

Ethical Issues In The Aviation Industry

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Introduction

The unique status of the aviation industry is attributed to two features. Firstly, the government has long-standing involvement dating back to the early days. Secondly, it is primarily concerned with ensuring the safety of its passengers and crew. Due to these factors, ethical decision-making is essential at all levels of the business. Ethical issues in aviation range from environmental and health concerns to various ground-level issues. However, discrimination based on race and gender has continued since the advent of this industry. This essay explores the ethical issue of discrimination within the aviation industry along with its historical context. The essay further aims to analyze its impact on the industry and the measures to combat the issue.

Diversity Issues In Aviation

Racial and gender discrimination have long been a part of the United States culture and has infiltrated the aviation industry since its establishment, barring minorities and women from entering the field. Recent data indicates that only 4.2% of women are among all the Airline Transport-rated pilots. Moreover, the percentage of African Americans is 2.7, whereas the Hispanic and Latino community constitutes a total of 5% of all Airline Transport-rated pilots. The percentages indicate the gravity of the situation and the need for immediate reforms (Hoppe, 2018).

Historical Context

For many decades, blatant discrimination has plagued the aviation industry and has left a lasting impact. In 1914, the first-ever flight under a black pilot journeyed between Tampa and St. Petersburg. However, it was not until after 50 years that the first-ever African American crew member was allowed a seat in the cockpit. Regarded as an industry for white men, and the prevailing perception about the inability of black people to acquire complex skills resulted in discouraging them from a career pursuit in aviation. Despite this perception being debunked, a majority of airlines continued the refusal to employ people of colour. They feared that the bigoted white people would boycott their services (Whitlock, 2018).

Bessie Coleman was the first-ever African American woman who not only dispelled the prejudice that people of colour could not acquire complex skills but was also the first black American to receive an international license. Although her gender and race hindered her admission to the US, she saved money and learned French. She travelled to France to pursue her dream and was the only female

among 60 graduates to receive her license in 1921. Her dream of returning to the US and opening the first flight school for African Americans was hindered by many racial barriers. It was not until 1986, when Beverley Bass earned her captain stripes that the first female captain was employed in a major US airline. These are among the many examples of racial and gender discrimination that have impacted the aviation industry for decades (Hardesty, 2008).

Although, over the years, alterations in law and employment practices have reduced the deliberately obvious practices of discrimination in the aviation industry, the bias continues subtly. Although less visible, the prejudices that barred women and minorities from excelling in the field are still at play. Today, discrimination continues not only in the cockpit but also at the collegiate program level. The ethical issue of discrimination against women is important as it may also impact personal career growth. Additionally, racial and gender discrimination is pernicious as it threatens civil rights and equality.

A Way Forward

The ethical issue of discrimination against women and minorities must be catered to from the initial levels of training and education. In a white male-dominated industry, many factors impact the motivation of minorities and women. Flight instructors and aviation educators must not only anticipate the challenges of motivating minorities and women in such an environment but must also play an active role in exposing stereotypes, discriminations, and prejudices. Moreover, anticipating and addressing the self-perception of inferiority that develops in a biased environment is also essential to keep them motivated. Since there is a lack of adequate counselling, defining clear career goals and instilling resiliency and pride can contribute to motivating women and minorities (Sulton, 2018).

Various organizations have been set up to combat the issue of discrimination in the aviation industry. These include the “International Black Aerospace Council”; “Women in Aviation International (WAI)” and “Negro Airmen International (NAI)” among others. The support provided by these organizations has generated positive results by increasing recruitment and retention rates of women and minorities. Other organizations, such as the “Association for Women in Aviation Maintenance (AWAM)” aim to promote professional growth for women, providing them with opportunities for education, networking, and public awareness (Baty, 1999).

To further combat the issues of discrimination, mentor groups can be established within aviation organizations. Mentoring not only helps in the effective management of cultural change, but it can also help in aligning the personal values of individuals with the organization’s strategic direction. Mentoring can also offer opportunities for professional growth. Additionally, it may also ensure the retention of a diverse workforce. Mentoring can prove to be effective by employing both minority and majority mentors who assist and guide younger employees belonging to a minority group. To ensure that mentors perform their job effectively, it can be assigned as an objective for performance review

and appraisal.

Conclusion

Although various organizations have formally taken up the task of representing minorities and women in the aviation industry, there is a long way to go before the deep-rooted discrimination can be overcome. While various recommendations can be put forth, a united effort is required to ensure equal opportunities for all.

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