

Adaptation and Resilience Strategies to Cope with Pandemics: Case Study of Redundant Workers in the Fiji Airline Industry.

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about devastating effects all over the world and locally in Fiji as well. It severely affected various sectors of the Fiji economy, particularly the tourism industry, the airline industry included. Resulting in the laid-off of workers in various sectors. However, one redundancy story that stood out from the rest was that of Fiji Airways, which is obviously at the forefront of Fiji's tourism industry. The unexpected and unilateral laid-off of close to 800 staff of the Fiji Airways (more than half of its workforce) came as a shock to the air travelling stakeholders and to the public at large. The majority of the redundant employees were caught off-guard because very few of them could have reliably predicted the eventual scenario. Some short-term financial relief were available, including withdrawals from their FNPF (superannuation) savings, and support from relatives and friends. However, in many cases, this was insufficient to sustain employees and their families in the long run. This was aggravated by the uncertainty of not knowing when the COVID pandemic would end. Therefore, alternative income sources became crucial for their survival. An investigation of how these workers adapted and coped following the forced redundancy is critical for understanding how qualified, well-paid workers with a strong sense of job security survived during and after the pandemic. The main objective of this study is *to investigate adaptation and resilience strategies that workers used to cope with redundancies from COVID-19 including: (i) alternative employment and/or other income sources; (ii) capacity of airline workers with specialized skills to undertake income diversification; (iii) relevant skill gaps and strategies that facilitate preparedness for external shocks; and (iv) any significant differences by demographic factors i.e., gender, age, etc.* An online survey with the members of the Fiji Flight Attendants Trade Union (FFATU) redundant members was conducted. The study is qualitative in nature with some basic quantitative analysis. The findings were quite interesting.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic, Airline Industry, Fiji Airways, redundancy, adaptation & resilience strategies.

1.0 Introduction:

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about devastating effects all over the world and in Fiji as well. It severely affected various sectors of the Fiji economy, particularly the tourism industry, the airline industry included. According to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, the tourism industry contributed about 40% of Fiji's GDP pre-COVID¹. The pandemic caused the loss of livelihoods resulting in significant socio-economic impacts. Approximately, 115,000 lost their jobs in various sectors, representing a third of Fiji's workforce².

One redundancy story that stood out from the rest was that of Fiji Airways, which obviously is critically positioned at the forefront of Fiji's tourism industry. The unexpected and unilateral redundancy of close to 800 airline staff (more than half of its workforce) came as a shock to the air travelling people, other stakeholders and just the public at large, both in Fiji and abroad. It was a widely publicized redundancy story of the pandemic in Fiji. The staff who were laid off included pilots, line managers, engineers, and cabin crews³. Many of them were well-qualified, highly paid, or both. In addition, many staff had been employed by the airline for a long time and their job security provided comfort and assurance of reliable income. Most of the redundant employees were caught off-guard because very few of them could have reliably predicted the eventual scenario. Some short-term financial relief were available, including withdrawals from their FNPF (superannuation) savings, and support from relatives and friends. However, in many cases, this was insufficient to sustain employees and their families in the long run. This was aggravated by the uncertainty of not knowing when the COVID pandemic would end. Therefore, alternative income sources became crucial for their survival.

An investigation of how these workers adapted and coped following the forced redundancy is critical for understanding how qualified, well-paid workers with a strong sense of job security survived during and after the pandemic.

Research questions (RQ)

The research questions for this study:

RQ1: What are the adaptive and resilience strategies used by redundant workers to access alternative income sources in a small developing state (SIDS) such as Fiji?

¹ <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/statistics/tourism-and-migration-statistics/tourismearnings-fjd-million26.html>

² https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/images/documents/Covid_19/COVID19_Business_Impact_in_Fiji.pdf

³ <https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/fiji-government-to-support-troubled-national-airline>

RQ2: To what extent do workers' experience, formal qualifications, and training (in-house or otherwise), assist in securing alternative income sources in other industries or entrepreneurial opportunities (micro & small businesses)?

RQ3: Will the redundant employees return to the same company or industry when conditions improve and whether this decision is affected by the establishment of secure, alternative income sources?

Research objectives (RO)

The main objective of this study is *to investigate adaptation and resilience strategies that workers used to cope with redundancies from COVID-19 including:*

RO1: alternative employment and/or other income sources.

RO2: capacity of airline workers with specialized skills to undertake income diversification.

RO3: relevant skill gaps and strategies that facilitate preparedness for external shocks.

RO4: any significant differences by demographic factors i.e., gender, age, etc

This paper begins with a review of the literature, then on to the discussion of the methodology used in the study, the discussion of the findings follows, before the conclusive remarks combined with practical implications, limitations of this research and research gaps for future studies.

2.0 Literature Review

The impact of pandemics on the global airline industry

The airline industry is a key player in the hospitality and tourism industry, the sector that is most vulnerable and suffered the most not only during COVID-19 (see Kim, & Wang (2021), Song, Yeon, & Lee (2021)) but also during previous similar global pandemics to name a few such as the Spanish Flu, Swine Flu, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Zika Virus and Ebola (Huang et al. (2020) as cited in Dayour & Adam (2020)). These events negatively impact the economy, particularly the Hospitality and Tourism Industry (Dayour & Adam (2020)). The airline industry as an integrated part of the Hospitality and Tourism industry contributes to the revenue-earning capacity of the sector, of which according to (Crespi-Cladera et al. (2021) & Nicola et al. (2020) as cited in Dayour & Adam (2020)), represents an important economic sector around the world, employing millions of people, generating billions of dollars in income and revenue to businesses, governments, and individuals. Dunford et al. (2020) highlighted the significant impact on the airline industry during the COVID19 pandemic. They

stated that as soon as about 100 countries around the world announced partial or full lockdowns, air, and even inter-city travel fell by 70 – 90% in comparison with the previous year. In actual fact, the freckles of the pandemic are still obvious on both the social and economic fronts worldwide. Many countries, Fiji included, are still struggling albeit slowly to return to normal.

Generally, it has been observed (Dube et al. (2021), Huang et al. (2020)), that the demand for air services is reduced significantly by disease outbreaks and pandemics. The end result is low patronage of airlines and even other hospitality and tourism services such as hotels, restaurants and eateries, and entertainment services (Dube et al. (2021), Huang et al. (2020)). The fear of being infected combined with the restrictions of the lockdowns during pandemics affected people who normally travel a lot, creating fear in them and resulting in a significant decline in air travel (Baum et al. (2020), Liu et al. (2021)). COVID-19 saw the highest grounding of planes around the world in recent times, which is in actual fact, regarded as quite an extraordinary event in the history of air travel. According to Serrano & Kazda (2021), as of April 2020, just one month after WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic, out of 22,000 passenger aircraft around the world, almost 14,400 were grounded. That represents the grounding of more than 65% of the world's airline passenger fleet.

In the domestic scene, Fiji Airways reaction to the pandemic's global lockdowns was no different from the grounding actions of its fellow global airlines. In fact, the Fiji Airways grounded eleven aircraft, consisting of two Airbus 350, four Airbus 330, and five Boeing 737⁴ at around the same time as other international airlines were grounding theirs. The risks associated with air travel when the pandemic was at its peak, and the months following, combined with anxiety of being easily exposed to the virus in the confine space of an air plane, despite having the best protective gears on board or how clean the plane was, were somehow too much risks for the air travelling public and the tourists at large. Therefore, resulting in reduced demand for airline tickets and related hospitality and tourism industry services that led to a decline in revenue of so many airlines around the world, Fiji Airways included. Ultimately, these economic consequences also resulted in the reduction of income of individuals and the household of the employees, the collapse of businesses, and a reduction in government revenue (Chen et al. (2007), Crespi-Cladera et al. (2021) as cited in Dayour & Adam (2020)).

