

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The airline business is an important business for international economic development as it is a key factor supporting other business such as tourism, hotels and other import-export businesses. Passenger service agents of an airline are also a key factor and the image of organization in order to provide services through direct communication with passengers. The service persons of the airline play important roles in an airline business' success due to the high level of competition in the world market.

Communication is a tool to communicate with people in order to provide and receive information, news, opinions and feelings in order to obtain a good understanding and relationship in society. Interpersonal communication has become a part of airline business nowadays because of the competition in the service business throughout the world. The quality of the airline business must constantly be improved in order to achieve success in the competitive airline business which has increased. Each airline must improve their own business in terms of the highest technology as well as quality of service personnel; for example, modern aircraft, effectiveness in communication so that they can operate their business effectively for maximum passenger satisfaction so that the passengers would like to travel with that airline as loyal customers.

The profession of the researcher at Lufthansa Services Thailand Ltd. (LST) as a passenger service representative of Finnair, one of the customer airlines, the responsibility involves the ground service of Finnair flights in Suvarnabhumi Airport such as check-in, boarding gate control, and flight irregularities such as delayed or overbooked flight or flight cancellations. This job requires very strong communication skills among colleagues as well as with our passengers in order to clearly acknowledge all the passengers' requests. This routine job directly involves interpersonal communication both in verbal and non-verbal languages in order to be able to provide information and gain a good understanding of what passengers want.

Communication is important in most situations because it can help the flight be on time because of the good co-operation among passengers. Finnair is a Northern European airline and is one of the most popular carriers for Scandinavian passengers who are a major group of tourists visiting Thailand every year as well as Thai passengers currently living in Finland and Scandinavian countries including Thai passengers who travel to those countries with Finnair. Sometimes there is the stereotypical attitude from Thai passengers who have problems with their document checking procedures or problems with excess baggage at the check-in counters where ground service representatives of Finnair in Bangkok treat Thai people differently from the Europeans. Most Thais think that passenger service agents provide better service to foreigners; which sounds smacks of discrimination. However, some kinds of interpersonal communication with Thais and foreign passengers is different in terms of cultural gestures such as eye contact, tone of voice, and smile. Some interpersonal communication body language must be interpreted differently according to cultural awareness. Ground service representatives are also known as the front-line service. This kind of service is a part of the image of the airline that can reflect on the quality of service. The impressive satisfaction of passengers must come from good service which requires effective skills and techniques of interpersonal communication, verbal and non-verbal language that can involve the image of the airline. This business strategy reflects that service agents of an airline are the most effective agents to give impressive service to passengers. This research aims to survey and compare passengers' satisfactions, both Thai and foreigners who travel with Finnair flights departing from Suvarnabhumi Airport. The survey includes mainly the satisfaction with communication between passengers and ground service representatives and the results can reflect how passengers are satisfied with interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service representatives in Suvarnabhumi Airport. The analysis of information given from passengers can be used to improve the service in the future.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.2.1 Main Problem:

Are Thai and foreign passengers of Finnair differently satisfied with

interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service representatives (Lufthansa Services Thailand handling agents) at Suvarnabhumi Airport?

1.2.2 Sub Problems:

1. Are Thai and foreign passengers of Finnair flights differently satisfied with verbal and non-verbal language used by Finnair ground representatives at Suvarnabhumi airport?
2. Does the interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service influence the satisfaction of Thai and foreign passengers at Suvarnabhumi Airport?
3. Does the interpersonal communication skill of Finnair ground representatives at Suvarnabhumi Airport affect the image of Finnair service?

1.3 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 Main Objectives:

To study and compare the satisfaction of Thai and foreign passengers with the interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service at Suvarnabhumi airport, and to use the result of the survey to improve the quality of service of Finnair ground service representative that handled by Lufthansa Services Thailand company.

1.3.2 Sub Objectives

1. To measure the degree of satisfaction of Thai and foreign passengers with the interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service representatives at Suvarnabhumi Airport.
2. To compare the satisfaction of Thai and foreign passengers with the interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service representative at Suvarnabhumi Airport.
3. To compare the satisfaction of business and economy class passengers with the interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service representatives at Suvarnabhumi Airport.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Definitions of the terms of this study are as follows:

1.4.1 Interpersonal communication refers to the communication behavior between Finnair ground service representatives at Suvarnabhumi Airport as the senders and receivers of messages to the passengers such as language use ability, knowledge of providing information, travel information. The evaluation of opinions given by Thai and foreign passengers are divided into;

1. Verbal communication factors such as verbal language between ground service representatives and passengers like greetings.
2. Non-verbal language factors which can be considered from the behavior and body language of ground service representatives to passengers like eye contact, voice and facial expressions

1.4.2. Finnair Ground Service Representatives refers to ground handling agents of Lufthansa Services Thailand Company or LST who provide ground service at the check-in counter and boarding gate for Finnair flights at Suvarnabhumi Airport. The agents are the employees of LST in both the positions of passenger service officers and passenger service supervisors (duty flight manager).

