



Quality Management Practices During Check-in and Boarding Process: The Case of Etihad Airways, UAE

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine quality management phenomenon of the aviation industry, by taking a deep dive into the practices carried out by Etihad Airways during the processes of check-in and boarding. The parameters set by the global standards are evaluated and compared to the existing practices in the airline's ground operations. Through this comparison, an analysis is derived in regards to how aligned the processes are, and how the particular areas of improvement can be targeted. The researchers conducted this qualitative investigation while analyzing the case of Etihad Airways, UAE. The study findings indicate that the set international quality parameters are a road map for airlines to follow, and while Etihad Airways' practices are in alignment with most of the protocols, there are areas wherein the airline management should shed light on in order to implement those protocols in their day-to-day operational activities. By scrutinizing these areas of improvement, the airline can pinpoint where their focus is needed most to advance their service of quality, subsequently elevating Etihad Airways as a business and giving the airline a competitive edge in the industry. While there are several studies that have addressed the role of quality in the aviation industry, this research adds originality and value by fixating on the check-in and boarding processes, which are crucial touchpoints in an airport. This analysis equips both the aviation industry and academia with insights into optimizing quality management practices, an exclusive input in an era of heightened competition and passenger expectations within the aviation sector.

Keywords: Quality Management Practices, Check-In and Boarding Process, Etihad Airways

1. Introduction

Quality management in project management is a vital and integral process that warrants the delivery of high-standard products or services while meeting stakeholder expectations. It incorporates a set of philosophies, procedures and tools targeted towards planning, monitoring and controlling project activities to achieve the desired level of brilliance. We are, as Aristotle once said, what we repeatedly do, as excellence then is not an act but a habit.

The aviation industry is highly competitive; airlines from all around the world strive to provide the best possible services and offer exceptionally good products in an attempt to retain maximum customers. Apart from luxurious aircrafts and smooth flights, what passengers expect the most when they pay high prices for tickets is remarkable customer service at every point of their journey, which starts at the airport. This means that quality management practices during check-in and boarding processes play a critical role in shaping an overall perception of an airline's services (Hardiman, 2021).

In the last decade, the aviation industry has witnessed significant advancements and innovations in technology and customer expectations. Since 2003, Etihad Airways has consistently proved itself as a reliable and steadfast airline. With its impressive ever-growing fleet of Airbus and Boeing aircrafts, along with the vast range of destinations the airline offers, Etihad Airways is one of the first choices of airlines for passengers who book flights from the vantage point of dependability, safety and luxury. Due to its convenient geographical location, the middle east harbours massive air traffic. Airports and airlines face increasing challenges in managing passenger flows efficiently, maintaining high safety standards, and meeting customer demands for convenience and personalised services. As a result, Etihad Airways is continuously on the lookout for optimizing their quality management practices during check-in and boarding processes to enhance operational efficiency (seatmaestro, 2022).

By exploring the current quality management practices and identifying areas of improvement, this research seeks to contribute to the broader field of aviation management and provide practical recommendations to Etihad Airways to maximise their potential to provide supreme airport services. The findings of this study will be valuable for aviation industry practitioners, airport authorities, and policymakers in understanding the significance of quality management practices in improving customer experience and productivity.

1.1. Problem Statement

The check-in and boarding processes in the aviation industry have a significant influence on passenger experience and overall service quality (Journal of Business, 2014). However, there is a research gap in understanding the contemporary quality management practices employed by Etihad Airways during these processes. Existing literature lacks comprehensive insights into Etihad's specific methods, hindering their ability

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to identify areas for improvement and maintain a competitive edge (Airlines.IATA, 2016). Keeping the above in view, the researchers planned to analyze the quality management practices in the aviation industry of UAE. Etihad Airways has been selected to study the issue in question.

1.2. Study Objectives

The main objective of the study is to analyze the quality management practices during check-in and boarding process at Etihad Airways, UAE.

1.3. Significance

The present study is significant as it investigates the aviation industry through the lens of quality. Given the fact that the airport is a significant part of a passenger's journey, understanding the quality standards expected from an airline, the implementation of current practices being carried out by the airline and the areas of improvement is critical for developing effective strategies to further enhance service quality in an airport.

1.4. Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of Quality Management practices in the Aviation Industry, with a particular focus on the check-in and boarding process carried out by ground operational team. (Skytrax, 2023) By analysing the contemporary practices of Etihad Airways, the research develops the existing body of knowledge in airline operations (CFI, 2023). Additionally, the research delves into the particular steps taken by check-in and boarding agents at their respective designations, examining how Etihad Airways allocates its resources in order to ensure that the best service is being provided.

