Volume 10, Issue 11, November – 2025 International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology
ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25nov370

Ethical Theories and Biblical Principles in Business a Managerial Approach to Aviation Business Challenges

Chidiebere Ohadoma[1]

Matric N0. PG/24/0444
Ebose Augustine Osegha (Ph.D); (Lecturer)
[1]Being an Assignment Submitted to the Department of Business Adminis Tration and Marketing. School of Management Science in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Masters in Business Administration School of Management Science Babcok University Ilishan-Remo
Ogun State Nigeria

Publication Date: 2025/11/15

Abstract: This paper explores the field of business ethics as a cornerstone of responsible corporate behavior visa vi the biblical injunction. It examines theoretical frameworks, core principles, and practical applications while analyzing contemporary challenges such as globalization, technology, and environmental sustainability. This paper also explores how ethical theories such as utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics intersect with Biblical principles to guide managerial decision making in aviation business contexts. Adopting a qualitative and conceptual approach, the study reviews scholarly literature and real world case analyses. Case studies of companies like Boeing, Azman Air Limited and Aero contractors Company of Nigeria Limited highlight how ethical decisions shape reputation and long term success and ethical challenges faced by aviation managers, including issues of corporate responsibility, safety compliance, and stakeholder relations. The discussion integrates Biblical values of integrity, stewardship, and justice as frameworks for promoting ethical consistency and moral leadership in the industry. Findings suggest that applying a faith informed ethical lens enhances transparency, employee trust, and sustainable business practices. The paper concludes that combining ethical theory with Biblical principles offers a robust moral compass for managers addressing aviation business challenges, and it recommends future empirical studies to test these frameworks in diverse aviation contexts. The paper concludes that ethics is integral not only to compliance but also to building trust, competitive advantage, and organizational sustainability especially in the Nigerian aviation world where phrases like "dog eat dog" is used to dignify unethical conducts.

How to Cite: Chidiebere Ohadoma (2025) Ethical Theories and Biblical Principles in Business a Managerial Approach to Aviation Business Challenges. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*,10(11), 455-460. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25nov370

I. INTRODUCTION

Business ethics has emerged as a critical area of study in modern management and organizational practice. Aviation business is not excluded. As globalization, technological advancements, and increased competition continue to reshape industries, the ethical responsibilities of managers and organizations have become more visible and scrutinized. Ethical dilemmas in Aviation business are not merely abstract concepts; they manifest in real-time such as corporate governance failures, manpower exploitation, and unfair competition. In industries like aviation where safety, cost efficiency, and profitability often collide with ethical decision making plays a decisive role in shaping not only organizational reputation but also human lives.

The study of business ethics is particularly relevant to business and management studies because it equips leaders with frameworks to navigate the complex interplay between Safety, profit maximization, and Regulatory/legal compliance. Managers today face difficult choices that is to say; balancing safety and profit, making transparent financial decisions, and ensuring that competitive strategies remain fair and sustainable. Ethical theories such as utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics provide useful perspectives for analyzing such scenarios, while ethical decision-making models offer practical guidance for aligning business goals with societal values.

The purpose of this paper is to critically examine ethical challenges in some aviation business through the lens of ethical theories and practical frameworks (my personal experience inclusive), with a focus on aviation accidents and

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incident as a case study. Here I will analyze a real airline scenario to highlight the ethical ramifications of managerial decisions and explore common ethical concerns faced by managers in contemporary aviation business practice. Furthermore, I will draw connections between ethical competition, sound business practices, and biblical injunctions, emphasizing principles such as provision for the poor, integrity in leadership, fairness in transactions, and honest compensation. The scope of this work is not limited to theoretical discussion; rather, it integrates practical management concerns with timeless moral values, demonstrating that ethical business conduct is essential for long term sustainability and societal trust.

II. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

In today's global business environment, managers and organizations are increasingly confronted with ethical dilemmas that test their commitment to integrity, fairness, and rule of law. A major issue lies in balancing safety and profit with the ethical duty to protect all stakeholders (staff, passengers, vendors, regulatory authorities), ensure transparency, and uphold moral values in business operations. In the aviation industry in particular, dilemmas often arise between passenger safety, cost efficiency, and profitability, reflecting the broader challenge of reconciling business performance with ethical responsibility. These challenges are further complicated by cultural, legal, and religious perspectives that influence how ethics is interpreted and applied in management.