1.4.3. Satisfaction of Interpersonal Communication refers to beliefs, ideas, comments and degree of satisfaction with the interpersonal communication (verbal and non-verbal language) with the ground services of Finnair at the check-in counter boarding gate.

1.4.4. Thai passengers refers to Thai customers aged not below 18 years old who travel on Finnair scheduled flights departing from Suvarnabhumi Airport in Business and Economy class.

1.4.5. Foreign passengers refers to non-Thai customers who travel on Finnair scheduled flights departing from Suvarnabhumi Airport such as Scandinavians (Danish, Swedish, Norwegians), Finns, Asians and other European countries.

1.4.6. Business class passengers refer to customers who travel in Business class on Finnair scheduled flights departing from Suvarnabhumi Airport. The tickets of these customers must be originally business class fares, not travel by upgrading for free.

1.4.7. Economy class passengers refer to customers who do not travel in Business class of Finnair scheduled flights departing from Suvarnabhumi Airport.

1.5 VARIABLES

The variables used in this study consisted of:

1. Independent variable:

1.1 Demographic characteristics of passengers which are gender, age, nationality, culture, occupation, different service classes (business and economy class passengers).

1.2 Performance of Finnair ground service representatives services:

- Appearance of grooming and make-up
- Facial expressions (pleasant and sincere smile)
- Service attitude (friendly, polite, helpful)
- Service manners
- Response to requests (speed, friendly response,

appropriateness)

2. Dependent variables: customer satisfaction measured by the extent of customer satisfaction with two elements of interpersonal communication, verbal and non-verbal language, occurring at the check-in counters and the boarding gate.

1.6 HYPOTHESIS

Finnair passengers are satisfied with the interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service representatives at Suvarnabhumi Airport ;

1. Thai and foreign passengers are differently satisfied with the interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service representatives at Suvarnabhumi Airport.

2. Business class passengers and Economy class passengers are differently satisfied with the interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service representatives at Suvarnabhumi Airport.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research is designed to survey the passengers' satisfaction of interpersonal communication of Finnair ground service representatives at Suvarnabhumi Airport. The study will also be conducted at Suvarnabhumi Airport. The sample will be 400 Thai and foreign passengers who travel on Finnair scheduled flights from Suvarnabhumi Airport from November 15, 2007-January 15, 2008. The

data collection process will be at Suvarnabhumi Airport after the check-in process, in the passengers waiting area at the boarding gate before boarding. The data collection will be conducted for two months during the high season of tourists, so most of the flights departing from Suvarnabhumi Airport will be really overbooked. The check-in procedure must be conducted under time limitations, so some questions may not be answered clearly. Some unexpected situations occurring during check-in procedure can also be a barrier to get the real feedback from passengers; for example, some passengers who have problem with the overweight or excess baggage may not be satisfied with the service as they have to pay or repack their belongings. Delayed flights and flight cancellation can also be a limitation of data collection.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Customers' satisfaction is an effective way to know the degree of passengers' satisfaction in terms of service improvements for Lufthansa Services Thailand Ltd. The satisfaction with the interpersonal communication of Thai passengers with ground service representatives of Finnair in Thailand can help monitor the effectiveness of interpersonal communication by Finnair ground service at Suvarnabhumi airport. The feedback and results measured from this study will be useful and beneficial to the management of both Finnair and LST in Thailand for analyzing how professional Finnair ground representatives are, and this study can also identify the strengths and weaknesses of ground service communication effectiveness from LST to Finnair ground service at Suvarnabhumi airport.

1.9 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of passenger satisfactions with the interpersonal communication of Finnair passenger service representatives at Suvarnabhumi Airport which is a comparative study between Thai and Foreign passengers is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the study which provides the background, statement of the problems, objectives, definitions and variables, significance, and scope of study. The second chapter is the review of literature and relevant research. The third chapter describes methodology. The results of the study are presented in the

fourth chapter. The findings, discussion, conclusions and recommendation are summarized in the last chapter.