1.5. Applied Aspects

Based on the analysis of contemporary Quality Management practices, this thesis offers practical recommendations to advance the check-in and boarding practices. When it comes to providing quality, there is always room for improvement. Airlines are constantly competing to be the best and in order to retain passengers and gain customer loyalty, quality is an integral aspect that cannot be compromised. (Airport Operations, 2023) These suggestions will be specific to Etihad Airways' operations and can help the airline enhance efficiency, reduce wait times, and streamline passenger flow. (ICAO, 2011) Furthermore, this study's insights can have broader industry impact, inspiring other airlines to adopt similar Quality Management practices and understand their lacks and areas of improvement.

1.6. Scope of this Study

The scope of this study is narrowed on examining the invaluable role of quality in airport operations. Unambiguously, this study will chiefly focus on the check-in and boarding procedures being carried out at Etihad Airways' ground operations, with a key emphasis on the airline's hub; Abu Dhabi International Airport, located in the UAE.

1.7. Study Limitations

The sample size and representation of passengers, airline representatives, and other stakeholders may be limited due to time and resource constraints, potentially affecting the generalizability of findings. In addition to, access to definite confidential information related to Etihad Airways might also be restricted, which may not provide an elaborate view of all quality practices. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the airline industry might result in evolving Quality Management practices and technological advancements over time, possibly rendering the study's findings specific to a particular period.

2. Review of Literature

This section is an attempt to study the progression of the domain in question while reviewing the related research. First, the table highlighting the progression is presented followed by the review of the research.

Researchers have been attempting to investigate the various quality management measures that contribute to elevating the standard of an airline and marking it as a reliable service provider in an exceptionally competitive market for many decades. In the table above are outlined multiple studies conducted on the aviation industry and the impact of quality management on passengers' experience, as well as an airline's profitability and repute.

In 2007, Fodness and Murray explored how quality management practices can be improved by examining these practices from passengers' perspective. A quantitative and qualitative research was conducted and the results suggested that ground operational quality is a multi-dimensional paradigm which involves three main dimensions: diversion, function and interaction. (Murray, 2007)

As per (Nichols, 1997), safety is not an accident and reliability does not occur naturally but is rather a result of hard work and carefully implemented mechanisms. This research discovers aviation safety in the context of quality management framework of passenger focus, team involvement, and continuous improvement.

According to Usman, Azis, Harsanto and Azis (2021), how service quality is measured in the aviation industry is dissimilar to how service quality is measured in other industries. This paper explores the parameters of quality measurement, areas that require more attention, and the integration of methods to achieve passenger satisfaction as well as cost-effectiveness. (Usman, 2021)

There are various factors that contribute to the satisfaction and the dissatisfaction of air travel for customers. In 2013, Bogicevic, Yang, Bilgihan and Bujisic discussed how there is a general consensus on certain elements of air travel that lead to a positive travel experience, such as maintenance of airport hygiene and positive

atmosphere. The researches further identifies key drivers of unfavourable factors leading to the discontent of passengers, such as unpleasant security checks, unsatisfactory airport facilities and perplexing screen displays. (Bogicevic, 2013)

In 2022, Cho, Min and Dresner took the airline industry as a case study and conducted a thorough research on the cost of quality in an airport. Cost of quality is a methodology that allows a firm to calculate how their resources are being used to prevent poor quality. Service failure from an airline’s end leads to passengers spending more time at the airport; using the airports’ various resources. This paper determines that the cost of quality can be controlled through service providers attempting to lower the probability of service failure. (Cho, 2022)

As per (Eren, 2019), mega projects, such as the Istanbul airport, require the implementation of government megaproject management model. The study utilizes quality research techniques and the conclusions signpost that lowering complexity, uncertainty, and risk while focusing on the enhancement of performance and interorganizational collaboration, project success can be achieved even under complicated circumstances. On the other hand, the findings also indicate that this approach also leads to minimized transparency and higher levels of centralization. The research provides a strategically tested model for nations attempting to undertake national strategic megaprojects while simultaneously actively tackling socio-political conflicts.

