CHAPTER 7     CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction to Conclusions and Recommendations

The main part of this chapter is a report of the conclusions which have been drawn from the research. These are related to the planned Research Outcomes (p.75), to the existing theories and frameworks noted in the Literature Review and finally to the nature of the population investigated - senior airline executives.

The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research and for practitioners, specifically for the population under investigation.

Conclusions

Conclusions regarding stated Research Outcomes

For clarity the specific intended Research Outcomes have been restated, in italicised text, exactly as given on p.75.

As some of these Research Outcomes are related to sectoral differences within the airline industry, it is important to set them in the context of how the airline executives themselves perceive sectoral differences. As reported on p.215, questionnaire respondents only identified themselves as clearly working for scheduled carriers or charter operators, failing to identify themselves, for example, as working for passenger carriers. There was clear anecdotal evidence from interviewees that even the traditional distinction within the industry between scheduled and charter carriers has become blurred, the larger charter operators in particular running in fact scheduled services; they tend to see any distinction between themselves and the traditional scheduled carriers solely in terms of the way that tickets are sold and not between the ways they operate.

Any sectoral differences reported below are therefore as a result of analysis of the data rather than a result of differences actually perceived within the industry.
ROI To establish whether senior airline executives share a generalised descriptive definition of ‘success’ and ‘failure’, seeking any different definitions that might be applicable in different sectors.

Senior airline executives hold a variety of views of what constitutes ‘success’ and ‘failure’. Clearly a definition which includes financial considerations is held by all but two of the thirty executives interviewed. Of the twenty-six financial definitions elicited during the causal mapping exercises, twenty-two were couched in generalised terms such as ‘profitability’ or ‘financial success’, with only three definitions referring to objective financial measures, one of which was ‘Creating Value’ (as opposed to the measure of Added Value) and two referred to Return on Investment (one definition was given as ‘Adequate Capital’).

If the sine qua non of safety is ignored, definitions including operational factors were not frequently mentioned. Exactly half the respondents included marketing definitions, but only three included HRM definitions. Seven interviewees offered definitions that were strategic.

Financial definitions were offered, but sixteen of the twenty-six interviewees who produced causal maps (61.5%) offered non-financial definitions. Definitions of ‘success’ are thus broader than simply financial definitions, and are not based on objective financial measures.

Definitions of ‘failure’ obviously include the sine qua non of bankruptcy, but tended to look beyond financial parameters. Although sixteen interviewees of the twenty-six (53.3%) offered financial definitions including bankruptcy, twenty-six (86.7%) offered non-financial ones, and 24% of all definitions referred to a marketing parameter, compared with 23% which were financial. Approximately 14% were operational and 10% were HRM-based. Strategic definitions (20%) were more prevalent than with definitions of success (13%).

Executives thus have broader definitions of ‘failure’ than they do for ‘success’.

The breadth of definitions means that one cannot establish a single definition of either ‘success’ or ‘failure’ which is both definitive and descriptive, other than noting that
such a definition if purely financial would be inadequate. With respect to any sectoral definitions, it must be noted that executives showed some variance in their views of the causes of success. Evidence for this comes from interviewees’ answers to questions of their views on technical factors (p.207). While all thirty interviewees gave ratings for the importance of having the right aircraft, aircrew, groundcrew and administration, eight declined to give a rating for the right routes and ten for the right marketing. Both groups tended to work for charter airlines, and those who declined tended to point out that these two factors were not within the control of the airline. However, others who also worked for charter airlines were prepared to give ratings, but it was not possible to determine whether they were answering from a generalised perspective or from a personal yet charter perspective.

In summary, executives share a definition of ‘success’ which includes a financial definition couched in terms of profit or simply ‘financial success’. The definition typically includes at least one non-financial factor, tending in order of frequency to be marketing, operational or strategic, but rarely HRM. Ryanair and Easyjet are seen as the exemplars of ‘success’.

Executives hold wider views on a definition of ‘failure’ but again see it in a context which is much broader than simply financial. They do not hold any consistent views of which current airlines might be exemplars of potential failure.

**RO2** To identify if and how industry executive views of which airlines are successful differ from an objective measure of success in terms of operational measures and added value and other financial measures.

