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## Use of Global Distance Education Program in Educational Goals of Airline

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### Abstract

Recently there has been an explosive growth in online distance learning which is rapidly transforming traditional learning habits with the more recent ones that uses the latest technology. As establishments nowadays are conscious of the necessity for being more integrative and innovative compared to the past, they question about the need to change management mentality in order to survive in a competitive market. Perceiving human as a value and an important valuable asset, directors of organizations look for the ways of changing of qualifications in workforce. To be able to accomplish this change, they need to alter the organization's training applications to ensure their own survival. Today, organizations tend to improve and gain from the managers out of their own resources by different approaches. As time and financial resources are restricted the newest technologies help them in succeeding this aim. Global distance education is one of the easiest supporters in this regard. In this study the historical developments of Turkish airlines (THY) are succinctly reviewed. Followed by the current position of global distance education in THY is to be highlighted. In this context, Turkish Airlines (THY) and Management Trainee Program of THY are taken as sample. "Harvard ManageMentor" (HMM) is being used for training purposes in Turkish Airlines and the researcher has aimed to explain how this program is being implemented in Turkish Airlines in detail and how the Harvard ManageMentor program corresponds to the needs of THY educational goals. It was concluded that HarvardManage Mentor supported the educational priorities of THY and e-learning programs by time saving and efficiency. Additionally THY educational goals were found to be in harmony with HMM. For further research, the staff of THY whom has been trained under HarvardManage Mentor, could be polled by online surveys. Based on surveys filled out, the results can be used for further discussions and probings.

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## 1. Introduction

Online education exploits the Internet intended for course supply for the student and educator customarily in different locations. Learners interconnect electronically with the educator and other learners (Sims, Dobb & Hand, 2002). Assignments and assessments are deferred to electronically. Educators, instructional designers, and course developers use technology to present course content. Course content can be presented through recorded lectures, slide presentations, text-based documents, interactive online activities of various forms, audio files, video files, pod casts, wikis, live chat sessions, online discussions, live online presentations, video conferencing, and other methods (Lisa, 2013: 2). Still some other people are observing a “systemic lack of awareness” in appropriate uses of technology in the field of education (Desai, Hart & Richards, 2009: 329).

Nevertheless, the general use of online education brings ease and time effectiveness especially for the working people who have limited time. This issue of time becomes more crucial especially in the tourism industry where the employees of the industry have to deal with people and establish service 24 hours a day and all year the round. Therefore the necessity of online education has to be underlined within the tourism industry. Many corporations have executed online learning to meet training and professional development needs. In a research by Trierweiler and Rivera (2005), participants expected future growth of online learning within their respective businesses. Professionals are utilizing online education to meet continuing education needs. Personal interest classes are also available online which provide opportunities to participate in online courses for almost any topic (Lisa, 2013: 2). Turkish Airlines (THY) THY has on going education programs for the flight cabin and airport personnel and Managerial School-Leaders of Tomorrow. Especially for the staff with managerial position they preferred to use online education of Harvard Manage Mentor.

Professional cultures are usually regarded in educational research as a typical context for acquiring and applying knowledge and skills (Nistor, et al, 2013: 737). Srite et al. (2008) suggested that cultural values influence technology acceptance and use; in particular, individualism/collectivism<sup>a</sup> directly influences the use of computer-based learning systems.<sup>b</sup> Collectivist societies show eagerness to classroom tutoring whereas individualist societies would find online teaching more efficient. Downey, Wentling, Wentling, and Wadsworth (2005) evaluated the relationship between national culture and the usability of an online learning system and reported that individuals from cultures with low power distance indicators found the system more beneficial as compared to individuals from high power distance<sup>c</sup> cultures (quoted from Lee, 2010: 279). Nistor et al. (2013: 736) focused the fact that distance education is a geographical necessity for Turkey and even Downey et al (2005) believes that low power distance individuals prefer online education, or Srite et al. (2008) comments about collectivist cultures about technology and online education (and Turkey with score of 66 seems to be in high power distance group and Turkey, with a score of

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<sup>a</sup> Turkey, with a score of 37 is a collectivistic society. This means that the “We” is important, people belong to in-groups (families, clans or organisations) who look after each other in exchange for loyalty. Communication is indirect and the harmony of the group has to be maintained, open conflicts are avoided. The relationship has a moral base and this always has priority over task fulfillment. Time must be invested initially to establish a relationship of trust. (Hofstede Centre, <http://geert-hofstede.com/turkey.html>)

<sup>b</sup> Hofstede describes culture using five dimensions that were initially identified in a worldwide study among IBM staff (Hofstede 2001): Power distance index (PDI) represents the extent to which the less powerful members of a culture accept the unequal distribution of power within the same culture.