According to researchers Awad, Alzaatreh, Almutawa, Ghumlasi, and Almarzooqi, studying the factors that contribute to a generally positive airport experience for passengers helps an airline understand and work on areas of improvement, further enhancing their quality of service. This paper analyzes Dubai International Airport’s Terminal 3 in particular, and attempts to identify the primary drivers of Airport Service Quality (ASQ) and investigate traveler experiences. The methodology to study these factors involved surveys, reviews and interviews, and the findings concluded that travelers’ approval can be achieved through certain basic humane factors such as assurance, availability, and empathy. (Awad, 2020)

In 2021, Bodolica, Spraggon and Soboh investigated the proactive measures taken by the airline industry in order to combat with the global pandemic, COVID-19. The paper particularly focuses on DUBZ, a home check-in and baggage delivery service, which is sponsored by Danata, Dubai. The findings of the investigation suggest that in order to effectively deal with unforeseen crisis, airlines can adopt the guard-potentiate-shape model, which demonstrates that in times of disruptions, multiple strategies should be employed by an airline to guard in opposition to failure, potentiate inventive change and shape the future design of travel services. (Bodolica, 2021)

2.1. Synthesis of Literature Review

Keeping in mind the past researchers’ in-depth studies in regards to the topic, the gaps in the research towards quality management during check-in and boarding processes in the case of Etihad Airways are apparent. The above studies indicate that passenger travel experiences are subjective and vast, and the importance of understanding and analyzing the various factors that contribute to improve service quality provided by an airline cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, the study also emphasizes that the multiple elements of an airports’ operations, such as safety, customer service, quality management and risk assessment are interlinked, and an airline cannot survive without the integration of these factors.

3. Methodology

Research design used in this qualitative study was case analysis. Etihad Airlines was used a case as this is one of the world’s leading airlines. Secondly the researcher had access to the data of Etihad. Researcher identified the globally approved standards of boarding and check in processes from World Travel & Tourism Council version 2020 and then compared the same with existing practices Etihad Airways (ACI WORLD SECRETARIAT AND AIRBIZ, 2021). The information entailed in the tables below was gathered through conducting a detailed interview with a Duty Operations Manager responsible for check-in and boarding operations for Etihad Airways at Abu Dhabi International Airport. The table below demonstrates the Global Quality Protocols required to be followed by airlines in order to successfully implement the relevant quality parameters during check-in and boarding processes in ground operations; ensuring that from legal, operational and global standpoint, all the necessary steps are consistently and effectively taken to ensure safety, security and efficiency in an airport. (WTTC, 2020).

Table 3.1: Check-In Standards

Global Quality Protocols (Airlines.IATA, 2016)		
Airport Check-in Standards		
S. No	Quality Protocols	Details
1	Chauffeur service	All around the world, airports are required to provide chauffeur services for pick-up and drop-off to and from the airport for

		passengers willing to opt for convenience and luxury. These services are globally free of cost for First and Business class passengers, but can be purchased for a fee by any class of passengers.
2	Airport parking services	An airport cannot operate without providing an appropriate space for car park. Car park spaces, though not free of cost in most countries, offer convenience for people who are dropping-off or picking-up passengers.
3	Maintenance of trolleys, buggies and wheelchair assistance	In order to unload luggage from private cars, taxis, buses or trains and carry that luggage until the check-in counters, trolleys should be readily available outside and at the entrance of an airport. Additionally, in larger airports, buggies are offered to passengers that require them, such as family with infants. Furthermore, special passengers in need of assistance should have wheelchairs available at the entrance.
4	Maintenance of screens and boards	The screen displays are a vital part of an airport. Screens should be regularly updated with flight, airline and delay information; as well as check-in counter numbers for the various flights open for check-in.
5	Airport cleanliness	Airport hygiene is a non-negotiable standard for service quality. The airport maintenance team must ensure that adequate levels of cleanliness are maintained at all times in an airport, which includes floors, seating areas, toilet facilities, as well as regular maintenance of check-in counters and baggage belts.
6	Information desk	An employee should always be available to assist passengers and provide information regarding flights, processes, directions, etc.
7	Ticketing and reservation desk	A ticketing desk must be available close by the check-in counters. Reservation agents are needed for passengers to be able to book last-minute flights, make changes to their tickets, purchase additional offers being offered by the airline, etc.
8	Baggage handling	Baggage handling services include staff assisting in cautiously handling passenger bags without damaging property, check-in agents ensuring that the bags are tagged to the right destination under the right passengers' names, and ramp service unit handling baggage with care while transporting the bags to and from the aircraft.
9	Queue coordination	To ensure high service quality, there should always be a few employees on ground for queue management at the check-in counters. The employees aid the passengers in providing additional information, answering queries, and in making sure that passengers do not miss their flights while waiting in the queue. This process of prioritizing passengers according to their flight timings expedites the check-in process and helps avoid conflict.
10	Self-check-in kiosks	A minimum of 15 kiosks should be available near to the check-in counters to help airline staff manage peak operational hours. In regions where passengers do not generally opt for the kiosk service, such as Asia, there should be employees available to assist.
11	Security questions	Check-in agents are required to ask mandatory security questions to passengers along with presenting a board/document demonstrating items that are a security threat to an airport and aircraft. The questions include: is this your bag and did you pack it yourself? Are you carrying any of the items illustrated on this board?
12	Document verification	A Document Verification Unit is to be available at all times to assist in cross-checking documents in complex cases. In normal cases, the check-in counter staff accurately verify the