This research objective was specifically reported in Table 38, and discussed in the section on Comparison with Objective Measures (p.170). It is concluded, using Spearman r, coefficients to investigate possible correlations between the rankings of perceptions of ‘success’ and a wide range of objective operational and financial measures, that there is little correlation. The only objective measure which showed a significant level of correlation was Tonne Kilometres Flown, an operational measure of the scale of an airline’s operations, and even in this case r, was low at 0.346 at 95% confidence. Since financial data is easily accessible from the CAA ERG website and
almost all executives defined ‘success’ in terms of financial factors, there are two possible causes for this low correlation: either executives do not access the data or they base their judgements more strongly on the non-financial factors in their definitions of ‘success’.

It should be noted that the evidence from interviews highlighted specific ambivalences with respect to ‘success’ and ‘failure’ when considering British Midland, Easyjet, Go and Airtours International. There was a tendency to perceive the first three as both a ‘success’ and as a potential ‘failure’. It is suggested that executives’ views of airlines as examples of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ are based not only on the past evidence in the form of objective measures but also on their projections of future performance drawn from their knowledge of the industry.

The ambivalent reporting confirms the view of the airline industry as one in which the difference between ‘success’ and ‘failure’ is grounded in the fact that small strategic changes (e.g. the decision whether to operate on a particular route or not) lead to large differences in performance.

RO3 To identify whether executives in different sectors of the airline industry share a view of what constitutes ‘success’ and ‘failure’.

Definitions from executives from the different sectors fitted the general patterns of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ described under RO1. For the reasons noted above in the introduction to this section and under RO1, sectoral analysis proved problematic. Notwithstanding the fact that executives themselves did not define themselves as working in distinct sectors, variety was found in the attribution of the causes of ‘success’ rather than in its definition.

Since sectors of the airline industry are delineated by the way they operate (e.g. charter operators v. scheduled carriers), operational factors might have been reported differently, but differences were restricted to a small number of factors which were distinctly different in operational terms, in particular Schedules/Slots and Routes. Other such factors (e.g. Punctuality and Quality/Reliability) showed little difference.
It was found that executives working for larger airlines were more likely to attribute 'success' to Planning/Strategy and Controlling Costs factors than those who worked for smaller airlines.

**RO4** To establish an airline industry 'recipe' for the perceived causes of 'success', the term 'recipe' being used in a therefore much more restricted way than Spender's usage (see page 77).

The perceived causes of 'success' have been analysed from three sets of data and reported as Causes of Success in Chapter 6 (p.175).

It is concluded that an airline 'recipe' for the causes of 'success' includes a wide variety of functional factors, with relatively few externalities seen as contributing to success.

Key elements, drawn from the range of analyses of cause of 'success' factors, are:

- **Financial**: Controlling costs; Generating revenue
- **Marketing**: Understanding the market; the Product offered; Public image
- **Operational**: Utilisation and yield management; Choice of aircraft
- **HRM**: Selection and recruitment; Training
- **Strategic**: Leadership

Table 41 provides evidence regarding the contribution of the root causes of success in an industry recipe. Key root causes, drawn from the single analysis of the number of tail concepts in causal maps, are, in the order of frequency reported:

- **HRM** Selection & Recruitment
- **Externalities**
- **Strategic** Procedures & Processes
- **Financial** Controlling Costs
- **Marketing** Product Offer
- **Strategic** Planning & Strategy
- **Strategic** Leadership

Selection & Recruitment, Controlling Costs and Product Offer are repeated from the previous list, but Externalities, Procedures & Processes, Planning & Strategy and Leadership are additions to the success 'recipe'. In particular the importance of Selection & Recruitment and Externalities should be noted at this root level.
Within causal maps it was found that Financial factors were seen more frequently as being influenced by other factors, whereas HRM factors were seen more frequently as influencing other factors.

There is evidence for the stereotyping of the perceived cause of individual airlines’ success - industry ‘mini-recipes’ - and this was discussed above under Stereotyping of Causes (p.208). In particular, Easyjet and Ryanair were perceived as ‘aggressive’ and ‘ruthless’ in their application of a ‘simple business model’. These terms were not used about other airlines.

