

# [Programs for pilot motivation case study analysis management essay](https://assignbuster.com/programs-for-pilot-motivation-case-study-analysis-management-essay/)

This paper looks at various motivating theories and their application to the declining levels of motivation commercial aviation pilots are experiencing. In the current economic and business climate commercial aviation pilots feel pressure from their employees to perform more with less and this has led to a decline in enthusiasm for their chosen profession. This case study is a response to an article in the New York Times by M. L. Ward, “ Airline Pilots Still Flying, but No Longer Quite So High”, published March 10, 2006, p. C3, as reprinted in Understanding and Managing Organizational Behavior by Jennifer M. George ad Gareth R. Jones, 2008.

## Programs for Pilot Motivation: Case Study Analysis

Motivating employees is important to any organization. Pilots are no exception. Pilots have seen their working hours increase and wages and benefits decrease. This has lead to a decline in the motivation of commercial pilots. We examine four theories of motivation and how these theories look when applied to the declining motivational level of a specific group, commercial pilots. Each motivational theory provides insight into how important employee motivation is to an organization. Also, each theory helps with ways to manage motivation in an organization.

## Intrinsic / Extrinsic Motivation

Some employees are intrinsically motivated by what they do. They love their jobs and do them happily because it is personally rewarding, but they may also be unhappy with extrinsic motivators, such as working hours and salaries. Pilots are the obvious example of this kind of employee. Pilots have a great responsibility and are expected to do many things, such as operating airplanes, handling all aspects of flights and keeping up with new policies and requirements. However, Frederick-Recascino & Hall (2003) said that pilots who fly because they love what they do are less stressed and less anxious in high-performance situations. This decreases the chance of negligence that would cause pilots to make trivial errors. Mistakes are less likely to happen.

Frederick-Recascino & Hall (2003) discussed student pilot training in the U. S. It is required for students to attend courses, practice some skills, and schedule flight times. They found that students who have a great amount of self-determination have a strong intrinsic motivation. Therefore, they are better able to complete their program with fewer extra lessons, due to their skill. To motivate the students further, they are given fewer extra lessons than what are given in basic courses. According to Benenson (2010), one way that is used to motivate students is to make them aware of career options that they can find when they have pilot certificates. Another way is to involve them in flying clubs. In this way, students participate with flight teams so that these teams can help them by motivating and keeping each other interested. Similarly, by making pilots aware of the conditions and the aviation rules that they will face in their jobs, they are less likely to perform negatively in their jobs.

Pilots often get in accidents because of poor judgment resulting from low motivating factors. If the pilot is neither emotionally dominated by the rational desire to live, nor do they care much about the machinery they are using that may not belong to them, they may put themselves in more dangerous situations. 2. 5% of aviation accidents out of the 14, 000 in the past decade have been a result of poor judgment in weather conditions. Strong intrinsic motivation to be safe and live might have checked this recklessness. Three steps that are used to improve pilot decision making are training, automation and displays (Madhavan, 2006). By using these tools, pilots can efficiently navigate and fly safely, but by ignoring or forgetting these, pilots can be in great danger. Recognition of these risks is an intrinsic motivator that is often overlooked by pilots who do not love what they do, or do not take flying seriously. Benenson (2010) explained that one important factor in retaining pilots’ involvement in their jobs is how they deal with their spouses. Spouses who resent their pilot taking time from them to fly may grow as a strong extrinsic motivation to quit flying. The pressure from the home may become more of a hindrance than flying is a blessing, so the extrinsic motivation to quit overshadows the intrinsic motivation to keep going.

A mandatory retirement age of 60 and working more hours than are to be expected would make non-serious pilots dissatisfied with their jobs. By looking at Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, it is obvious to see that Safety needs are the second most important factor. Airline companies need to take this factor into consideration in order to try to satisfy and motivate pilots. Offering other jobs, such as teaching ground instruction and being an airport manager is one way to motivate pilots who may find flying too risky, perhaps because of family concerns.