		authentication of documents, the information being provided and the information being recorded in the system.
13	Baggage drop for online checked-in passengers	There should be designated counters at the check-in area for passengers who are already checked-in and possess a boarding pass (through online check-in). These passengers are looking to only drop-off their bags, which is a quicker process. Hence, they should not have to wait in the same queue as the passengers who are not yet checked-in.
14	Segregation of ticket class	First, Economy and Business class passengers cannot be checked-in at the same counter. A distinct segregation should be made by the airline and airport authorities.
15	Accuracy and speed	Ground employees must ensure accuracy of data entry, along with following the standard time for check-in per passenger. Following this quality parameter reduces wait time for passengers in the queue and aids in the streamlining of operations.
16	Privacy of passenger data	Confidentiality is of utmost importance in airline operations. Passenger data should be protected at all costs; which includes passport information, contact information, personal details, ticket details, passenger requests, and whereabouts, etc.
17	Efficient use of technology and innovation	It is an airline's responsibility, in collaboration with the airport authorities, to be up-to-date with technological advancements and implement the relevant technology in an airport and aircraft for passenger and employee convenience.
18	Passenger comfort	The quality of seating areas and waiting lounges in an airport should be regularly assessed and maintained for the comfort of all passengers.
19	Language interpretation / support	An airport is a diverse area. People from all ethnicities and backgrounds are welcomed and service quality should not be compromised based on cultural differences. Hence, diverse and linguistically capable employees should be hired by an airline. Additionally, airline management must reinforce standards of consistent and unbiased customer service.
20	Health and safety measures	Health and safety protocols should be implemented, particularly in light of global health concerns, such as a pandemic.
21	Quality checks / minimized margin of error	The processes taking place at the check-in counters should be regularly assessed by performing audits and quality checks, which will aid in identifying areas of improvement, leading to minimizing errors.
22	Lost and found services	There should be an availability of a lost and found service at each airport, allowing passengers to locate lost items left behind in the check-in area.
23	Feedback and surveys	Passengers have a right to provide positive or negative feedback. Their feedback should be regularly collected and analyzed to improve quality measures.

Table 3.2: Global Boarding Standards

Global Quality Protocols (Airlines.IATA, 2016)		
Flight Boarding Standards		
S. No	Quality Protocols	Details
1	Security checks	Thorough baggage searches need to be conducted for all passengers. In addition to, passengers need to pass through metal detectors, and oblige to further checks if needed. Employees conducting the search should be courteous and professional.
2	Updated screen displays and	Screen displays and signage around the airside areas should be

	adequate signage	regularly updated with clear and precise information, including gate changes, flight delays, gate numbers and terminal directions.
3	Premium lounge facilities	Passengers expect high levels of customer service from the airline employees allocated at the premium lounges, as these lounges are accessible only to First and Business class passengers. Hence, lounge facilities and catering services should be of remarkably high quality.
4	Gate announcements	Frequent and clear gate announcements to be conducted including but not limited to; pre-boarding announcement, gate change announcement, boarding and last call announcement.
5	Queue management	Once boarding commences, a boarding agent should be allocated to manage the queue; assisting passengers in preparing the relevant documentation and ensuring the prevention of commotion.
6	Airline staff professionalism and customer service	Updating miles, answering queries, assisting in seat change requests, upgrading passengers and providing real-time updates on boarding status and/or any changes.
7	Studying the flight and conducting pre-flight briefing	Boarding gate agents should study the flight thoroughly before reaching the gate in order to be adequately equipped with the flight information. This includes the flight load, time of departure and arrival, type of aircraft, seat map, and the number of passengers requiring assistance. A briefing should be conducted by the lead gate agent with the boarding team to discuss the boarding plan bearing the relevant information in mind.
8	Maintenance of the boarding gate bridge and buses	There are two types of boarding gates available in an airport. The bussing gates require passengers to be loaded on a bus which transports them to the aircraft. The quality, availability, and capacity of the buses should not be compromised. On the other hand, remote gates require boarding agents to oversee the maintenance of the bridge, and to pause boarding whenever required to prevent overloading bridge.
9	Passport and boarding pass verification	Quick and precise verification of each individual passport and boarding pass need to be done by the boarding agent.
10	Priority boarding	Boarding should be done through a segregated system of prioritization. Passengers needing special assistance and families with young children are called to board first, followed by First and Business class passengers, and then Economy class passengers.
11	Cabin baggage compliance	The allowed cabin baggage has specific measurements. Bags exceeding size or weight are to be checked-in and not taken onboard.
12	Flight documentation	Documents include the flight manifest, gender zone counts and load details. These should be printed, signed, and handed over to the designated employees in a timely manner.
13	Effective team collaboration	Effective communication and teamwork are a catalyst to smooth operations. Boarding gate agent should actively collaborate with the flight dispatcher, cabin manager and duty operations manager.
14	Efficient zonal boarding	Boarding should be done by zones, especially for a wide-bodied aircraft. Gate announcements must be made broadcasting the zones being boarded. Passengers seated in the zone at the end of the aircraft are invited to board first. This streamlines the boarding process and helps ensure order.
15	Chasing missing passengers	Passengers absent from the gate are to be chased. The boarding gate agent shall attempt contacting the passengers via telephone, as well as allocate a team member to try locating the passengers around the airport. Furthermore, announcements should be made summoning the passengers mentioning their