Uncertainty avoidance (UAI) deals with the intolerance for unstructured, i.e. novel, unknown, surprising or unusual situations that the members of a society show.

Individualism (IDV) (vs. collectivism) refers to the quality of ties between individuals, and to the degree of integration into cohesive groups within society.

Masculinity (MAS) (vs. femininity) is a preference for assertiveness, achievement and material success; contrasted with femininity, which emphasizes relationships, modesty and caring.

Long-term orientation (LTO) (vs. short-term orientation) comprises values such as thrift and perseverance, as opposed to respect for tradition, the fulfillment of social obligations and face-saving, which are representative of short-term orientation.

<sup>c</sup> Turkey scores high on this dimension (score of 66) which means that the following characterises the Turkish style: Dependent, hierarchical, superiors often inaccessible and the ideal boss is a father figure. Power is centralized and managers rely on their bosses and on rules. Employees expect to be told what to do. Control is expected and attitude towards managers is formal. Communication is indirect and the information flow is selective. The same structure can be observed in the family unit, where the father is a kind of patriarch to whom others submit. (Hofstede Centre, <http://geert-hofstede.com/turkey.html>)

37 is a collectivistic society), Turkish airlines have been attending online education programs especially for the managerial positions as well. Hence in this study HarvardManageMentor (HMM) programme was discussed whether it demonstrated harmony with THY Manager Trainee Program MTP that has used HMM in online education. Regardless of the cultural attributes, it has been observed that the programme has been implemented successfully. It should also be noted that the attributes that Hofstede had categorized, could undergo change and cause differences through years as well.

## 2. Outlook of Turkish Airlines

THY Turkish Airlines, Inc. is the national airline of Turkey, headquartered in Istanbul. It operates scheduled services to 11 international and 37 domestic cities (38 domestic airports), serving a total of 158 airports, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Americas (Zaim et al, 2013, p. 545).

The Turkish Airline industry has hitherto become one of the fastest growing industries in Turkish economy, after liberalization allowed airline companies to compete on scheduled flights. By becoming the first national airline company of Turkey, the Turkish Airlines has successfully created a different image on passengers for years. Therefore, the customers became loyal to the company. The other reasons for customers being loyal to the Turkish Airlines can be classified in terms of accuracy in schedules, quality of service, frequency of flights, behaviors of the staff, and safety and security provided (Aslan, 2007).

Within time, the Turkish Airlines has strengthened its position with its strategic plans that are prepared by its skillful and experienced staff during the reconfiguration process after the privatization. The Turkish Airlines appears to be far better in terms of management competence and experienced dexterous staff with respect to other firms (Torlak et al, 2011, p. 3404).

The Turkish Airlines for the twenty-first century was the following: regional leadership on long haul flights, opening up new international flight destinations, making İstanbul Atatürk Airport a hub, providing technical, educational and technological service to the airlines in the region and boosting its image abroad and joining an alliance system (Türk Hava Yolları, 2009, p.220).

The Turkish Airlines has also taken up a decision to cooperate with airline alliances in order to respond their customers' increasing demands as a result of proliferating number of passengers. Meanwhile the Turkish Airlines attended to "Star Alliance" groups in which Lufthansa took the lead in 2006. The business expects benefits from this cooperation such as flight facility to more destinations worldwide, income increment, cost decrement, information, technology and experience sharing, common brand utilization, opportunity to win mile points and spend it in other airlines that are the members of the alliance, connecting flights by ticket from only one airline, and transfer of the luggage to the destination point. All these benefits have strengthened the trust of customers who travels in domestic flights through the Turkish Airlines brand.

Furthermore it can be stated that Turkish Airlines has not only increased the number of international transit passengers, but also contributed to İstanbul's tourism potential. As Singapore and Dubai have developed into tourist destinations with the help of being aviation hubs, İstanbul may utilize from its tourism potential with the help of Turkish Airlines and Atatürk Airport (Lohmann et al, 2009).

Along with all the above, THY has been an official sponsor of Barcelona, Manchester United and Euro league Final 2010. In addition to the sponsorship deals, the involvement of Turkish Airlines contributes to Turkey's trade and tourism potential that influences mutual understanding between societies, hence improving economic and political relations.

THY aims at to become the leading European air carrier with a global network of coverage with its strict compliance with flight safety, reliability, product line, service quality and competitiveness (Zaim et al, 2013, p. 545). At the same time, the success of Turkish Airlines also contributes invisibly positively to the global image of Turkey.