## Need Theory Perspective

There is no question that the commercial airline industry has taken a hit in terms of profitability. To make up for lost revenues from things like new regulation, challenging economic times and greatly increased fuel prices, airlines have put pressure on the union representing its pilots for concessions. The pilots have had their pensions cut, in some cases up to 75%. Due to changes in pay structure, pilots are now only paid for time in the air, resulting in many wasted hours sitting on tarmacs and in airports. This means increased time away from family, and loss of personal time. Pilots are working harder to earn the pay they once had, and some are becoming concerned that low levels of job satisfaction will lead to motivation issues and ultimately safety concerns within the airline industry (Wald, 2006).

Applying Maslow’s theory to pilots, physiological needs include considerations like ‘ Can I afford to eat?’ and ‘ Do I get paid enough to afford to live here?’ In the aftermath of the Buffalo NY crash in 2009, US Congressmen and the FAA took a look at commuter pilots and discovered many of them simply could not afford to live in the cities they are based out of. As a result, pilots were commuting long distances to work and sleeping in uncomfortable airport lounges (Lowy, 2010). This makes a good case that for some pilots, regional commuter pilots in particular; physiological needs are not being met.

Concerns over pilots long, uncomfortable hours highlights another of Maslow’s needs: safety. This fear is not supported by empirical evidence (ie. increased airline accident body count), but anecdotally many pilots have come forward saying that the additional strain has resulted in added safety oversights and errors that could be disastrous (Wald 2006). In the New York Times article, a Northwest pilot voiced his concern that the added strain on pilots has led to things like routine system checks being overlooked. One may also argue that pilots are intrinsically motivated for safety because their life is in the hands of the hardware they are operating, and as a result they will be highly motivated to meet their safety needs, and those of the passengers on board (Wald 2006).

Progressing up the need level, belongingness needs follow the need for safety. Examples of belongingness not being met can be seen with the strained relationships between pilot and employer. The example from the article with the pilot snapping at his first mate about how talking about United Airlines just infuriates him, is a good example (Wald 2006). Additionally, when pilots speak up and voice their job concerns with the FAA or news outlets, they do so anonymously because they fully expect to be fired or grounded for a long period of time as a result of their actions (Wald 2006).

Pilots seeing their fellow captains laid off after years of service, seeing pensions cut, wages plummet and witnessing some of the ‘ shine’ come off their wings all show how the next need, esteem, for some is not being met. According to the article, measuring job satisfaction with pilots can be difficult to measure, and esteem needs in particular because they are difficult to quantify. Pilots being quoted saying “ They kind of bleed us out,” and ‘ I’d lost my edge,” are solid indicators that pilots are not feeling good about themselves or their accomplishments, and their esteem needs are not being met and their motivation suffering (Wald 2006).

Ultimately, employers wish to meet all of the needs previously discussed so that employees can begin attempting to meet their self-actualization needs – employees working to achieve their highest potential and furthering their skills is a mutually beneficial arrangement between a manager and their employee. In such a customer experience oriented business, even little things like seeing a captain go the extra step to be the best, customers will respond with patronage benefitting both the airline and the pilot.

Interestingly, despite all of the concern voiced by pilots about their job satisfaction, as of 2009 airline on-time arrivals were the best since 2003 (Freed, 2010) and the major accident rate was the second lowest ever (Lowy, 2010). This indicates that while there may be a problem with motivating maligned pilots, airlines are achieving statistically amazing output from a safety and effectiveness standpoint.

## Expectancy Theory Perspective

Vroom’s expectancy theory posits 3 questions that determine whether a worker will be motivated in a work situation. Those questions are:

Will the worker be able to get the outcomes they want from the situation? This refers to what Vroom called valence. If the valence of the outcomes is high, the worker wants the outcomes sufficiently to enhance performance.

Does the worker need to perform at a high level to earn the outcomes? Will high performance deliver the desired outcomes? Expectancy theory calls this instrumentality.

If the worker tries hard, will they be able to perform at a high level? Does the worker believe they are capable of performing at a high enough level to secure the desired outcomes? This is called expectancy.

If the answer to any of these questions is no, the worker will not be motivated to do their best in the situation (George, 193).