		name, flight number and gate number.
16	Timely offloading of passengers and baggage	Offload details (such as baggage tag numbers) should be passed on time to the flight dispatcher so that the bags can be kept on hold. The details should be conveyed 20 minutes before departure, and the absent passenger should be offloaded from the system 10 minutes before departure, followed by the offloading of bags.
17	Generating and submitting the gate report	A report is to be generated entailing the summary of the flight, including the start and end time of boarding, number of passengers and bags offloaded, time of aircraft pushback and departure, and reasons for delay (if a delay has occurred).

4. Data Analysis & Finding

4.1. Quality management practices carried out by Etihad Airways

In this process, a comprehensive study was conducted to accurately analyze and determine the parameters of quality being implemented by Etihad Airways during check-in and boarding procedures in day-to-day operations. The detailed interview conducted with the Duty Operations Manager at Etihad Airways aided in demonstrating the airline's compliance with the Global Quality Parameters during check-in and boarding processes. Below are the comparative tables reflecting data analysis:

TABLE 4.1: Compliance of Etihad Airways during Check-in Process

Global quality parameters		Etihad Airways		
Check-in counters		Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Not compliant at all
1	Chauffeur service	✓		
2	Airport parking services	✓		
3	Maintenance of trolleys, buggies and wheelchair assistance		✓	
4	Maintenance of screens and boards	✓		
5	Airport cleanliness	✓		
6	Information desk			✓
7	Ticketing and reservation desk	✓		
8	Baggage handling	✓		
9	Queue coordination		✓	
10	Self-check-in kiosks	✓		
11	Security questions	✓		
12	Document verification	✓		
13	Baggage drop for online checked-in passengers	✓		
14	Segregation of ticket class	✓		
15	Accuracy and speed		✓	
16	Privacy of passenger data	✓		
17	Efficient use of technology and innovation	✓		
18	Passenger comfort		✓	
19	Language interpretation / support		✓	
20	Health and safety measures	✓		
21	Quality checks / minimized margin of error	✓		
22	Lost and found services		✓	
23	Feedback and surveys			✓

This report presents an analysis of the global standards of quality and its contrast with the check-in and boarding practices in the case of Etihad Airways, as per the information attained from the Duty Operations Manager at Etihad Airways. It demonstrates which of these parameters Etihad Airways is fully compliant, partially compliant, or not compliant at all with.

The purpose of this comparative study is to investigate precisely how aligned Etihad Airways is with the global quality protocols. The report also aids in detecting the areas of improvement.

As the above table indicates, Etihad Airways is not fully compliant with all the check-in processes.

The responsibility for maintaining trolleys, buggies, and wheelchairs falls under the jurisdiction of the airline, however, it is to be noted that at Abu Dhabi International Airport, trolleys and buggies are typically maintained by the airport authorities rather than airline management. Wheelchair assistance, on the other hand, is provided by a team working for the airline. Being partially compliant with this task suggests that there is a shortage of these commodities at the airport.

Being partially compliant with queue coordination directs that an employee may be allocated at this touch point from time to time, but not always. Touch points at the airport are a simple, yet crucial task. Having an airline employee manage the queues, especially during peak hours, can avoid multiple offloads and delays.

