The second questionnaire consists of 32 respondents, and this questionnaire is only for people who were engaged in the aviation industry. They are 23 females and nine males. The ages of the respondents are between 20 to 60 years old. Most of them are in their forties, and the second biggest group is between 31 to 40 years old. Only a few of them are between 20 to 30 years old. The remaining people are in their fifties. We also collect data about their work experience, including the number of years they have been working in the aviation industry and their positions. The majority of people have been worked for over ten years while some of them have been worked for between 2 to 10 years. Furthermore, a great number of them serve as ground staff, whereas the rest of them serves as the flight attendant. Responses collected from the questionnaire offer a glimpse into their view on the strike.

The flight attendants who filled out the form all supported the strike. They considered that it is their right to obtain reasonable working conditions. However, some ground staff strongly opposed the strike because they were seriously affected by the strike. Ground staffs thought the practice used by flight attendants was too extreme because they could not stand in others' shoes. This could damage the company's reputation. However, some still supported them. They thought it is reasonable to fight for their rights. There were still rational people who thought that the strike was the last resort, which was not easy to launch.

II.5 An in-depth interview with the professionals in the aviation industry

To gain more insights into the flight attendant strike event, we went to Kaohsiung International Airport to interview three professionals who had been working in the aviation industry for a long time. We interviewed two ground crew and one flight attendants. We referred to the result of the questionnaire and made an in-depth discussion with interviewees to eliminate the myths of the job and the strikes.

First, we interviewed a 41-year-old flight attendant who has been working in the industry for 20 years. The reason why she joined the aviation industry was her friend's recommendation. She said that the advantages of the job were high salary, good benefits, and free flights. The disadvantages were the long working hours, the lack of sleeping, and an irregular lifestyle. The main reason for the strike in her company is the long working hours. She was barely affected by the strike, but a little on her salary. She supports the strikes because their management team rejected the labor's appeal, and the union decided to take strike action. If there were a chance, she would like to stand out and support them.

The second interviewee is a ground crew who is 36 years old. She has been working for this position for 13 years, and she thought the pros are that they have free or discounted air tickets, and most of the colleagues are cheerful. She thought the company's treatment was reasonable for her. The reason why she joined the aviation was her friend's recommendation. She was not sure about the certain reason for the strike because she belongs to the ground crew union. She was affected by the strike a little bit because she would have direct contact with the passengers at the counter. If guests have any complaint that they are going to deal with these problems and clean up after the flight attendants' mess, resulting in an extremely busy time at the counter. Sometimes passengers will comfort them at the counter. The company tends to be in the red because of the strike. Therefore, the employees would not receive a great year-end bonus. She considered that the effects of the strike are a double-edged sword. Furthermore, the strike event was beneficial to the entire working condition of the aviation industry because there was no concept of strike struck in Taiwan's environment. She supports the strikes if it is reasonable, and it is believed to succeed. From her perspective, the flight attendants would not strike for a long time because of family concerns. She was afraid of attending the strike because she thought that the flight attendants have their standpoint. However, this did not mean that the ground crews should take the flight attendants' responsibilities.

The third interviewee is a 27-year-old ground crew who has been working in this department for four years. She was the youngest staff of our interview. When she was a child, her dream is being a flight attendant. Her perspective on the pros of working in the aviation industry is to see various people every day. By contrast, the cons are that the early morning shift starts so early in the morning before sunrise. Walking along on the way to the airport made her shocked and scared. She thought the company did not treat her well because she has not been promoted. She thought the reason for the strike was to fight for benefits (i.e. overnight allowance). Overnight allowance means to offer more extra pay of the night shift or layovers in other cities. Fortunately, the strike time just did not affect her because she was on a day off. People who worked on the day of the strike were able to get extra pay. In her case, the influence of the strike is good. Flight attendants are fighting for their rights. For instance, French often go on strikes, so people there take it for granted. On the contrast, Taiwan does not go on strike very often. When the strike causes inconvenience to others, that makes Taiwanese or senior officers face up to flight attendant's demand. The strike is not a bad thing. Last but not least, she supported the strike and thought that it was right to fight for our rights. If she gets the chance, she will also want to go on strike. In her position, she has to think about her livelihood and her family. She said, "If you want to go on strike, you have to plan might be fired."

II.6 The positive and negative effect of the strike

Based on the survey, respondents who claimed themselves to be affected or not affected by the strike are on a 50/50 basis. Because of the strike, many non-strikers have increased their workload, and they should come to work at the time they did not go on duty. This incident caused many of the original flight passengers to feel dissatisfied, trying to add much trouble to attendants.

The positive effect was that the salary increased, and benefit package got much better. The negative impact includes significantly increased workload, damage to company reputation, business plummeting, and passenger dissatisfaction, and harm to people's impression of the flight attendant.

III. Conclusion

III.1. The strike event was a double-edged sword.

People of different age groups would have different views on the strike. The employees in the same company in different positions also have various views on the strike. On the whole, most of the people are supportive. The supporting reason is that flight attendants are fighting for their rights. There is nothing wrong with fighting for their rights. If one does not step forward, no one will stand out for them. There are still a few people against it. The opposed reason is that those who do not participate in the strike may be significantly affected, such as being cut down the salary or reducing their year-end bonus and damaging the company's reputation. There are relative benefits and bad shortcomings. Unions should strike a balance between the two and let the strike no longer an off-the-go issue.

III.2. Strikes are a last resort.

Recently, the issue of strikes has gradually been taken seriously by the public in Taiwan, and how can labor in pursuit of their own interests mediate with their company? The event raised public awareness recently. Particularly in the aviation industry, unaltered strikes have brought inconvenience to passengers who had scheduled flights, and large-scale employee demonstrations have led to the flight suspensions, all of which have been seen in the media. However, what was the trigger for the strike? Few people understood the suffering of aviation personnel who were under the pressure of the management, sacrificed their own health, and completed the so-called boss' "mission." The employees might face the impact of their own lives and consider their own safety and livelihood so that they choose to keep silent. That is one major reason why Taiwan does not

often take strike action because they still have family concerns. These hidden factors are invisible and unappreciated; thus, the strike was the last resort. Many strikes have made people pay more attention to employee rights than just superficial surfaces.

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