⁴<https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/fiji-government-to-support-troubled-national-airline>

Redundancy, adaptive strategies & resilience after crisis

It is critical at this juncture to explain the relationship of adaptive strategies & resilience, the lay-off of workers or redundancy and crisis. Each term is to be defined individually and of their relationships to follow. This is done in order to help out with the understanding of how this relationship arises. A review of the literature is critical in acquiring the majority view on definitions on these terms and the relationships amongst them.

The first term to be defined is 'crisis'. There is a need for the term crisis to be clearly defined in order to understand why redundancy happens, its consequences for workers who lose their jobs, and how it necessitates adaptive strategies to secure alternative sources of income and to remain resilience despite the hardships encountered, and also to be well prepared to face similar events in the future. Indeed, a clear, understanding of the term crisis also allows the research team to focus the investigation and in alignment with the research objectives.

According to Faulkner (2001), different authors described the term crisis from their own perspectives. Faulkner (2001), for example, considered the viewpoints of authors, such as Reilly (1993) & Pauchant & Douville (1993). Reilly (1993) explained a 'crisis' is a situation that is harmful and disruptive and usually occurs in a sudden, acute manner that is outside of a firm's or an individual's control but demands a timely intervention to help mitigate or lessen the impact. Pauchant & Douville (1993) on the other hand described the term 'crisis' as a disruptive situation that affects an organization, or a system and the assumptions that governed previous actions. Faulkner (2021) challenges the definitions of Reilly (1993) and Pauchant & Douville (1993). Faulkner (2021) argued that Reilly (1993) and Pauchant & Douville (1993) views were focussed on describing the crisis as a mean of disrupting existing operations that are often outside of the control of the organization and suggesting immediate actions required to get back to normalcy. Faulkner (2001) argues to the contrary, by stating, that to some extent, the crisis is self-inflicted largely due to managerial problems such as incompetent managerial structures, and/or actions, and the management's failure to adapt to change. Further, Faulkner (2001) also believes that a crisis occurs suddenly and could not be avoided. But it could be cushioned again, according to Faulkner (2021) with strong management structural competency, together with the management's ability to anticipate and adapt to change, could help predict and manage disruptive situations such as encountered by the Fiji Airways during COVID-19.

Hence, Faulkner (2021) argues that in order to avoid behaving reactively when a crisis occurs, the organizations, should be first and foremost focus on successfully controlling the underlying cause of the crisis. However, as true as it may seem of Faulkner's suggestion (2021) of the need for organization to be in a readiness position to tackle the root cause of any crisis, but the reality was, the main cause of the crisis, that was the COVID19 pandemic, was beyond the reach of the Fiji Airways management, or the airline industry administrators in general. It is strongly believed that no particular airline management and administration around the globe was well prepared for the COVID19 pandemic. When it happened, it was swift, sudden, and unexpected and not allowing much time for any management team, in the airline industry and other industries as well, to have a prepared reaction in place especially in advance to appropriately tackle its impact. There was indeed no time for a well- prepared reaction. It is worth noting that even the strongly managed airlines around the world such as the Singapore Airline, Qantas and the British Airlines for example succumbed to the same fate as was experienced by the Fiji Airways. In fact, we believe that no airline around the globe when COVID19 happened was spared nor even well prepared to face the consequences for that matter.

Layoff of workers or in other word redundancy, on the other hand, is also subject to some explanation for the purpose of this study. Redundancy within the human resource management context is defined by Singh et al (2021) as the temporary or permanent removal of employment of an employee or a group of employees from business. CIPD (2020) (as cited in Dayour & Adam (2020)) further elaborated on redundancy stating that it implies the idea of being idle without work resulting from lay-offs or dismissal from work, especially when an employer desires to reduce the size of its workforce. Waters (2007) (as cited in Dayour & Adam (2020)) also stating that a total lay-off of employees is a manifestation of the worker being dismissed from work or reducing the number of hours assigned to the employee. (Waters (2007)) argued further that redundancy may occur due to many factors including low demand for goods and services being produced, or sudden occurrences such as the COVID-19 pandemic that result in the need to reduce costs by letting off extra labour. The discussion of redundancy from a human resource management aspect though it may seem similar but it is quite different from an engineering perspective especially in relation to robotics. Concur & Buckingham (1997) argued that when redundancy is discussed concerning robotic manipulators, it should be focused on the categorizing as sensor redundancy and mechanical redundancy. They elaborated further on sensor redundancy. By stating its meaning as to when there are more

sensors than theoretically necessary, usually when high reliability is required (Concur & Buckingham (1997)). On the other hand, they explain mechanical redundancy as further divided into kinematic and actuation redundancy (Concur & Buckingham (1997)). The term redundancy used in this paper is aligned with the human resource management perspective as explained by Singh et al (2021), CIPD (2020), and Waters (2007).

Perhaps, when redundancy is viewed from the human resource aspect, would provide some insight into the reasons why Fiji Airways management laid off more than half of its workforce during the pandemic. Simply put, the company with the grounding of its major fleet, followed by according to the Airline CEO and Managing Director Andre Viljoen a period of zero income revenue⁵, which meant it could no longer afford to continue paying its workers. As a result, it is assumed that there was no other choice available for the Fiji Airways management but to made more than half of its staff redundant.

Within the scope of this study, adaptive strategies & resilience refer to the actions undertaken by the redundant Fiji Airways workers to secure alternative income sources. These strategies include seeking employment in the same industry or another industry both locally or abroad and starting up micro or small businesses (entrepreneurial opportunities).

The complex relationship between crisis, redundancy and adaptive strategies specifically in the airline industry is rarely discussed. However, some studies such as Baum et al. (2020), found that there is an intricate relationship between crisis, redundancy and one particular adaptive strategy that of entrepreneurship. Kang et al, (2021) argued that during a crisis the normal ability of the businesses to produce at normal capacity are disrupted. And in some instances, such as in the case of the Fiji Airways, as argued by Alonso et al. (2020) the crisis moves beyond the limits of the organizations, and reaching out to the wider society resulting in severe reduction in the demand for goods and services with the end result being the layoff of workers as a cost cutting measure.

Singh et al. (2021) claim that a crisis, COVID19 for example, can induce redundancy, and in such cases the businesses engage in an attempt to cushion its inability to cope with the direct effects of the crisis on its operation combining with the fall in revenue earning capacity forces the lay-off of employees. Alonso et al. (2020), and Singh et al. (2021) argued that redundancy

⁵ <https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/fiji-government-to-support-troubled-national-airline>

in the Hotel & Tourism Industry, airline industry included, in its entirety rises out of necessity. They mean to say, that businesses in order to stay afloat in the short-run must be targeting the reduction of their operational costs and hoping for recovery in the long-run.

On the other hand, studies (see Lea, 2020) have found that redundant employees are observed to often explore and engage in entrepreneurial opportunities with the purpose of investing their savings and avoid being idle. Hence, it could be concluded that a crisis induced redundancy, such as the Fiji Airways case for example, provides opportunities for nurturing of entrepreneurial mindsets in the short-run as coping mechanisms, and at the same time with the intention to make a living out of a business idea, to bear the difficulties associated with the duration of the redundancy period (Lea, 2020). According to Dayfour & Adam (2020) it can be argued that a crisis on one hand is negative due to loss of livelihoods but at the same time a blessing in disguise as it gives rise to entrepreneurial initiatives. In the case of the Fiji Airways some of the layoff workers may take being made redundant as an opportunity to go into businesses which at the end help them to deal with the impact of redundancy or avoiding repeat of the same fate in the future. Or they may take it as an opportunity to venture out and get employment in similar or different industries both in Fiji and abroad. Whatever, the alternative strategy employed by Fiji Airways redundant workers, it should be clear that their adopting of alternative income sources is an attempt to cope with or actually these could mean that they are their adaptive strategies in order for them to remain resilient during and after the pandemics. Arguably, according to Dayfour & Adam (2020) that taking such actions by redundancy workers may have implications on the labour availability in a particular sector in the future.