Accuracy and speed are non-negotiables in the aviation industry. An airline is subjected to an investigation to justify even the slightest delays. The comparative table suggests that Etihad Airways' is not always reliant with accuracy and speed, however, speed can vary on a case-to-case basis. Check-in processes are not always identical as each individual passenger has their own set of demands that require attention. The standard check-in time for Etihad Airways is 10 minutes per passenger, but charging a passenger for excess baggage, upgrading a passenger, adhering to seat change requests, or verifying doubtful passport or visas can justifiably lead to check-in time exceeding the standard time limit.

Passenger comfort is a priority for airline management and airport authorities. Partial compliance with this aspect suggests that the airport lacks comfortable seating arrangements or waiting areas. Though the airport provides adequate space at the boarding gates, this may not be the case in the check-in counters.

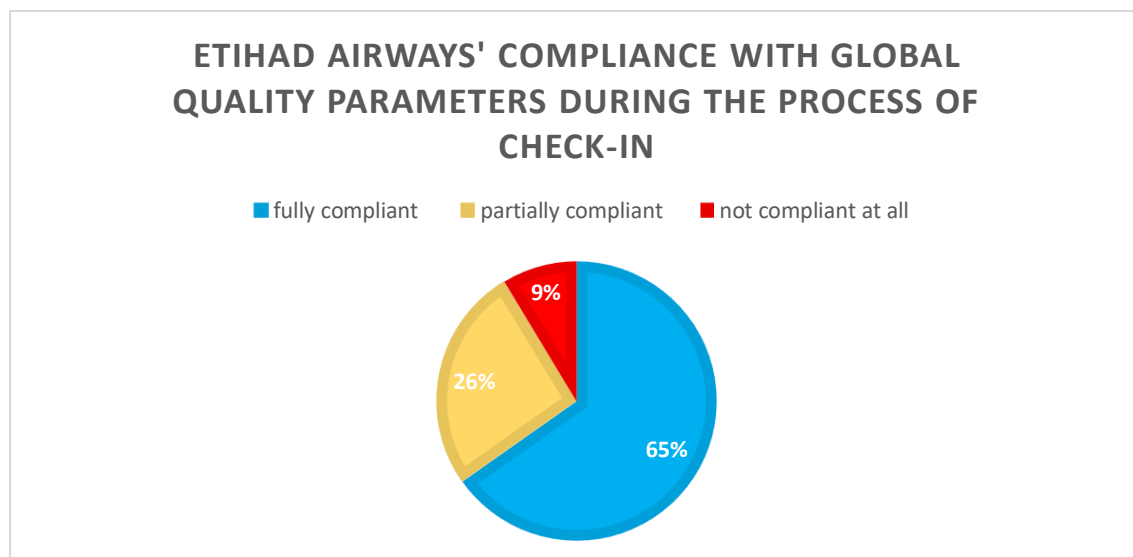
Language support: Passengers from different backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities and countries travel through the airport. Partial compliance with this protocol could be due to the lack of availability of multi-lingual airline employees at all times.

Lost and found services: Though Etihad Airways has a somewhat efficient lost and found service team, the team is not big in numbers. Furthermore, it may not always be convenient for passengers to retrieve lost items. Due to security concerns, items not claimed within a specific period of time are discarded, leading to passenger complaints and frustration. Passengers are also required to fill out various forms, provide documentation, etc. which can be a lengthy and exasperating process.

Information desk: Our research shows that Abu Dhabi International Airport lacks adequate information check points. The information desk that is available, is located in Arrivals, and is operated by the airport authorities. At the check-in counters, there is no desk available that can provide additional information to the passengers seeking it. Non-compliance with this step should be highlighted and worked upon.

Feedback and surveys: Passengers find it difficult to get in touch with the airline to lodge complaints. Although the official website offers an outlet to provide feedback, passengers seldom hear back from the airline with an update. Etihad's non-compliance with this protocol staggers its growth and could lead to losing passengers to other airlines.

FIGURE 4.1: Compliance of Etihad Airways during Check-in Process



As figure 4.1 illustrates, Etihad is mostly compliant with the global quality parameters during the process of check-in, however, there are areas that need the airline management's focus in order to elevate quality and improve customer experience. The airline management, specifically the Terminal Operation Managers, should study the areas of improvement more closely and implement strategies to be fully compliant with global standards of quality management.