**RO5 To investigate the significance of industry-specific factors in the attribution of the causes of ‘success’**.

Industry-specific factors fall into two categories - those that derive directly from operations (the operational or technical factors) and those that derive from other sources (for example, different forms of marketing resulting from vertical integration with tour operators).

Technical factors were analysed on p.207. The evidence suggests that, while operational factors are generally considered important when asked about in isolation (during the interviews), the importance of choosing the right aircraft and the right routes is diminished when the factors are analysed in the broader context of causal maps. As suggested in that section, there are two possible explanations for this - either an assumption that they are carried out effectively, or the implications of the individual’s chain of causality are not appreciated (the respondent acknowledges the importance of operational factors when asked directly about them, but does not appreciate the high level of centrality in his/her causal map). Since there was no evidence to support the former explanation from the qualitative part of the interviews, the latter appears more likely.

**RO6 To investigate the existence of linkages between executives’ perceptions of ‘success’ and their perceptions of the causes of ‘success’**.

The results of the mapping exercises produced a wide variety of causal maps and the issues of aggregation or congregation have been noted. The evidence suggests that
perceived causation at a detailed level is highly individual and not indicative of any one specific. All respondents drew from a variety of functional causes of success (see p.197).

However, the investigation of the causal chains and in particular the overviews obtained did provide evidence regarding the perception of HRM factors.

The various overviews can be interpreted as a series which shows depth of abstraction with respect to ‘success’, its causes and their perception:

- definition of ‘success’ in the abstract (p.159);
- single most important cause of ‘success’ in the abstract (p.175);
- causes of ‘success’ within chains of causation (p.202 and p.192);
- root causes (tail factors) of ‘success’ (p.180).

While reporting of the various functional factors varies across the four overviews, some patterns were detected in the frequency of reporting (see Table 60).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fin</th>
<th>Op</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>HRM</th>
<th>Strat</th>
<th>Extern</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition of ‘success’ in abstract</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single most important cause of ‘success’ in abstract</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>25.6</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes of ‘success’ within chains of causation</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root causes of ‘success’</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Key: Fin = Financial; Op = Operational; Mark = Marketing; Strat = Strategic; Extern = Externalities

Table 60  Percentage frequency of factors at various levels

While success and its causes can be seen as being strongly influenced by financial factors, the influence became less and less pronounced at the deeper levels. Conversely, HRM factors became much more frequently reported at deeper levels, as did externalities and other factors (the 1.6% at the level of definitions of ‘success’ in abstract relates to the uncoded-in-other-categories definition of success as ‘success’).

This suggests that the importance of HRM factors may not be as apparent to airline
executives as the importance of other functional factors even though they are highly important when viewed in terms of their influence as root causes. The argument of Marlow (1984) that management development and training are key factors to growth is thus supported, but only at deeper levels of analysis. This issue of HRM factors and their role in achieving success is discussed below in terms of further research and recommendations.

**RO7** To establish whether a typology of airline executives’ views of the causes of ‘success’ exists by looking for patterns in the individuals’ causal maps.

Analysis of individual maps was conducted above (see p.204) to investigate whether it was possible to establish groups of maps indicating stereotypical views. Some evidence was found of such groups, based on which functional factor was the most dominant in the individuals’ perception of the causes of success, and is discussed in the pages following p.204. Of the findings reported there, of particular note are:

- Respondents whose main functional factors are Financial or Operational tend to see little influence by HRM factors.
- Respondents whose main functional factors are HRM tend to take varying views about the influence of other functional factors.
- Respondents in other areas see other functional factors as having a variety of influences.
- Externalities are seen as having only a very minor influence on the causation of ‘success’ by all respondents.

There is insufficient evidence to identify clear and discrete classes of stereotypical views on the causes of ‘success’ among the senior airline executives interviewed. However the evidence reported above (p.204) shows that some patterns exist in the way they see the various factors influencing the causation of ‘success’. As well as this separation between those with dominance of financial factors and those with dominance of operational factors on the one hand and those with dominance of HRM factors on the other, there is also a separation between those who see success as marketing-driven and those who see it as strategy-driven.
Conclusions re Existing Theory

1. Strategy Theory

The following section responds to the strategic issues highlighted in the Conclusions of the Strategy Literature Review (p.39).