Overall, Dayour & Adam (2020), summed up the discussion of redundancy, adaptive strategies and crisis, by stating that a crisis-induced redundancy could lead to the identification and investment in entrepreneurship opportunities. This creates a three-way relationship between crisis, redundancy, and entrepreneurial opportunities (one of the adaptive strategies under investigation in this study).

Layoff, adaptation & resilience strategies after a crisis – a theoretical perspective

Trying to cope with being forced to lay off from work is not easy at all. It causes anxiety and hopelessness and a sudden anticipation of what the future may bring. Especially if you had been for a long-time being comfortable and feel secure in your job. It is further complicated if the only source of income for the laid-off staff is from the salaries or wages that were received

from employment. It is within these contexts, that an assumption is made to be experienced by the workers of the Fiji Airways when made redundant during COVID-19. Conducting a study in this area and in a small island development state (SIDS) such as Fiji is lacking, but at the same time such studies must be undertaken as it is critical. Basically, because due to a large extend the study outputs assist in the formulation of policies by stakeholders in order to prepare workers well to cope and adapt to similar future crisis. Faulkner (2001) emphasizes the importance of such research since their outputs will become essential foundation for assisting not only a specific industry, the tourism industry and the airline industry for example, as a whole but relevant government agencies as well. Therefore, according to (Faulkner (2001) at the end, equipping the tourism industry stakeholders with a learning database, to be used to gain inside knowledge from past experiences, and at the same time developing strategies to avoid and cope with similar future events. However, little progress has been done in the advancing of the understanding of the tourism crisis. And one of the reasons according to Faulkner (2001) is that the development of underpinning theoretical and conceptual frameworks required to analyze the phenomena, is limited. There needs to be more studies to be undertaken. Only then that we would be fittingly weaved a framework to use as a defensive mechanism when faced with a crisis as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this study, we attempt to use the family adaptive strategy concept (Moen & Wethington (1992), Reiss and Oliveri (1980), and McCubbin et al. (1998), to understand how and why the laid-off workers of Fiji Airways adjusted their income sources to remain resilience during and after the COVID-19 as a result of being made redundant.

Moen & Wethington (1992) examines the concept of family adaptive strategies and noted that intuitively it is an appealing metaphor used for family response to structural barriers and stressful events. They further argued that the concept was principally used as a sensitizing device, combining trends of macro-level and micro-level and behavioral patterns. Moen & Wethington (1992) admitted that it was hard to find good examples of empirical investigations of family strategies. Mainly because they believed that a good example is one that uses the family adaptive strategy concept as an explanatory process. Prior to Meon & Wethington (1992), Reiss and Oliveri (1980) explored strategies used by families to cope with stressful challenging events, and circumstances. The main objective of their study was more to show how these coping strategies are related to one another in particular with the more fundamental adaptive capacities of families. Reiss & Oliveri (1980) found that a family's adaptive

capacities when considering both the family's everyday routines as well as the family's attempts to cope with unusual and stressful events are shaped by the family's abiding conception of the social world in which the family lives in.

However, Moen & Wethington (1992) assured that there are conceptual difficulties associated with the family adaptive strategy concept. They argued that these difficulties are raised by questions such as '*what exactly is and is not 'strategy', whether families themselves view their actions as strategies or whether this label is based on researchers' analysis and interpretation, and whether strategies can be treated simultaneously as a cause and effect*'. Moen & Wethington (1992) arrived at three theoretical models that described the family adaptation strategies; (i) a structural approach; (ii) a rational approach; and (iii) a life course approach.

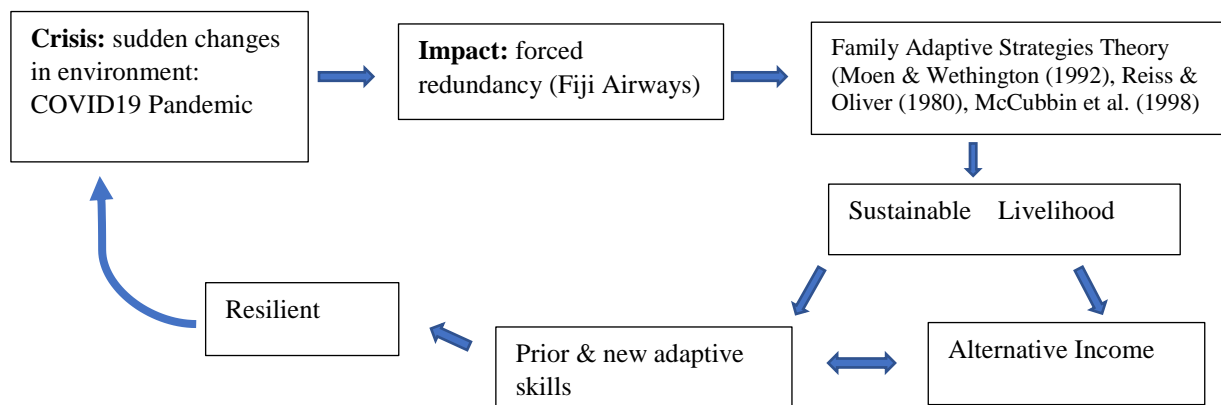
“A *structural approach* emphasizes the ways that larger social structural forces constrain the repertoire of available adaptations. A *rational choice approach* underscores the role of choice, within the confines of structural constraints in an effort to maximize family wellbeing. And a *life course approach* points to the importance of historical time, life stage, and context in delimiting both family problems and the possible strategies to deal with them.”

McCubbin et al. (1998) noted that families negotiate change and stressful events with an innate reaction to fight, to remain stable, and to resist changes in the family's established patterns of behavior. This to mean that the adjustments by families are characterized by relatively minor changes in the family system, is a predicable phase in the family's responses to a stressor, of being laid-off from work by Fiji Airways for example. The family adaptation strategy is a response to the impact of the crisis which at the same time causing drastic changes in the family system McCubbin et al. (1998). McCubbin et al. (1998) further argued that during a crisis the families are challenged to expand and to contract, to incorporate and to release, and to achieve stability by disrupting existing patterns of functioning. They concluded that in cases of a stressor-induced crisis, in this case COVID-19 induced redundancy, families adapt by instituting changes in the family's pattern of functioning, changing its scheme, or blueprint, for functioning and by changes in the family's relationship to the outside world.

The discussion of the family adaptive strategies concept by Moen & Wethington (1992), Reiss and Oliveri (1980), McCubbin et al. (1998) is assumed to be exactly similar if not the same, to

the actions of the Fiji Airways redundant workers. That is taking into consideration McCubbin et al. (1998). The Fiji Airways belongs to a family in one way or another. Therefore, the staff that were laid-off are family members of a particular family. The working and income earning environment changed dramatically after being laid off. But each individual family somehow need to survive and life must go on. That is sustainable livelihood is crucial in order to remain resilience and in their ability to meet future crisis. There is no other choice but be able to adapt to the new environment as a result. And that could be achieved by at least instituting changes in their functioning pattern, scheme of work or the way they used to do things, and definitely their relationships with the uncertain environment outside of the security and comfort of the Fiji Airways.