Table 4.2: Compliance of Etihad Airways In Boarding Process

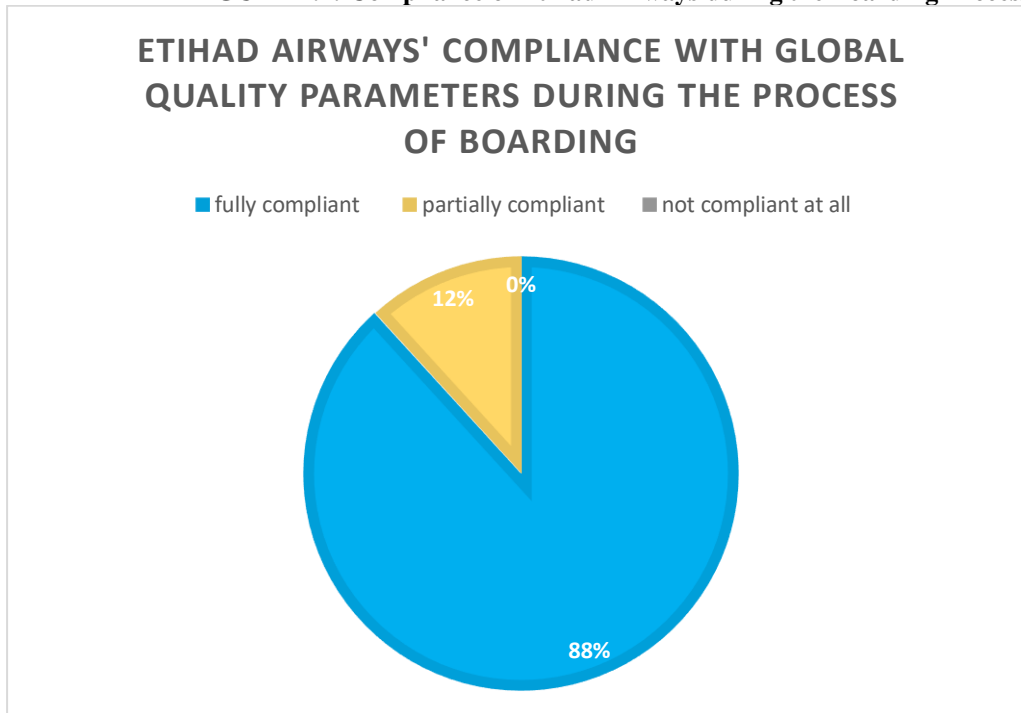
Global quality parameters	Etihad Airways		
	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Not compliant at all
1 Security checks	✓		
2 Updated screen displays and adequate signage	✓		
3 Premium lounge facilities	✓		
4 Gate announcements	✓		
5 Queue management		✓	
6 Airline staff professionalism and customer service	✓		
7 Studying the flight and conducting pre-flight briefing	✓		
8 Maintenance of the boarding gate bridge and buses	✓		
9 Passport and boarding pass verification	✓		
10 Priority boarding	✓		
11 Cabin baggage compliance	✓		
12 Flight documentation	✓		
13 Effective team collaboration	✓		
14 Efficient zonal boarding		✓	
15 Chasing missing passengers	✓		
16 Timely offloading of passengers and baggage	✓		
17 Generating and submitting the gate report	✓		

Table 4.2 demonstrates the quality parameters that Etihad Airways is currently fully compliant, partially compliant, and non-compliant with, as per the Duty Operations Manager at Etihad Airways.

As the above table determines, nearly all standard guidelines are being followed by the airline staff at the boarding gates, which validates Etihad's esteemed on-time performance, minimal delays and admirable reputation.

Queue management: Etihad's partial compliance with queue management suggests that not all flights being boarded at the airport have an employee allocated to manage queues. Queue coordinator is a vital touch point as it enables a smooth boarding process; benefiting passengers and boarding team simultaneously. The airline being fully compliant with the queue management quality standard at the check-in counters but only partially at the boarding gates proposes that the managers/supervisors prioritize only certain flights to utilize this touch point, perhaps depending on the flight load or destination.

Efficient zonal boarding: zonal boarding is a practice that should be applied to all flights regardless of the gate, aircraft capacity or the flight load. Along with the seat numbers, zone numbers are mentioned on the boarding pass and passengers expect to be boarded accordingly. Etihad's partial compliance to this protocol suggests that not all flights are being boarded by zones, which could lead to disorder while boarding, congestion on gate bridge, and disruption while being seated in the aircraft.