The central problem this paper addresses is the difficulty managers face in applying ethical principles consistently when confronted with competing pressures of profitability, competition, and accountability to multiple stakeholders. While theories such as utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics provide different lenses for evaluating ethical choices, the practical application of these theories in business decision making remains complex. Moreover, the integration of biblical injunctions such as the provision for the poor, equitable treatment in transactions, and the moral responsibility of leaders raises important questions about how timeless moral standards can inform modern business practices.

➢ *This Dilemma Gives Rise to the Following Research Questions:*

- What are the gaps in ethical theories based on airline accident or incident scenario and analysis?
- What are the key ethical concerns managers face in modern business environments, and what models of ethical decision making can guide them?
- How can ethical business competition be maintained in a way that aligns with both modern business practices and biblical injunctions concerning fairness, integrity, and responsibility?
- To what extent do biblical principles such as provision for the poor, integrity in leadership, fair wages, and equitable treatment provide a moral framework for addressing contemporary business dilemmas?

By addressing these questions, this paper seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of business decision making, particularly within the aviation industry, while highlighting the relevance of both secular ethical theories and biblical injunctions in shaping sustainable and morally responsible business practices

III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BUSINESS ETHICS

❖ *Utilitarianism*:

Businesses should act in ways that maximize overall welfare (e.g., environmentally sustainable production practices).

❖ *Deontological Ethics (Kantian Approach)*:

Actions must follow universal principles such as honesty, fairness, and respect for rights.

❖ *Virtue Ethics*:

Focuses on cultivating good character traits such as integrity, trustworthiness, and accountability.

A. Utilitarianism in Aviation Business and Its Application

Utilitarianism, developed by philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, could be refer to as a consequentialist ethical theory. It holds that the right course of action is the one that produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In aviation business, this means decisions should maximize overall benefits (Safety) while minimizing harm (Risk). This implies that Safety Management System (SMS) should be robust, documented and well implemented; not just for regulatory compliance, but as an organizational cultural practice.

International regulatory bodies such as ICAO identify four main SMS pillars:

➢ *Safety Policy and Objectives*

- Defines management commitment to safety, assigns responsibilities, and provides organisational direction

➢ *Safety Risk Management (SRM)*

- Identification of hazards
- Risk analysis and assessment
- Implementation of mitigation strategies

➢ *Safety Assurance*

- Monitoring, auditing, performance measurement
- Ensures that the risk controls are effective and continuously improved

➢ *Safety Promotion*

- Training, communication, safety culture development
- Ensures employees understand, value and participate in safety management

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In aviation management, the Safety Management System (SMS) serves as the formal structure for ensuring safe operations through proactive hazard identification, risk assessment, and mitigation. While SMS is primarily regulatory in nature, its successful implementation depends on the ethical orientation of organizational leaders and frontline personnel. A utilitarian perspective complements the SMS philosophy by promoting decisions that achieve the greatest benefit for the greatest number protecting passengers, crew, and the public while ensuring business continuity. For instance, utilitarian reasoning supports investments in preventive maintenance, advanced safety technologies, and human factors training, even when such measures entail short-term financial costs, because they yield long-term benefits for the larger system.

However, the practical application of utilitarian ethics in aviation business presents challenges. Managers often encounter ethical dilemmas where safety objectives conflict with financial performance targets or operational deadlines. Decisions such as extending aircraft utilization, deferring maintenance, or optimizing crew schedules can produce moral tension between immediate economic gains and potential safety risks. In such cases, utilitarian reasoning offers a rational and moral basis for prioritizing actions that preserve life and system integrity over short-term profits.

This paper explores the theoretical and practical dimensions of utilitarianism within the aviation business environment, emphasizing its application to Safety Management Systems. It seeks to demonstrate how a utilitarian ethical framework enhances risk management, promotes transparent decision-making, and strengthens safety culture. By linking moral philosophy with industry practice, the study contributes to the growing discourse on ethical management and provides aviation leaders with a structured approach to align business objectives with societal and safety responsibilities.

➢ *Passenger Safety vs. Profitability*

The aviation industry is built on two core pillars: safety and profitability. Passenger safety is the highest moral and legal responsibility of airlines and aircraft manufacturers, but the industry is also highly competitive and profit-driven. Balancing these two priorities often creates an ethical dilemma: Should airlines invest heavily in safety at the risk of lower profits the airline will go bankrupt, or reduce costs to remain competitive at the potential expense of safety, will lead to accident.