In the case of the pilots, it seems that pilots are frustrated at the first question. Due to economic pressures of working at airlines with aging business models that tend to be unprofitable or financially under pressure, pilots have been asked to have salary increases frozen or have their benefits reduced (Eitel), or accept spending more time away from home to get their compensated flight hours (George, 206). All in all, pilots at the major airlines tend to be well compensated, so despite the NY Times article by Wald’s claims that the pilots are unsatisfied with pay and what they have to do to get it, in general terms pilot pay is competitive with other highly skilled professional careers. Entry-level pay at major airlines averages $36, 283 per year and tops out at around $160, 000 per year (McCartney). What seems to be a point of contention for the pilots is that there are generational issues where some older pilots have seen better days such as when pilots working international routes could bring in $300, 000 a year (ibid). And there is dissension in the ranks, as pilots working regional routes or airlines get paid on a lower scale than those working at the major airlines (ibid). These pilots tend to be early in their careers and are logging hours in hopes of getting hired by the majors. All told though, it would be fair to say that pilots are generally able to get the outcomes they want from working as pilots. It seems that they have intrinsic motivation to fly, and getting paid competitive salaries to do it allows them to get paid to do a job they enjoy. Their frustration seems to be one where they perceive inequity between their current compensation system and an earlier one that was more lucrative.

In regard to the 2nd question, it is true that pilots need to work at a high level of proficiency to do their job. Hackman and Oldham’s Job Characteristics Model provides 3 factors called critical psychological states that describe how workers react to the tasks that they encounter (George, 221). This is a fruitful model for examining the job of a commercial airline pilot. These are the 3 critical psychological states:

Meaningfulness of the work

Responsibility

Knowledge of outcomes.

There is little doubt that the job of commercial airline pilot is meaningful enough for the pilots. They seem to love to fly, and so the challenge of handling their equipment and achieving the goals of flying point to point are things the pilots would probably do on their own time in single engine planes at their own expense. The Wald article establishes that they tend to be intrinsically motivated to fly, so we can determine that the meaning of their work is not a detractor to pilot motivation.

Responsibility is probably a key issue for pilots. They have an incredible responsibility to their customers, the fliers, and to co-workers the cabin crew, and to their families and themselves to fly the aircraft safely every single time they fly. Failure in this task is not an acceptable outcome as it would have catastrophic effects. Thus there is a great deal of stress on pilots, and as the Wald article points out, they really do not have the freedom to access mental health counseling as it would likely get them banned from flying by the FAA. There is also the issue of how much freedom of action the pilots actually have in the role. To be sure they must act in a very regulated environment. Pilots are prepared for a great number of eventualities through flight simulators and training, but they tend to fly on autopilot, take directions from air traffic control, and are required to follow procedures written by the airline. We expect that they do not actually have much freedom in carrying out their duties.

Lastly, we ask what knowledge of outcomes do pilots have and how does it affect their performance? Clearly, pilots know when they have met the minimum standard for any flight, since it is landing safely at their destination. But it also happens that pilots are heavily studied and monitored. They would tend to receive a great deal of feedback. The system pilots work in puts an emphasis on correcting their mistakes. So from a technical side they are probably given enough feedback, and maybe perhaps even too much (Lempereur). Where they may not receive enough feedback is in the aspect of their emotional connection to the customer. Gone are the days when children would be allowed into the cockpit to see the captain fly the plane. There seems to be rift in the captain’s ability to connect to the fliers. If it is important for pilots to meet customers and get the positive effects of seeing satisfied customers, this might be something that pilots are not getting as much of in the post-9/11 environment of pilots being locked in the cockpit.

One of the pilots’ key complaints was their flying schedules and having to be more flexible about being on the road to fly and having layovers. The example of only earning 15 hours of pay in 3 days on the road was a salient feature of the demands of being a pilot in this environment. The pilots would probably not schedule themselves that way. What might be a way to make the pilots happier would be to organize them into self-managing teams and let them decide how they want to schedule themselves every month or quarter. Giving them control over one of their biggest de-motivators would probably give them the scheduling flexibility they seem to want and the motivation to help everyone on their team meet both their personal and professional commitments.