Figure 1.1 Family adaptive strategies and resilience -theoretical perspective



3.0 Methodology

Data sources

In this study, both primary and secondary data sources were employed. For primary data sources an online survey using SurveyMonkey was adopted. The main reason for using SurveyMonkey was due to the system's ability to analyze the survey data automatically. Therefore, allowing the team to minimize data analysis time and having more available to be dedicated for the write up. Most data from secondary sources was acquired from websites and annual reports of relevant institutions and stakeholders of the Fiji Airline Industry. These secondary sources, include the websites, and the annual reports of the Fiji Airways, the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, the Fiji Tourism and so forth.

We used mainly qualitative and some basic quantitative analysis.

Population of interest and sample size

The population of interest was the total number of workers that were laid off by Fiji Airways, close to 800, the actual figure however was 758⁶, during the COVID-19. However, our sample size was the members of the Fiji Flight Attendants Trade Union (FTATU). This sample size was chosen with restrictions only to those that are members of the Fiji Flight Attendants Trade Union. The main reason for choosing of the sample size was due to the short time available to complete this study and for ease of data collection. The research team managed to secure the support of the Union President prior to the conducting of the main survey. Securing the support of the Union President was without doubt, critical for the successful completion of the survey in such a short time. Simply because the President was already having a database with all the union members contacts. Thus, allowing an easy targeting of Union members and the same time providing some comfort to the research, with the certainty that the members will provide reliable data and to be able to complete the survey within the scheduled timeframe.

Data collection

The data collection was in three stages. The first stage was the questionnaire design, the second stage, was the pilot survey and lastly the main study. Both the pilot and the main study were conducted online.

Questionnaire Design

In order to answer the study questions and to capture the study objectives, the questionnaire was design with the appropriate questions in mind. The questions were designed under three sections. Section 1: Background information, Section 2: Demography, and Section 3: The Future. Altogether there were 27 questions to be answered with an extra question requesting the respondent to provide an email contact in order for the team to reach out to that particular person in order to cater further information should there was a need for clarification. Making the questions in the survey equals to 28 in total. Table 3.1 below summarizes the questionnaire structure.

⁶ <https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/fiji-government-to-support-troubled-national-airline>

Table 3.1 Questionnaire structure

Questionnaire Section	Purpose	Number of questions.
Section 1: Background Information	The main objective of the questions in this section, were to capture the background information of the respondents before and after being made redundant. And the actions (adaptive strategies and corresponding skills) used by the respondents to remain resilience during the redundancy period.	17
Section 2: Demography	The questions in this section aimed to capture information on the demographic details of the respondents. The type of questions included age, gender, place of residents, education level, marriage status, etc.	8
Section 3: The Future	The questions in this section aimed to capture information on the future expectation of the respondents. The type of questions includes re-employment at Fiji Airways, potential actions for Fiji Airways to undertake in order to prepare staff to survive future layoff. An extra question was included requesting the respondent to provide and email for contact regarding further clarifications and information should the need	3
	Total	28

The pilot survey was conducted after the draft questionnaire was successfully uploaded to the SurveyMonkey app.

Pilot survey and the main survey

In an attempt to test the clarity of the questions, a pilot study was done before the main survey. The pilot survey involved about 10 participants. Upon receiving the responses from the pilot participants, the questions were amended, and finalized before the main survey was conducted. The main survey link was then sent to the President of the Fiji Flight Attendants Union. The President was kind enough to support the research team by circulating the survey link to union members specifically to those who were laid-off by Fiji Airways. The survey was not compulsory and this was clearly stated in the instructions given before the start of the main relevant questions. All information provided by the participants remained confidential and used only for the purpose of this study. The standard time for completion of the survey was 15 – 20 minutes. The survey was conducted in the months of July and August 2023.

Survey software and technical tools

The survey used the SurveyMonkey app. Simply, as earlier stated in this section, because of the app’s basic statistical automatic analysis of the result in the end of the survey. Which significantly assist with our analysis of the findings considering the limited time that we had to conduct the survey and write up of our paper.

Since this survey is qualitative in nature with minimal quantitative analysis, advanced statistical tools were not used. However, the use of Excel was quite sufficient for performing of the minor statistical calculations such as percentages, proportions, and graphical illustrations that were not provided in the automatic SurveyMonkey result analysis.

4.0 Findings

Before the detail discussion of the findings, it is fitting at this point in time to once again bring to the fore the main objective of this study, that is *to investigate adaptation and resilience strategies that workers used to cope with redundancies from COVID-19 including:*

- 1) *alternative employment and/or other income sources.*
- 2) *capacity of airline workers with specialized skills to undertake income diversification.*
- 3) *relevant skill gaps and strategies that facilitate preparedness for external shocks.*
- 4) *any significant differences by demographic factors i.e., gender, age, etc.*

The next few paragraphs discuss the results of our findings. The way the analysis of the findings is done separately under the different sections according the objectives of this study with a final section on ‘Other findings: the future.’ The discussion of the findings ends with brief elaborations on the answers to the research questions. The sample size was 400. However, only 147 or 36.75% participants completed the survey. All the 147 participants were flight attendants and are current or former members of the FFATU. They hold various positions, as crew (different grades), and pursers/senior flight attendants etc., before they were made redundant. Also, as part and parcel of their jobs they were entitled to overseas and overnight allowances, per diems and other job-related benefits based on rank, that some of the participants were stating as other income sources, when asked about whether they were receiving any other sources of income as different from their wages/salaries and other job entitlements before redundancy. Most probably the confusion lies within the way that this question was worded.

Research objective 1: Alternative employment and/or other income sources

When the staff of the Fiji Airways were laid-off due to the COVID19 pandemic, the loss of their income source was quite devastating especially for those that were relying heavily on their paid wages/salaries and job-related benefits (per diems & overseas allowances) as their only main source of income. There were mortgage and other family commitments to meet. Securing of an alternative income source, was a must to do task, and apparently to an extent playing a key role in their adaptive strategies and resilience (ability to remain in survival mode) after being made redundant. Perhaps, there was no other choice. To have an alternative income before being made redundant or while still working should have been provided some form of comfort as they could have easily continued with that extra income activity or most importantly have learned the trade already. Thus,

there was not really a need to start from scratch but just to continue with it. The transition therefore would have been much easier to cope with as compared to beginning from zero. It is also worth noting that engaging in an extra income activity by an employee during employment in any company, such as Fiji Airways for example, is normally close to impossible and simply not allowed within a normal employment contract. However, participants were asked as to whether they were having an alternative income source before being made redundant. They were also asked what were their alternative income sources during the redundancy period.

Sideline income sources during employment before redundancy

In order to capture a picture towards how quickly or how long did it take to secure an alternative income straight after the redundancy. It was deemed necessary to find out the proportion of the redundant workers that were having some sort of side income through other means during employment. As stated in an earlier, it is indeed not an easy task to try and cope with being laid-off and it is more stressful if the only source of income for the redundant worker is his/her paid wages/salaries. The struggle to cope with redundancy is much more severe for them than fellow redundant colleagues that may have already engaged or receiving an extra source of income from other means while still being employed. Basically, due to the fact these colleagues may have already somehow established themselves in doing such activities and most importantly learning the tricks already especially on how run a small business for example.

82.99% or 122 of the 147 respondents did not have any extra income source (i.e., none) before being made redundant. This means that a significant amount (over three quarter) of the redundant staff, that is 122 of them in total were relying on their wages/salaries (plus other benefits that comes with the job) alone for their livelihood. The remaining 25 or 17.01% were earning some extra income sources before redundancy. Table 4.1 provides the detailed statistics.