Airlines often face the temptation to cut operational costs (e.g., reducing maintenance or pilot training hours). From a utilitarian perspective, compromising safety for short-term profit is unethical because the potential harm (loss of lives, injuries, reputational damage) far outweighs financial gain. Thus, prioritizing rigorous safety procedures serves the greatest good: protecting passengers, employees, and society at large. Hence the dilemma in aviation business will be to balance Safety and profit.

- *Why the Dilemma Exists*

✓ *High Operating Costs*

Aircraft maintenance, fuel, crew training, and regulatory compliance are extremely expensive. Airlines under financial pressure may be tempted to cut corners. Base on the Nigeria Accident Investigation Bureau report AASL/2019/01/03/F concerning Azman Air Services Limited AZM 2316 5N-AIS B737-500 which occurred at Por-Harcourt on 3rd January, 2025, It was discovered that:

▪ The Captain did not have enough hours (Experience) as required with their Operations Manual Part A for the role of a captain. This could be due to the high renumeration cost of employing an experienced captain. Hence the Airline went for cheap labor.
▪ The Airline was not carrying out the required internal audits. This could be due to lack of experienced Quality Management system because of high renumeration cost of employing an experienced Quality Manager.
▪ It was also discovered that the bi-annual Simulator training did not cover single engine out maneuver training. This could be due to either due not having an experience staff in the training department or removing the slot to save simulator session cost.

✓ *Competition and Pricing Pressure*

In a deregulated market, low-cost carriers push fares down. To remain profitable, airlines sometimes minimize costs in areas such as staff wages, training, or maintenance schedules. It is important to note that Azman had the cheapest flight ticket as compared to Airpeace Limited, Ibom Air and United Nigeria Airlines. This attracted more passenger traffic however to make profit, they needed to reduce operational cost (focusing on Fixed cost).

✓ *Regulatory Compliance vs. Cost*

Adhering to safety regulations requires continuous investment. Some operators may only comply minimally to save costs. The Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) required all airlines operating in Nigeria to have an Operational manual. These requirements are detailed in the Nigerian Civil Aviation Regulation (Nig. CARs) part 9. Each airline must have their operational procedure detailed in the manuals. As much as is a mandatory requirement, most airline meet the minimum requirement just to fulfil regulatory requirement as such, they do not practice what is documented in the Operational manuals. Hence NCAA does oversight surveillances to ensure through monitoring that airlines comply with their approved procedures.

➢ *Ethical Analysis*

- *Utilitarianism*

From a utilitarian perspective, maximizing overall happiness means prioritizing safety over short-term profit. A single accident caused massive loss of Aircraft engine, trust(Passenger turn-away), and long-term financial ruin. The Azman Aircraft have been grounded since 2019 resulting in huge losses. This was a leading factor to the grounding of the

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airline's operation. Thus, safety investment is both ethically and strategically correct.

- *Deontological Ethics (Kantian)*

Airlines and manufacturers have a duty to protect life. Cutting corners on safety to increase profits is inherently immoral, regardless of outcomes. Passengers must always be treated as ends in themselves, not means to profit.

- *Virtue Ethics*

Ethical leadership in aviation demands integrity, prudence, and responsibility. A virtuous airline prioritizes safety, building long-term reputation and trust over quick profits. This is achieved by adhering to the company's approved manuals and Standard Operating Practices (SOPs).

➢ *Biblical Injunctions*

- *Provision for the Poor and Strangers (Leviticus 19:9–10)*

Aviation must protect even the most vulnerable passengers; safety cannot be compromised for economic reasons. This is because an air crash could kill innocent passengers onboard, crew as well as innocent people in their homes, cars, farm, seas, depending on where the aircraft crash on. Biological life, crops or animals could also be affected. Dependents of the passenger, crew or the causalities on the ground would be affected as well.

- *Wealth and Integrity of Leaders (1 Timothy 6:10)*

"The love of money is the root of all evil." Excessive profit seeking at the expense of safety reflects moral failure.

- *Principle of Equity (Luke 12:48: "To whom much is given, much will be Required")*

Airlines and manufacturers entrusted with human lives carry greater ethical responsibilities. We would expect them to be professional and handle aviation business professionally.