This research provides answers to the two questions generally unasked by generic strategists:

- what do we presume about whether it is worth getting there?
- how will we know when we have got there?

The underlying presumptions on the definitions of ‘success’ as perceived by senior airline executives have been established and reported in Chapter 5. They extend beyond the basic presumption of profitability and other financial concepts to include marketing, operational, strategic and even HRM definitions.

How airline executives ‘know when they have got there’, i.e. how they measure success, has been discussed on p.170 in a review of the correlation between objective measures and the executives’ perceptions of success in terms of ‘successful airlines’, where it emerged that Tonne Kilometres Flown proved the only measure with a significant correlation (Spearman $r$, of 0.346). This measure, an indicator of scale of operation, is one which can be sensed by observation within the industry and is a contributor to Public Image, a ‘success’ factor that was reported highly. The fact that Tonne Kilometres Flown represents the highest correlation of an objective measure with perceptions of success suggests that airline executives still see their strategic objective in terms of growth (Greiner, 1972; Stacey, 1973) rather than in terms of profit or added value, which their financial backers would wish. Tonne Kilometres Flown is also the most tangible indicator of Survival, a definition of Success by several interviewees. Again, the fact that airline executives use this as a definition of success contrasts with the strategic objectives of their financial backers, although it is a view of success that might be shared by the rest of the airline’s staff.
While Added Value showed negligible correlation (Spearman $r_s$ of 0.133), executives’ perceptions correlate more closely with a simpler financial measure, Profit ($r_s = 0.248$), (although neither result is significant), which does align with the priorities of financial backers.

The principle of Bounded Rationality was found to hold among the population surveyed. Although high pay emerged as one of the factors contributing to success, it did not hold the key place that it would hold as a motivator in a view of rationality that was unbounded.

The use of growth as a measure of success was found to be unrealistic in an industry whose members did not show clear and consistent patterns of growth, either operationally or financially. No evidence was found in the airline industry to support the view of Boxall and Steenveld (1999) that particular HRM strategies produce consistent success/failure outcomes.

While respondents tended to see themselves as members of a team, with 32 references to ‘team’ in 30 interviews, the research added to the body of knowledge regarding individual members of ‘Top Teams’ rather than regarding ‘Top Teams’ per se.

As noted in the Literature Review conclusions, there has been little to date in the literature with respect to the deeper causes of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ or to the role of individuals within Top Teams. This thesis has produced the conclusions given in the preceding section on these deeper causes as perceived by individual members of Top Teams.

2. Attribution Theory

The Conclusions of the Attribution Literature Review (p.50) are used as a basis for the following conclusions.

The three core sources of attributional error have been recognised and steps taken in the methodology to avoid them - the development of separate data sets for ‘actor’ and ‘observer’ roles to allow their influence to be detected.
Senior airline executives attribute success in different ways, depending on whether they are assessing their own airline (p.212), assessing airlines they identify as successful (pp.211-213) or considering success in the abstract (p.175).

In assessing their own airlines and building causal maps for ‘success’ there was very strong evidence of what Brown and Rogers (1991) described as an over-emphasis on their own contribution, an example of the self-serving bias. Only eight of the twenty-six interviewees included Externalities in their causal maps, and there was not a single identification of an Externality as the single most important cause of ‘success’ in the abstract. Executives were not uncritical in assessing the success of their own airlines, producing a mean score of 3.83 on a Lickert scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). They were reluctant to give ratings higher than 4, however, or lower than 3.

They tended to see leadership as more significant when assessing successful airlines and identified financial factors as most important, particularly controlling costs, when reviewing the causes of the success of their nomination as ‘most successful airline ever’.

Externalities were rarely attributed as the causes of success, in spite of the fact that airlines are subject to the all-pervading attentions of external regulators as well as to more general externalities such as the economic climate. Luck was not seen as a significant factor in the causation of success, with only 10 unsolicited mentions in the thirty interviews, and not a single appearance in a causal map. This suggests that senior airline executives see themselves as having a high level of control of their own airlines’ success or failure.

The conclusions with respect to Research Outcomes 4 to 7 help to fill the gap in the literature regarding attribution within specific industries. They develop an approach which investigates hierarchies of causation and hence attribution, an approach not generally noted elsewhere.