Table 4.1 Sideline income sources before redundancy

Before redundancy		
Income source	Number of respondent (/147)	Percentage (/100%)
None	122	82.99%
Rent income	5	3.40%
Lease income	2	1.36%
Rent income/lease income	1	0.01%
Dividend income	7	4.76%
Rent income/interest income	2	1.36%
Business income (online business, sale of kava & food pack)	7	6.67%
Others: (insurance health)	1	0.01%

Income support and alternative income sources during redundancy

The participants were asked to indicate whether a certain member or members of their family were still keeping their job and as such still receiving income that may have helped out during redundancy. Identifying this particular income source gives an indication of the degree of resilience and the more of good reasons why redundant staff will be engaging in an alternative income source.

79 participants or 53.74%, that is more than half of the 147 participants had no other member of their households earning income during the redundancy period. Table 4.2 shows the detailed statistics.

Box 4.1, however, highlights some of the comments made in regards to a family member still working or not working during redundancy.

Box 4.1 Comments highlights

...Spouse with the no jab no job policy in place then; ...Was laid-off during COVID but got re-employed once business picked up; ...I was the sole breadwinner at the time; ...My husband (principal of his law firm), was not allowed to continue due to no vax; ...Spouse was also terminated; ...I was the sole bread winner, etc.

Table 4.2 Participants with the same household members still working during redundancy

Member of households working during redundancy	Responses	
	Number (/147)	Percentage (/100%)
None	79	53.74%
1	49	33.33%
2	12	8.16%
More than 2	7	4.76%

The income support during redundancy or the alternative income received straight after being made redundant was also captured. In order of highest to lowest, 62 of the participants or 42.18% indicated that they made FNPF withdrawals, 33 of the participants or 22.45% were utilizing the Fiji Government assistance (\$360 per person at the time), 9 or 6.12% of the participants received income in the form of remittances from overseas (from friends & families) and down to the lowest, is the income from employment in the airline industry, which is 1.36% or 2 of the participants. Table 4.3 shows the detailed statistics.

Table 4.3 Alternative income received during redundancy.

Alternative income source	Response	
	Number (/147)	Percentage (/100%)
None	11	7.48%
FNPF withdrawals	62	42.18%
Government assistance (eg. \$360)	33	22.45%
Income from self-employment	22	14.97%
Income from employment in the airline industry	2	1.36%
Income from employment in other industry	4	2.72%
Income from overseas employment	4	2.72%
Income from overseas remittance	9	6.12%

Household income covering household needs after redundancy and the coping mechanisms

In regards to whether the income earned during redundancy covered household needs, 68 or 46.26% of the participants stated that they barely coping with the income they received to cover household needs during redundancy. And 12 or 8.16% stated none at all, while 13 or 8.84% stated that they were quite comfortable and 54 or 36.73% said the income received during redundancy was adequate.

In regards to the coping mechanism when the income was not enough (i.e not at all) or barely meeting the daily household needs during redundancy. Borrowing was identified as the main coping mechanism, 67 or 45.58% of the participants. However, borrowing was mostly from family members & friends (stated as the source of borrowing), in fact these were not really borrowing in

the real sense of it, they were somehow more like just assistance (monetary & in-kind) from family members & friends both in Fiji and abroad). FNPF was also stated as another source of borrowing, but it is more appropriate to affirm that FNPF withdrawals, should not be treated as borrowing as these were from own redundant staff's or family member's retirement money. And moving in with friends and families (urban centers) 53 or 36.05% of the participants involved, and the rest identified relocation to village (for farming or do not have to pay rent) as their coping mechanism. It is interesting to note that no one from the 147 participants has identified that they borrowed from the major bank nor any of the common money lending institutions in Fiji. That is, no one borrowed from the major commercial banking retailers such as Westpac, BSP or ANZ to name a few. Table 4.4 provides the detailed statistics.

Table 4.4 Household income covering household needs and coping mechanisms during redundancy

Income covering household needs during redundancy?	Responses	
	Number (/147)	Percentage (/100%)
Not at all	12	8.16%
Barely	68	46.26%
Adequately	54	36.73%
Comfortably	13	8.84%
Coping mechanism:		
Borrowing (family (local/abroad) & friends), FNPF & others)	67	45.58%
Relocation to village (farming, no rent, etc.)	27	18.37%
Moved in with friends and families (urban centres)	53	36.05%

Research objective 2: Capacity and specialized skills to undertake income diversification.

Time taken before securing an alternative income

In order to capture the appropriate capacity and specialized skills to undertake income diversification at first a question was asked on how long did it take after redundancy before they could start earning alternative income. Not all the 147 participants completed this question. Only 140 participants managed to complete this question, 7 skipped. 47 or 33.57% of the participants took more than 12 months before they could start earning an alternative income, compared to just 12 or 8.57% of the 140 participants secured an alternative income immediately after being made redundant. Table 4.5 provides the detailed statistics.

Table 4.5 Time taken to secure alternative income.

Time taken to secure alternative income	Response	
	Number (/147)	Percentage (/100%)
Immediately	12	8.57%
Within 3 months	32	22.86%
Within 6 months	32	22.86%
Within 12 months	17	12.14%
More than 12 months	47	33.57%
Skip	7	

Factors affecting redundant workers' ability to start earning income from alternative employment

63 or 42.86% of the 147 participants, that is close to half, identified the *need to acquire new skills* as the number one reason that affected their ability to start earning income from alternative employment. 34.69% or 51 of the participants felt that *stress and depression*, perhaps to a great extent resulting from being laid-off from work affected their ability to start earning income from alternative employment, 31 or 21.09% participants identified that the *joy of working for Fiji Airways and doing the work they comfortable with* affected their abilities to start earning income from alternative employment, and 1.36% or 2 of the participants stated that they are *close to retirement*. Table 4.6 shows the detailed statistics.

Table 4.6 Factors affecting the ability to start earning income from alternative employment

Factor affecting ability to start earning income	Response	
	Number (/147)	Percentage (/100%)
Need to acquire new skills	63	42.86%
Stress and depression	51	34.69%
Close to retirement	2	1.36%
Enjoy working for Fiji Airways and do the work I am comfortable with	31	21.09%

Factors affecting ability to start own business

62 or 42.18% of the 147 participants identified the *'inability to access finance'* as the number one reason that affected their ability to start own business. 18.37% or 27 of the participants felt that *'the inability to identify a clear concept/idea for my business'* impacted significantly their abilities to start their own businesses, 28 or 19.05% identified *'lack of access to other resources'* as the main reason not able to start own business, 21 or 14.29% identified *'lack of business skills'*, and 6.12% or 9 of the participants identified *'lack of confidence'* as the factor affecting their abilities to start own business. Table 4.7 shows the detailed statistics.

Table 4.7 Factors affecting ability to start own business

Factor affecting ability to start own business	Response	
	Number (/147)	Percentage (/100%)
Inability to identify a clear concept/idea for my business	27	18.37%
Lack of confidence	9	6.12%
Inability to access finance	62	42.18%
Lack of business skills	21	14.29%
Lack of access to other sources	28	19.05%

Research objective 3: The relevant skill gaps and strategies that facilitate preparedness for external shocks.

Type of previous training facilitating preparedness for external shocks (e.g., redundancy)

55 or 37.41% of the 147 participants identified ‘work experience’ as top of the list of training that facilitating preparedness for external shocks, in this case forced redundancy. Next on the list is 29.93% or 44 of the participants identified that ‘none’ of their previous training assisted them in their preparedness for redundancy. 4 or 2.72% identified both Government & Trade Union trainings as contributed to preparedness for redundancy. Table 4.8 highlights the detailed statistics. Box 4.2 highlights the comments on ‘Others’.