## 2. Importance of Training in THY

With its growing market a loyal customer profile customer-oriented business has been one of the company policies of THY for a long period of time. Customer-oriented business policy, service friendliness feature, comfort

and reliability features have an important role on customers' choice and THY with its educational team tries to provide better and sound service with higher quality focusing on customer with well-trained staff and managers.

THY has ongoing education programs for the flight cabin and airport personnel. In addition to flight training in 2012 THY started its Managerial School-Leaders of Tomorrow. The education of managers is as important as the education of the flight cabin. With training programs the managers will have the initiative and working skills which would improve the flight cabin's training skills as well. According to Karasar and Öztürk (2014), the Managerial School intends to provide high or medium level managers and potential managerial candidates with equipment and qualifications that the Turkish Airlines might need as a company. For this purpose, twelve in class sessions and ten in conferences are given to the leadership program students.

The major target of a manager is to use company resources efficiently. And a successful manager directs resources in order to achieve best record in organizational goals (Karagülle, 2012, p. 93). One of these resources is the employees and one of these goals is to improve the skills of the employees that the manager works with.

Table 1 Management Trainee Program (MTP) of THY

| Personality Traits               | Personal Skills   | Strategic View             | Operational Skills                       | Human Resource Management                       |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--|---|
| Humanism                         | Educational background  | Seeing the big picture     | Take action                              | Management of diversities                       |
| Strong moral values              | Work experience   | Analysis and synthesis     | Fast decision making                     | Understanding of people's skills and potentials |
| Taking initiatives               | Competence in information technologies                            | Visionary                  | Being innovative/Adoption to changes     | Being a good listener                           |
| Self-assessment (Self-criticism) | Being a good rhetorician  | Prioritizing               | Being goal oriented                      | Setting as an example/ Being inspirational      |
| Dedication                       | Fast learning-Speed reading                                       | Cause- effect relationship | Effective time management                | Being persuasive/motivator                      |
| Sense of justice                 | Being able to establish organizational & communicational networks | Planning                   | Division of authority and responsibility | Being open and honest in relationships          |

Note. From "İşletmelerde Yönetici Adayı Havuzu Yöntemiyle, Yönetici Adaylarının Belirlenmesi (THY Uygulaması)", by THY, 2013, *Electronic Journal of Vocational Colleges*, 43.

### 3. Online Education of THY

Owing to the immense amount of knowledge culminated in the first decade of 21st century and the increasing demand for education in society, traditional educational institutions have become incapable of meeting this demand. Due to this educational cleavage, the notion of "distance learning" has occurred as a substitute to traditional education (Erginöz, 2013, p. 18).

Digital technologies entering the economic field in recent decades have accelerated the process of economic globalization and the relaxation of laws relating to terms of employment in such a way that companies have found themselves compelled to transform their productive and organizational processes (Busquets and Argüelles, 2014, p. 68).

According to Cannings & Talley (2002), the Internet and multimedia, including the non-linear integration of video, audio, text, and graphics can provide a rich environment for case studies which promote the mental

construction of knowledge about integrating technology into the curriculum. Consequently, e-learning also brings a substantial reduction in training costs, makes knowledge easier and integrates workers into the company (Clarke, Lewis, Cole, & Ringrose, 2005).

For the purpose of e-learning the Turkish Airlines purchased the usage rights of Harvard ManageMentor (HMM). HMM is a web-based distant education program, for almost a thousand managerial candidates, in cooperation with Harvard University. ManageMentor, which was initiated by Harvard University, is one of the most famous and successful programs through which the managerial candidates receive web-based distant education. Harvard ManageMentor online offerings are made available to all leaders. Leaders are encouraged to use tools and exercises from the system for in-service and staff training sessions. All leader tools and resources are made available online for enhanced usability and easy access (Bradley et al, 2008: p. 28).

This program, which is supposed to be used by more than five million people since the day it has been launched, consists of 44 modules. Harvard ManageMentor is competent enough to provide a secure background for the future managers with its interface that enables sharing seminars of the world leaders, visual presentations, comments of the users. (Karasar & Öztürk, 2014, p. 115) IATA has incorporated Harvard ManageMentor's 44 e-learning modules into its training curriculum as well. (Harvard Business, 2013)

These module groups are Managing Yourself, Managing Others and Managing the Business. Harvard ManageMentor anticipates improving the skills of the trainee managers and other users in six phases. In the first phase, key points of the subject and auxiliary materials are presented. Then, the learning capacity is determined by using taught concepts that would present real scenarios and tests applicable to the taught concepts. The tips on how the taught concepts should be applied to the work environment are shared with the user. The users can share information on their experiences or acquire knowledge with the Harvard ManageMentor community (Karasar & Öztürk, 2014, p. 116).