3. **Airline Industry Theory**

This section is related to the Conclusions of the Airline Industry Review (p.14).
Current issues which have been the focus of both academic and journalistic interest did not feature in interviewees’ responses - 2 mentions of deregulation or liberalisation, and 10 references to the formation of alliances.

This research has built on the knowledge of airline strategy, an area which began to open up with the work of O’Reilly (1995a; 1995b) and Streffens (1995). Its findings are compatible with some of those of Kangis and O’Reilly (1998), reported on p.53, who investigated the strategic responses of airlines to the increased competitive pressures arising from deregulation. In particular they concluded that lower wage costs and superior marketing were strengths perceived in competitors, consistent with the argument of Doganis (2001) on strategies needed by airlines. These perceptions of the causes of Ryanair’s and EasyJet’s success certainly featured in the assessments of those interviewed by this author. There was however no evidence to support their finding that ‘major new competitors are perceived as being independent and larger than established airlines’ (Kangis and O’Reilly, 1998, p.189). Indeed, the entry of Go, as a subsidiary of British Airways, Buzz, a subsidiary of KLM, and BMI baby, a subsidiary of British Midland, would mitigate against any current perceptions of independence, and would explain the fact that in the current research cost leadership remained a factor associated with Ryanair and Easyjet rather than with these three more recent additions to the low cost/low price sector.

While the use of financial data by airline executives was not directly investigated, there is strong evidence that it does not feature strongly in shaping their perceptions of success or its causes. Even the strongest correlation between objective measures of financial performance and perceived success was with Turnover, which is not itself a derived function but a direct financial measure, and was not found to be significant. The lack of mention of financial objective measures in interviews or in causal maps suggests that executives make relatively little use of these measures. This is particularly surprising when it is considered that a) the modes of reported (by questionnaire respondents) financial training and financial experience were 5 and 5 respectively on the standard Lickert scale of 1 to 5 used, and b) means were 3.43 and 3.24 respectively, in each case the second highest values for any business function (see Table 59).
The research helps to explain some of the recent developments in the UK and Irish airline industry outlined on p. 61:

1. A number of mergers or take-overs, e.g. the emergence of JMC through Thomas Cook’s purchase of Caledonian and Flying Colours; the take-over of Go by Easyjet; the merger of Air Foyle and HeavyLift.

Where mergers and take-overs originate from external stakeholders such as owners or banks rather than industry-active board members, a disparity of strategic vision can be identified. Whereas external stakeholders will be concerned with financial objectives and will make decisions on financial data, past and current, it has been identified that airline executives see ‘success’ from a broader perspective and are likely to be more focused on internal future prospects rather than simply on past and current financial data.

2. The desire of larger players to sell off smaller operations, e.g. the troubled relationship between KLM uk and its parent KLM; the sale of Go by British Airways; the management buy-out of Maersk Air to form Duo.

Again, parent companies are more clearly focused on objective measures of financial success. The management buy-outs of Go and Duo reflect the continuing optimism for future success based on broader definitions of ‘success’.

3. On the other hand, the phenomenon of some larger carriers setting up subsidiary low-cost operations, e.g. MyTravel’s MyTravel Lite; British Midland’s BMI baby.

The evidence from the number of nominations of Ryanair and Easyjet as the most successful airline and the clear admiration for their successful business model in particular have inspired larger carriers to try and repeat this success by setting up subsidiaries using the same business model.

4. The rebranding of airlines, e.g. Airtours International as MyTravel; British Midland as BMI; Heavylift Cargo as HC Airlines; Sabre Airways as Excel Airways.

The high significance which airline executives place on Public Image indicated a high appreciation of the brand awareness shown by the general public. It should be noted
however that airline executives place much less emphasis on the importance of Market Research, which would suggest that rebrandings are not based on empirical evidence that a rebranding is needed.

5. Attempts by new entrants to enter the market, e.g. Astraeus; Blue Fox.

In the case of Blue Fox, a new variant of the much admired business model of Ryanair and Easyjet is planned. Again however the planned airline and business model may not be supported by empirical market research.