Table 4.8 Type of previous training facilitating preparedness for external shocks.

Type of previous training facilitating preparedness for redundancy	Response	
	Number (/147)	Percentage (/100%)
None	44	29.93%
Scheduled training by Fiji Airways	6	4.08%
Government	4	2.72%
NGO/CSO	9	6.12%
Trade Union	4	2.72%
Formal Education	13	8.84%
Work Experience	55	37.41%
Others	12	8.16%

Box 4.2 ‘Others’ comments highlights

Personal character traits...USP cohort...A Christian ministry...Lifelong skills taught a home came into play... NGO like FRIENDS, PIFON and Natures’ Way helped to cope with not being able to provide or have a steady income ,they expanded my insights on how I was able to solve problem though Agriculture...Faith-based including work experience...Been innovative by seeing what trending and tapped into that particular market that enabled me for a somewhat sustainable funding to get me by as I was the soul bread winner of a family of 6 with an aging father of 82...I am a self-taught baker and cook...self-taught...Gym...Catering ...

Relevant skills from the type of previous trainings that facilitated preparedness for external shocks (e.g., redundancy)

This question allows multiple responses. The overall result indicated that 66 or 23.83% of the participants identified the ‘customer service/public relations’ as the type of previous trainings that assisted them the most in preparedness to cope with external shocks, forced redundancy for this case. ‘Others’ comes in second place with 30 or 10.83% of the participants. The ‘managing micro and small businesses’ ties in third place with the ‘manage people and team’ at 29 or 10.47% respectively. ‘Personal grooming including hairdressing’ comes in last at 13 or 4.69% of the participants. Table 4.9 highlights the detailed statistics. Box 4.3 highlights the comments of the participants that chose ‘Others’.

Table 4.9 Relevant skills from the type of previous trainings facilitating preparedness for external shocks (e.g., redundancy)

Relevant skills from the type of previous training	Response	
	Number	Percentage (/100%)
Financial literacy	20	7.22%
Managing micro and small businesses	29	10.47%
Customer services/public relations	66	23.83%
Sales and marketing skills	24	8.66%
Manage people and teams	29	10.47%
Caregiving	20	7.22%
Training and instruction	20	7.22%
Cooking and catering	26	9.39%
Personal grooming including hair dressing etc.	13	4.69%
Others	30	10.83%

Box 4.3 ‘Others’ (other relevant skills) comments highlights

Was selected as school manager for my children school swim team... None... Adaptability and resilience... None at all... No training ever prepared me for a pandemic... Nursing... Parents... I went back to Uni to study law... Spiritual... My interest in DIYs and my love for baking... Baking Skills... Call Centre/Payroll... Did not receive training, used past experiences and skills to bake and make a little amount to help the family... Inner strength and faith helped me cope... International Relations... Electrician... Self- taught... Through internet - cope with termination... I went back to Uni to pursue my law degree... No training ... Volunteering... Teaching I had to learn using their overseas school curriculum ... Baby sitting my nieces... Mental stability... Care for all people on all walks of life. Respect for all...

Relevant skills for better preparedness for external shocks

We asked the participants of the relevant skills that they perceived that would best equipped them with their preparedness for external shocks. The options given to choose from, ranges from *upskill (in-house training to enhance existing skill set) & diversify skill (in-house training to develop new skill set)*, to *small business training & financing*, and the *link to all the potential* related types of training provided in this question. This was a multiple answers question.

The result, 60 or 19.80% identified ‘*diversity skill (in-house training to develop a new skill set)*’ as top of the list for potential, relevant skills training for preparedness. ‘*Small business training*’ comes in second place with 58 or 19.14%, and in third place, ‘*opportunities for internal transfer to other units*’, standing at 52 or 17.16%. And the ‘*link to the above*’ is 18 or 5.94%. This link to the above somehow indicate a strong level of the need by participants for trainings in the various areas of the options that were given in the question. Table 4.10 highlights the detailed statistics.

Table 4.10 Relevant skills for better preparedness for external shocks.

Relevant skills for better preparedness	Response	
	Number (multiple answers)	Percentage (/100%)
Upskill (in-house training to enhance existing skill set)	44	14.52%
Diversify skill (in-house training to develop new skill set)	60	19.80%
Opportunities for internal transfer to other business units	52	17.16%
Employers' subsidies/rewards for formal continuing education	37	12.21%
Small business training	58	19.14%
Small business financing	34	11.22%
Link to the above	18	5.94%

Research objective 4: Significant differences by demographic factors

Total working years and years of work for Fiji Airways before redundancy

For this objective we tried to capture first the *total working years* of the participants, and the proportions of the total working years that the participants were employed by *Fiji Airways*.

The result was quite interesting. It indicated that 36 (same person) was the highest total numbers of working years, and 32 years dedicated to working for Fiji Airways. A difference of 4 years. And the lowest number of years work is less than 1 year (same person) which was all spent with Fiji Airways. The total number of working years, on average is 14.7 years, and working for Fiji Airways an average of 12.6 years. Just 2.1 years of difference on average. The median is 9 years for total working years and 15 years for working at Fiji Airways. The highest number of working years, and working for Fiji Airways, are 5 years for both respectively. The result indicates or is giving a picture that the redundant Fiji Airways staff were dedicated and long-term service employees. Therefore, making us to conclude that in time of a crisis, especially during pandemic like COVID19, no one should feel secure of keeping employment. Regardless of how many years of dedicated service to an employer. When it comes to let go of staff during a pandemic, the axe would be coming down on every employee regardless of the long years of service. The result also gives us a more important reason to conclude that the need for proper and appropriate upskilling & diversity skilling of staff is or should be a critical factor for facilitating preparedness during employment in order to at least to be able to face external shocks. Table 4.11 provides the detailed statistics.

Table 4.11 Working years statistics.

	Total Years Working	Work for Fiji Airways	Difference
Highest	36 years	32 years	4 years
Lowest	less than 1 year	less than 1 year	same
Average	14.7 years	12.6 years	2.1 years
Median	9 years	15 years	
Most years	5 yrs (21/147)	5 years (18/147)	

Other demographic factors

The other demographic factors include the *annual income before redundancy, age, gender, marital status before redundancy, place of residence before & after redundancy, ethnicity, and education level before redundancy*. Table 4.12 provides the detailed statistics.