FIGURE 4.2: Compliance of Etihad Airways during the Boarding Process

As figure 4.2 illustrates, Etihad Airways is 88% in full compliance, and 12% in partial compliance with the global quality protocols during the process of boarding. Furthermore, the airline being in 0% non-compliance with quality parameters is a positive and reassuring result.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study findings are as follows:

- The analysis finds that airline employees are required to follow standard policies and procedures set by the aviation authorities.
- Most of the processes that take place in the operational areas of the aviation industry require effective and functional teamwork. Airport employees need to be professional and reliable in order to successfully achieve on-time departure of a flight.
- The results of the study reflect that Etihad Airways is fully compliant with the global quality management protocols by 65%, and partially compliant by 26% at the check-in counters.
- Being partially compliant indicates that though the processes are being followed, under certain circumstances, the processes are being altered.
- According to the statistics, Etihad Airways is not compliant with the standard check-in process by 9%. This indicates that there is room for improvement, and the airline should focus on implementing strategies that can aid in minimizing this percentage.
- As the statistical analysis signposts, Etihad Airways is 88% fully complaint, and 12% partially compliant with the globally set quality management parameters during boarding flights.
- The nil percentage of non-compliance at the boarding gates shows that protocol is being followed successfully to pushback flights.
- The studies indicate that Etihad Airways is more efficient, compliant, and proactive in airside operations, i.e. the boarding gates, as compared to landside operations, i.e. check-in counters.

5.1. Conclusions

Based on the above findings of the study, following conclusions are drawn:

Quality management is vital to the success of a business. As the objective of the study was the identify ways to streamline check-in and boarding practices, the objectives are completed by assessing the current practices being implemented by the Etihad Airways' employees, demonstrating areas of compliance and non-compliance, through research and conducting a detailed interview with the Duty Operations Manager at Etihad Airways. The management responsible for the operational side of a business is required to pay close attention to the practices being carried out, and the alignment of those practices with the quality protocols. Quality of service is subjective and ever-changing, and an aviation industry is a highly competitive market. In today's world, passengers sift through the many available options lined up for them to book flights and pledge loyalty to an airline. As various flights from multiple airlines are readily available for a passenger to

fly to the same destination, travelers tend to pick the airline that can give them the best quality of service, comfort, and convenience for their money. Etihad Airways, like its competitors, is constantly on the lookout to implement strategies to upgrade its value in order to retain passengers and grow their business in terms of size, profitability, and international ranking. In order to do that, they aim to consistently provide high quality of service in all aspects of the business and high-end products that set them apart from other airlines. The study showcases and pinpoints the areas that can be focused on to improve and regulate day-to-day operations, and how service of quality can be elevated if protocols are concisely executed right from the first point of contact for a passenger, which is the check-in touchpoint at the airport. In conclusion, this research and its investigative report aids in closing the gap between global standards and Etihad Airways' practices at the check-in counters and boarding gates. This enables the airline to zero in on the particular practices to focus on in order to enhance their quality of service, which could potentially lead to a higher passenger retention rate, giving the airline a competitive edge.

5.2. Recommendations for the Industry

Based on the study findings and conclusions, it is recommended that Etihad Airways instigate ways to improve quality of service during the check-in and boarding processes. This can be achieved through subjecting their ground staff to more training programs, as well as frequent refresher sessions from time to time in order to instill policies and procedures.

Moreover, Etihad Airways should explore avenues to increase employee motivation, which will stimulate ground staff to go the extra mile in delivering quality service. This will not just have a positive impact on the overall organizational culture and boost productivity, but will also aid in diminishing the rate of employee turnover. This objective can be accomplished by introducing additional reward systems, generously handing out appraisals in acknowledgement of commendable efforts, and offering monetary incentives.

Furthermore, Etihad Airways should highly consider augmenting its workforce to facilitate adequate operational coverage in all areas of the airport. A more extensive employee roster would allow the airport team to allocate staff in critical touchpoints around the terminal, which would upgrade customer service and abridge passenger access to airline representatives, resulting in heightened passenger satisfaction and comfort.

Lastly, with the findings of the research in consideration, an additional recommendation would be to promote employee involvement and engagement in the decision-making process, as well as in strategy-making discussions. When employees from all departments feel involved in the crafting and planning of changes, strategies or regimes, they develop an in-depth understanding of protocols, and the importance of the enforcement of these protocols in operations. This can be accomplished through Etihad's management conducting frequent meetings, daily pre-shift briefings, and informal discussions with their ground operations' employees.

5.3. Recommendations for the Future Researcher

This study was conducted in the UAE. Similar research endeavors must be conducted in developing nations such as Nigeria, Pakistan, Nepal, among others. Following these studies, a comparative analysis between research findings and conclusions from both developed and developing aviation markets should be undertaken.

In order to establish the concise effectiveness of newly implemented strategies and practices to upgrade quality in airport operations, it is recommended that an updated research may be prepared in approximately a year from now. Henceforth, a comparative analysis can be steered, collating the outcomes of this forthcoming research with analogous studies, thereby enabling a wide-ranging evaluation of these practices.

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