Table 2. Harvard ManageMentor Program

| Managing Yourself       | Managing Others        | Managing the Business     |
|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Career Management       | Change Management      | Budgeting                 |
| Delegating              | Coaching               | Business Case Development |
| Goal Setting            | Developing Employees   | Business Plan Development |
| Managing Upward         | Difficult Interactions | Crisis Management         |
| Meeting Management      | Dismissing an Employee | Customer Focus            |
| New Manager Transitions | Feedback Essentials    | Decision Making           |
| Presentation Skills     | Global Collaboration   | Diversity                 |
| Stress Management       | Hiring                 | Ethics at Work            |
| Time Management         | Laying off Employees   | Finance Essentials        |
| Writing Skills          | Leading & Motivating   | Innovation & Creativity   |
|                         | Performance Appraisals | Innovation Implementation |
|                         | Persuading Others      | Marketing Essentials      |
|                         | Retaining Employees    | Negotiating               |
|                         | Team Leadership        | Performance Measurement   |
|                         | Virtual Teams          | Process Improvement       |
|                         |                        | Project Management        |
|                         |                        | Strategic Thinking        |
|                         |                        | Strategy Execution        |

Note. From Harvard ManageMentor, <http://www.proactivknowledge.com/wp-content/uploads/Harvard-ManageMentor.pdf> & From "İşletmelerde Yönetici Adayı Havuzu Yöntemiyle, Yönetici Adaylarının Belirlenmesi (THY Uygulaması)", by THY, 2013, Electronic Journal of Vocational Colleges, 43

#### 4. Evaluation of HMM & Concluding Remarks

Managing yourself attributes of HMM seem to be in harmony with THY Manager Trainee Program MTP with especially personal skills and personality traits. Especially presentation skills module help the trainees to improve their communication skills.

The issues that are included in the “Managing Others Section” match with the Human Resources target of MTP. Managing the business section is composed of challenging topics like diversity which can be interpreted under Human resources of MTP.

The educational goals of MTP are supported by HMM and it provides a complete manager-training program for the company. The Turkish Airlines gives the lead to all other airlines in Turkey by setting an instructive example not only for the aviation sector but also for other, sectors as well through its usage of Harvard ManageMentor.

Analysis and synthesis, prioritizing, visionary topics could be considered in the Managing the Business Group Module whereas Modules of Strategic Thinking and Strategy Execution can directly be grouped under Strategic View of MTP. In the Table 3 all the target modules have been grouped according to the HMM’s three main groups.

Table 3 Matching attributes of MTP with HMM

| Managing Yourself   | Managing Others                                 | Managing the Business                    |
|---|---|--|
| Humanism  | Management of Diversities                       | Seeing the big picture                   |
| Strong moral values   | Understanding of people’s skills and potentials | Analysis and Synthesis                   |
| Taking initiatives  | Being a good listener                           | Visionary                                |
| Self-assessment (Self-criticism)                                  | Setting as an example/ Being inspirational      | Prioritizing                             |
| Dedication  | Being persuasive/motivator                      | Cause- effect relationship               |
| Sense of justice  | Being open and honest in relationships          | Planning                                 |
| Educational background  |   | Take action                              |
| Work Experience   |   | Fast decision making                     |
| Competence in information technologies                            |   | Being innovative/Adoption to changes     |
| Being a good rhetorician  |   | Being goal oriented                      |
| Fast learning-Speed reading                                       |   | Effective time management                |
| Being able to establish organizational & Communicational networks |   | Division of authority and responsibility |

Note. From Harvard ManageMentor, <http://www.proactivknowledge.com/wp-content/uploads/Harvard-ManageMentor.pdf>

As regards to the content analysis, it can be commented that HarvardManage Mentor supports the educational priorities of THY and e-learning programs causes time saving and efficiency. THY educational goals are in harmony with HMM. As the e-learning program has also provided time saving and efficiency for the staff who has time restrictions, Turkish Airlines initially sets a noteworthy example for the other airlines and may lead its competitors in use of educational programs, e-learning programs like HarvardManage Mentor.

For the improvement of this study, for the next research, the staff of THY, whom has been trained under HarvardManage Mentor, could be polled by online surveys. Based on surveys filled out, the results can be highlighted and used for further discussion and probings. The results can also be shared by THY directors so that they are aware of their personnel inclinations and expectations from the online educational programs and from their organization as well.

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