Table 4.12 Other demographic factors

Other demographic factors	Responses	
	Number	Percentage (/100%)
Annual income before redundancy (/147)		
-less than \$30000	122	82.99%
-between \$30000 - \$50000	25	17.01%
-between \$50000 - \$70000	-	
-between \$70000 - \$100000	-	
-above \$100000	-	
Age (/147):		
-20 to 25 yrs	6	4.08%
-26 to 30 yrs	32	21.77%
-31 to 40 yrs	45	30.61%
-41 to 45 yrs	29	19.73%
-46 to 50 yrs	18	12.24%
-51to 55 yrs	15	10.20%
-56 to 60 yrs	2	1.36%
Gender (/146):		
Male	47	32.19%
Female	96	65.75%
Prefer not to say	3	2.05%
Skip	1	
Marital status (before redundancy) (/147):		
Single	38	25.85%
In a defacto-relationship	24	16.33%
Married	76	51.70%
Widow	3	2.04%
Prefer not to say	6	4.08%
Place of residence before redundancy (/146):		
Western Division	134	91.78%
Central Division	10	6.85%
Northern Division	-	
Eastern Division	2	1.37%
Skip	1	
Place of residence after redundancy (/147):		
Western Division	99	67.35%
Central Division	26	17.69%
Northern Division	5	3.40%
Eastern Division	3	2.04%
Others: (overseas (not specific)(4), USA (7), Hawaii (1) & NZ(2))	14	9.52%
Ethnicity (147/147):		
Itaukei	108	73.47%
Indo-Fijian	2	1.36%
Part European	26	17.69%
Others: (kailoma (2), chinese (1), banaban (rabi island)((2), I-Kiritati(1), part-chinese/rotuman (1), part-european/indo-fijian (1), rotuman(1), islander/polynesian (2)	11	7.48%
Education level before redundancy (/136):		
Secondary	52	38.24%
Technical and vocational	18	13.24%
University diploma and degree	60	44.12%
University postgraduate	4	2.94%
Professional e.g., Pilot Academy	2	1.47%
Skip	11	

It is worthy to take note of these significant demographic statistics before being made redundant. That 82.99% of the participants were earning less than \$30000 (the tax threshold in Fiji at the time); 15 of the participants were within or close to Fiji's retirement age of 55 (at

the time), 2 participants were over the retirement age (at the time). The tax threshold and age of retirement has changed to 60 years with the new government. 96 or 65.75% were female, and 76 or 51.70% were married, 134 participants resided in the western division and dropped to 99 after redundancy. 14 of the participants are now residing overseas. In terms of ethnicity, 108 are Itaukei, while 39 are others. And 60 or 44.12% had university diploma or degree, and 4 participants with university postgraduate qualifications. And 52 with secondary school level of education. These statistics speak volumes of the caliber of staff at Fiji Airways in general and those that were made redundant. While the participants of this study are restricted to Flight Attendants only, but based on the statistics, it is assumed that Fiji Airways is an attractive place of employment.

5. 0 Other findings: The future

Returning to Fiji Airways after COVID19 and economy returning to normal

We were also able to capture the proportion or percentage of those who would be willing to join Fiji Airways again after COVID19 or when things are returning to normal. More than half of the participants, 113 or 76.87% indicated that they would return to Fiji Airways once normalcy is restored. Compared to just 34 or 23.13% that opted not to return to Fiji Airways for various reasons only known to them. But it is assumed that the main reason for not returning to Fiji Airways, is because most of them already at length have somehow secured alternative livelihoods by either working for other industry (locally or abroad), or having running small businesses of their own (entrepreneurship opportunities). Table 4.13 shows the detailed statistics.

Table 4.13 Proportion of participants would return to Fiji Airways once recovery

Would return to Fiji Airways (Yes/No)	Response	
	Number (/147)	Percentage (/100)
Yes	113	76.87%
No	34	23.13%

Future important actions for Fiji Airways to better prepare staff for future economic shocks and possible forced redundancy

Towards the end of the survey, one open question was given requesting the participants to state their opinions and identify three main priority actions (in the order of action 1, action 2, and action 3), that the Fiji Airways as an employer should be undertaking in order to prepare staff well for similar future crisis induced redundancy. The results were quite interesting, and at

the same time amazing. The next few paragraphs discuss what aspiring from the participants' suggestions. And at the same time providing specific areas of the actions needed to be sanctioned by the Fiji Airways as a step forward to improve preparedness to cope with or withstand and critically survive comfortably when external shocks happened.

Suggested Action 1:

While 17 or 12.23% of the 139 participants were giving reasons in order of priority, suggested trainings (different types, upskilling, diversify skill and support from the company for education and skill developments). 8 participants however, skipped or provide no reason at all.

The majority of the 139 responses (122/139 or 87.76 %responses) were just rendering their frustrations with the way and how the redundancy was handled by the Fiji Airways management at the time. Most of the reasons given were to suggest how the redundancy should have been handled or should be handled in the future. Majority of the responses suggested that the redundancy was not properly handled at all. These include improper communication & negotiations between the staff, the union (FFTAU), before redundancy.

Since, most of the responses are somehow beyond the scope of this study it is therefore, unethical to display publicly these suggestions. It is in our best interest that this aspect could be included in another future research paper with different scope and perspectives.

Suggested Action 2:

Similar to suggested action 1. 10 participants skipped or did not provide no response at all. However, 22 or 16.06% of the 137 participants that answered or were giving reasons in order of priority, suggested again trainings (different types, upskilling, diversify skill and support from the company for education and skill developments). As one of the necessary or appropriate actions that Fiji Airways, should undertake in order to prepare staff well in facing future external shocks.

The majority of the participants (115/137 or 87.76 %responses) were again just rendering their frustrations with the way and how the redundancy was handled by the Fiji Airways management at the time. And suggested some reasons for improvement. Most of the reasons given were no difference from those given in Suggested Action 1.

Suggested Action 3:

Similar to suggested actions 1 & 2. 22 participants skipped or did not provide no response at all. However, 17 or 13.6% of the 125 participants that answered or were giving reasons in order of priority, suggested again trainings (different types, upskilling, diversify skill and support from the company for education and skill developments). As one of the necessary or appropriate actions that Fiji Airways, should undertake in order to prepare staff well in facing future external shocks.

The majority of the participants responded (108/125 or 86.4 %responses) were again just rendering their frustrations with the way and how the redundancy was handled by the Fiji Airways management at the time. And suggested some reasons for improvement. Most of the reasons given were no difference to reasons that were given in Suggested Actions 1 & 2.

The overall findings of the survey not only facilitated, the four strands of the main objectives (RO1 – RO4) of this study, but at the same time answered the research questions (RQ1 – RQ4).

In actual fact, there is a great delight with the survey results. This is mainly due to the actual results, in fact provide a picture of the reality that experienced by redundant workers faced after being made redundant.

5.0 Conclusion

We endeavored through this study to ascertain adaptation and resilience strategies that the Fiji Airways redundant workers utilized in order to maintain sustainable livelihood during and after being made redundant. A forced redundancy in this case, by the employer, Fiji Airways, as an emergency response to the crisis resulting from the COVID19 pandemic. But in the end denying the laid off staff of the security that were provided on a daily basis by the fortnightly pay received from the Airline. Simply, as a consequence putting these staff in limbo especially having to go through some form of depression and stress as a result. And at the same trying to figure out how to survive during the pandemic. However, the actions of the Fiji Airways redundant staff in trying to cope with redundancy were in alignment with the family adaptive strategies theory that were discussed by Reiss & Oliveri (1980), Moen & Wethington (1992), and McCubbin et al. (1998). In these days and age, of which money is generally viewed as ‘no money no funny’, or the common adage, ‘money is everything’. It is no laughing matter when staff are forced to be go home without being prepared or made worst not even being forewarned or consulted. Certainly, family members in time of crisis in order to continue their normal life must in one way or another activated some adaptative strategies. Simply, the result identified the strategies necessary to cope and be resilience with the forced redundancy and the external shocks due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our survey results have indicated that in fact that those who are suddenly made redundant must go through a period of transition and may endure longer time period before securing alternative income sources. It made worse, with or if the redundant person is being ill-equipped with the proper and relevant skills, that allows for faster securing of alternative income. In fact, 44 or 29.93% of the participations indicated that their previous trainings were not at all prepared them to deal appropriate lately this external shock. The major trainings, in the sense of trainings, that prepared the participants well for external shock is none other than the work experience. The survey results also highlighted the importance of upskilling and diversify skills to develop new skill-sets, through in-house trainings while still being in employment. On average the survey participants were employed at the Fiji Airways, for 12.6 years being made redundant. Working, on average for a company, for this long is often or should be