6. Airline failures, e.g. AB Airlines; Debonair; Gill Airways.

In all three cases the airlines had been trading at a loss for some time before their bankers refused to continue supporting them. As noted in points 1 and 2 above, there was a disparity between the perceptions of ‘success’ held by the banks and by the Boards of the airlines, the disparity growing until it was unacceptable to the supporting banks.

7. The emergence of Easyjet and Ryanair as the dominant players in the low-costs sector.

Although the research identifies this emergence and the reasons that executives from other airlines attribute this success to, it does not produce, or attempt to produce, objective reasons for their success. It does however contribute to the explanation of the disappearance of Go and Buzz as significant direct competitors as stated above, which increased the dominance of Easyjet and Ryanair in this sector.

**Limitations of the Study**

**Data**

Although the number of interviewees (30) and questionnaire respondents (50) was reasonable as a percentage of the population (24.1% combined), the numbers were small in absolute terms. This was a problem when analysis by sectors was made. For example, only the number of questionnaires executives working for scheduled carriers and charter operators reached twenty.
Difficulties with finding Irish financial and operational data that was compatible with UK data have been discussed. This proved a limitation with respect to the consideration of Ryanair and to a lesser extent Aer Lingus, which was not mentioned as frequently as Ryanair. To have restricted the surveys to UK airlines would not have made sense given the repeated mention of Ryanair by UK respondents.

Interviews were restricted to UK executives on financial grounds. Irish executives accounted for 14.7% of the population.

The extent of a longitudinal dimension for UK operational and financial data was restricted by that which was available from the CAA. This however covered the period identified as the context of the survey.

**Methodology and Methods**

The problem of sample size discussed above implies a limitation with the methods chosen. However, to explore individuals’ perceptions there is no alternative to surveying.

The research is, by design, exploratory. Further research, discussed below, will have to address the issues of population and thus sample size.

Questionnaires were administered postally and respondents completed them themselves. Misunderstanding of questions may have affected validity, one specific example having been noted (p.152). Executives from five airlines indicated in response to either the letter requesting an interview or the postal questionnaire that it was not company policy to help in academic research or that no executives would be able to provide help because of other commitments. However, of these five, executives of three did in fact return questionnaires and one senior executive granted an interview.

The research has been restricted to current perceptions and there may therefore be an issue of the stability of these perceptions over time.
Generalisability

The conclusions are based on the perceptions of eighty executives in one industry. As well as possible limitations because of sample size discussed above, the generalisability of the findings depends on how typical the airline industry is. This can be to some extent assessed by considering the nature of the industry. This was set out in Chapter 1 (see p.2).

The nearest example of an industry with similar characteristics is the private-sector railway industry created in the UK by the privatisation of British Rail. In particular, the form of competition is defined by the available routes, which in turn are defined by the infrastructure. There is intense regulation of routes, operators, personnel and safety issues by a state body, the Strategic Rail Authority. Other forms of transport also have similar characteristics, and it might therefore be expected that the conclusions of this research may be applicable to them.

Beyond transport, few industries share these characteristics, with the arguable exception of private sector health care, and generalisation should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that senior airline executives did not attribute the causes of success to any great extent to externalities, so the possibility of the findings being widely generalisable cannot be ruled out, and deserves further investigation.

Recommendations

Investigating Human Resources Management in the Airline Industry

The research has demonstrated that HRM within the airline industry is handled in a different way from the business functions of Marketing, Finance and Operations. It is either handled in a more integrated way, with little perception that it needs a focus of representation at board level, or its importance is under-estimated. If it is handled in a more integrated way, there is no evidence from the current research to show the degree of integration within different departments in an airline. This offers an interesting field for further investigation.
Further research needs to be at the departmental level, with a survey of the practices and perceptions of middle managers across airlines, determining the degree to which they either integrate or ignore the HRM function. With this much larger population both interviews and questionnaires will be less problematic in terms of achieving adequate samples. Possible differences between sectors and between functions - for example, do airline marketing managers at middle-management level handle HRM differently from their finance or operations colleagues? - should be investigated.

**Recommendations for Practitioners**

The research already conducted shows the handling of HRM to be different from the way that other business functions are handled at the level of the senior executive. Senior executives may wish to reflect on the lack of representation of HRM at board level, and consider whether the present low level of representation is desirable given the importance they perceive in the contribution of Pay & Conditions and Training in particular among HRM factors to success.