From the view of expectancy then, we can say that pilots are de-motivated be a variety of factors. Compensation and benefits are rather high valence outcomes that to some degree seem to frustrate pilots. What seems to be the bigger problem is that the pilots do not have a lot of confidence in the airlines senior management to keep the airlines’ business models profitable which would have highly adverse effects on the pilots’ long-term job security (Eitel). The valence for job security is what has led to union contracts that have diminished overall compensation and increased negative hygiene factors like unpaid time on the road waiting for flight duties. Pilots need to perform at a high level due to their burden of flying safely every time they fly, regardless of whether they want to obtain high valence outcomes. This frustrates the instrumental linkage of high performance as a necessity to obtain rewards. For pilots, high job performance is an avoidance of immense negative consequences; it is not a supreme effort to succeed so much as a mandatory first principle to avoid failure. Since high performance is not optional, it is unlikely to motivate towards desired behaviors. And pilots must know they can perform at a level high enough to earn rewards, since they would not be flying at all if they could not perform to standard. So for commercial aviation pilots, all three factors of the expectancy model of motivation (valence, instrumentality, and expectancy) are frustrated or missing, which means that according to this model pilots will tend to not be motivated to do their best work as their job is currently structured. Lacking one factor is enough to cause a failure to motivate. For all three to be negatively affected is a real problem. However, this probably still held true even when pilots were “ flying high”. Motivating pilots seems to be a special case that is more likely to be enhanced through analysis and intervention based on the Hackman and Oldham Job Characteristics model (George, 217) or through basic job enrichment strategies (George, 214).

## Organizational Justice Perspective

Organizational justice is the employees’ perspective of fairness in organizations. It is the employees’ perception of how they are treated by the managers and the overall organization. After reading the article, “ Airline Pilots Still Flying, but No Longer Quite so High,” we realized that the pool of pilots is divided in two groups: one who are complaining about the working conditions and one with people who are trying to ignore the negative points about the job. However, there is a common feeling of discouragement and despair among the pilots. They are feeling cynical towards their respective companies and the way they are treated. Most of the pilots are intrinsically motivated to do their job because they love flying. But they are also getting tired of flying long hours for lesser money. Also, the working conditions are not as good as they used to be.

Organizational justice has four forms of justice perceptions: distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice and informational justice. In this case, pilots’ perceptions are low on all the four forms of justice perceptions. With reduced salaries and long hours of flying, pilots are dissatisfied with the organization. There have been many layoffs in recent past. In the article, “ Lufthansa pilots call off strike after talks with airline officials” of Daily News and Analysis, journalist Pramod Thakur points that the reason for the strike was a raise of annual pay by 6. 4% and job security. Lufthansa is one of the biggest airlines in the industry and this strike affected almost 4, 000 flights. This shows that the airline pilots are frustrated about the most basic incentive of the job. This will lead to unhappy pilots and disgruntled customers who would opt for other airlines. The organization needs to understand that their employees are their biggest customers and if they are not happy, they can never keep the customers happy.

Also, as the pilots do not have managers, they do not know how their performance is evaluated. There is a lot of ambiguity about the performance criteria and this leads to suspicion among the pilots whether they have been evaluated fairly or not. This makes their perceive low procedural justice. The airlines, however, still expect the pilots to work harder with low pay and with no explanation provided. Airlines are reeling from the aviation industry’s worst year ever, in which demand dropped faster than capacity could be cut, but workers are becoming increasingly impatient with pressure from employers to tighten their belts (Sheahan).

The pilots are also low on informational and interpersonal justice perceptions. The biggest reason for these perceptions is because the pilots are usually on their own with no managers managing them. This poses a problem as they work individually or in pairs and do not have anyone to seek help or guidance from. According to the USA Today, an experienced pilot who lost his job at the age of 54 wrote “ To any young person thinking of flying for a career, I have one word: Beware!” This describes that there are very few people to whom a young pilot can discuss future career plans. Also, if they do a good job there is no one to appreciate their work and this can lead to dissuasion among the pilots.