considered as quite a significant level of company loyalty. However, a good lesson is learned from this result, that during pandemics, a company struggling to stay afloat, would not consider the years of service as an important factor in retaining staff. It is assumed that this kind of decision by Fiji Airways, is not an exception to the rule or quite different from decisions through daily observations, undertaken by companies both Fiji and abroad, that were experiencing the same problems during the pandemic. And in regardless of whether it is in the airline industry or any other industry. However, it is amazing that though Fiji Airways made a forced redundancy, of more than half of its workforce, but the survey result indicated that 113 or 76.87% of the total 147 participants still having that desire in them to rejoin the Airline despite being made redundant. That is an expression of loyalty to the Airline and most importantly getting back to a work environment they are comfortable with. These indicated that the redundant workers had and still in their hearts and soul for Fiji Airways. 31 or 21.09% of the participants (2nd highest to need to acquire new skills), indicated that the main reason affecting their ability to start earning income after redundancy, is *'enjoy working for Fiji Airways and to the work I am confident with'*. However, at the same time most participants have indicated their willingness to engage in trainings, with strong pushing or suggestions for the support of the Airline, to allow upskilling & diversify skills (developing new skill set), in order to be well prepared to cope with external shocks. 63 or 42.86 % (highest), indicated the *'need to acquire new skills'* as the main factor affecting ability to start earning new income straight after redundancy.

However, it has been a learning curve when embarking on this study, for our team. Though the study is qualitative nature. Of which most of the answers to the research questions and objectives were deductive and observed from the survey responses of the participants. We believe that a quantitative study would have been more appropriate for empirical solutions to be made. Which subsequently allows the facilitation and making of precision, concrete and predictive solutions. However, we are highly satisfied with our survey results as we are able to take a peek and at the time having a glimpse of how life is like when being made redundant suddenly in an industry, the Airline industry, of which at most times seem to the most secure working environment. It made worst because there was no proper redundancy planning & communication, or a simple negotiation dialogue at the first opportunity before redundancy, with the FFTAU to make a case for their members was absence. We are also grateful, despite the absence of a strong quantitative analysis, in knowing for certain, that this is a first study of this kind in this subject area.

Policy Implications

There are quite a few policy implications that should be made as recommendations from this study. It is generally a fact of life in this day and age, of which we are more than ever vulnerable to climate change and consequently diseases that comes with it. The pandemics such as COVID19 is part and parcel of our daily lives nowadays. The, pandemics for sure are not going to go away. However, for a long time the emphasis and the focus of many employers is having a strong financial bottom line. A strong financial bottom line, not only allows shareholders to be happy but at the same secure potential investors. But of course, let's not forget the hefty benefits and perks that are in store for senior management when finance looks strong. Therefore, as a result, at most times focusing on strong financial stance often led many company boards and senior management team in tow, to forget about or to consider the staff welfare. At times staff welfare would be considered as a burden rather an asset to the company. Another lesson that the COVID19 pandemic has taught us also, is that human capital welfare deserves priority attention especially from employers and relevant stakeholders.

We have arrived at six recommendations for policy implementation:

- 1) The employers in industries that are vulnerable to pandemic, Airline Industry in this case, and the Hospitality and Tourism Industry in general, to seriously start thinking of getting out of the comfort zone, and consider supporting and training staff skills or even allow staff to engage in small business ventures during employment. That certainly would provide them with a strong preparedness level with the right skill levels, and to use these skills to maintain sustainable livelihood when are made redundant suddenly due to pandemics. This could mean changes of age old or existing company regulations (if there are current ones) of restricting employees in engaging in a second job or even engaging in training of skills that are outside of the normal or direct job description required skills.
- 2) The employees, of the Airline Industry, and the Hospitality and Tourism Industry in general, must make attempts individually to engage in studies or training in or of skills in the areas, while still being employed, that will assist them to adapt or at the same time to be in a strong position of preparedness to cope with external shocks.
- 3) For the FFATU, similar to what has suggested earlier to the employer, Fiji Airways, not to even think- twice of getting out of the union's comfort zone. That is, not just aiming to fight for better pay checks and good working conditions for members. But

also, include in its manifesto, provided that is yet to be included, providing strong support for members to engage in short courses, FFATU sanctioned, on other skills-based areas such as formulating business concepts/ideas, small business training on how to run and operate & financial literacy, and other related skills-based areas (eg. Caregiving, baking, personal grooming etc.) identified by the survey results as a need. These short courses should be done in partnerships with training institutions such as USP (Pacific TAFE), FNU, Uni Fiji and the other relevant, established, and recognized training institutions in Fiji.

- 4) The Fiji Government, the banking sector and other savings institutions in Fiji, should seriously or starting discussions of developing a saving alternative other than FNPF, that are simple and easy for airline workers or workers in other industries, to engage in as an additional source of income to FPNF that will be coming handy during or when facing external shocks.
- 5) And the FFATU and the Fiji Airways management should also be looking at having a savings policy for its members. As suggested by participants, probably deducted at least \$20 from pay and put aside for savings, for rainy days. Another participant is suggestion to revive or strengthen the staff credit union. Or maybe FFATU could take up this initiative.
- 6) The Fiji Government, to seriously start looking at incorporating financial literacy and small business training as a core subject at Year 12 and Year 13 secondary school level. Such an initiative would not only provide benefits to students that are intending to work at the Airline Industry, or the Hospitality & Tourism Hospitality at large, but other students for that matter with different career paths. Since as we have learned from the COVID19 pandemic. Everyone was affected in one way or another! Getting staff prepared is like following the old original Boy Scout motto 'Be prepared!'. Witnessing the devastating effects of the COVID19 pandemic on every aspect of the society, we should always be prepared.

Limitations and Future Research Gaps

There are some limitations to this study and we are discussing them in the next few paragraphs together with suggestions for areas that could be considered a fertile ground for future researches.

- 1) The population of interest for this study were the 758 Fiji Airways total staff that were laid off. However, due to the short time frame required to complete our study we had

to compromise and narrowed down our population of interest to the 400 FFATU members in particular those that were made redundant. Other staff that were holding other positions like pilots, line managers, engineers, etc. before being made redundant were not able to be included as participants in the survey. It is recommended for future studies in this subject area to try and include as many a variety of positions as possible. And to conduct the study for a longer period time in order to get as much data as possible. Which may therefore, result in having a better picture of adaptive strategies from various skill perspectives.

- 2) Our study was focusing only on the airline industry, Fiji Airways, with forced redundancy (or unplanned) due to the pandemic. And area of interest for research is to carry out a study on the impact of forced redundancy due to the COVID19 pandemic on the other industries, in particular the Hospitality & Tourism in general for Fiji. And the impact on laying off staff in specific activities like the tourism accommodation industry (hotels, motels and other accommodations etc.) and other tourist related activities such transport as & tour guides, bars & restaurants, handicraft vendors, commercial farmers etc.
- 3) Planned redundancy especially due to organizational re-structure. At most times as been observed, redundancy cases were not subject to being forced due to a pandemic but mainly due to a re-structure of the organization. Some workers are replaced by machines or the specific skills are no longer needed or redundant as a result of the new organizational re-structure. An interesting area for further research in the future.
- 4) In general, the area of labour market resilience in itself is a fertile ground for future researches. What we discussed in this paper is just a drop in the wide ocean of labour market resilience. Whether it be on adaptive strategies & resilience after being made redundant, the labour market resilience as a subject matter is in fact, filled with a huge potential to be discovered, especially within the context of a Small Island Development State (SIDS) such as Fiji for example.

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