- *Honest Wages and Fair Dealings (James 5:4)*

Fair treatment of pilots, engineers, Flight Dispatchers, Cabin crew Ticketing staff, security and baggage handlers and drivers ensures safer operations. Exploiting staff for profit indirectly endangers passengers. Because a compromised staff or disgruntled staff's action or inaction could be catastrophic to the airline.

B. Deontological Ethics in Aviation Business and its Application

Deontological ethics, often associated with Immanuel Kant, is a duty-based ethical theory. It asserts that actions are morally right or wrong regardless of consequences. What matters is adherence to moral duties, rules, and principles, such as honesty, fairness, and respect for human life.

➢ *Passenger Safety as a Moral Duty*

Airlines have an inherent duty to protect passengers, crew, and ground personnel. Decisions like cutting maintenance, overworking pilots, or ignoring safety warnings violate this duty, even if such actions save costs or increase profits. Kantian ethics prioritizes the obligation to uphold safety over financial or operational considerations.

➢ *Honesty and Transparency*

Airlines must provide accurate information regarding flight schedules, delays, cancellations, and safety incidents. Concealing information to avoid bad publicity or legal consequences is ethically wrong, because it violates the duty of honesty, regardless of any potential business benefit. Most airlines will conceal information for insurance purposes (Most incidents in aviation would not be compensated by insurance if the truth is not concealed) this in morally wrong as well.

➢ *Fair Treatment of Employees*

Pilots, Engineers, flight Dispatchers, cabin crew, and ground staff must be treated with dignity and fairness. Overworking staff, underpaying wages, or ignoring labor rights breaches the duty to respect employees as ends in themselves, not merely as means to profit.

➢ *Compliance with Laws and Regulations*

Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (Nig CAA) are moral as well as legal duties to ensure passenger and environmental safety. Deontological ethics demands strict adherence, even when shortcuts might increase profitability, because following rules is an obligation, not optional.

➢ *Case Example: Airline Misrepresentation*

Suppose an airline advertises "fully safe and world-class" maintenance but knowingly delays inspections to cut costs, manipulate the Minimum Equipment List (MEL) to cut costs, use Bogos material for a maintenance task. Concealing information to the Civil Aviation Authorities, Insurance Company or other vendors.

- Deontological Analysis: The airline violates its moral duty of honesty and duty to protect passengers, even if financial gains seem justified.
- The ethical judgment is clear: the airline is acting immorally, irrespective of the positive outcomes of reduced costs or higher revenue.

C. Virtue Ethics in Aviation Business and its Application

Virtue Ethics, rooted in Aristotle's philosophy, emphasizes moral character and virtues rather than rules or consequences. It asks: *"What kind of person (or organization) should I be?"* Decisions are judged based on qualities like honesty, courage, integrity, and fairness.

➢ *Integrity in Leadership*

Airline executives must demonstrate honesty, courage, and accountability. For instance, admitting errors in flight operations or safety protocols instead of covering them up or lying to passengers that delay or cancellation is due meteorological condition or aircraft technical problems instead of admitting that is based on poor planning.

➢ *Commitment to Safety*

A virtuous airline prioritizes passenger and employee safety, not just regulatory compliance. Airlines need to

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25nov370

develop a robust Safety Management System (SMS) in the organization. This will include implementing proactive safety training programs, investing in state of the art maintenance as well as training programme. Proactively grounding planes for preventive checks reflect the virtues of prudence and responsibility.

- *Customer Service and Care*

Treating passengers with respect, empathy, and fairness is a virtue oriented approach. Handling delays, cancellations, and complaints with patience and transparency demonstrates compassion and fairness.

- *Employee Welfare*

Virtue ethics supports fair wages, proper rest periods for staff members, and safe working conditions. Valuing employees as moral agents and nurturing their growth reflects justice and respect.

- *Case Example:*

Aero Contractor Company of Nigeria limited grounded operations in 2016. During the grounding, all Flight operations staff were sent for various operational training. So here the airline voluntarily grounded operations due repetitive wrong decision making by the flight operation team.

Flights have been cancelled and aircraft recalled to the maintenance hangar due to potential technical issues; this demonstrates courage, integrity, and care. This is the core virtues valued in aviation business ethics.

D. Core Principles of Business Ethics

- *Integrity and Honesty*: Truthful communication builds trust with employees, customers, and regulators.
- *Transparency:* Open disclosure of information prevents misinformation and fraud.
- *Accountability:* Companies must accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions.
- *Fairness:* Treating employees, suppliers, and customers equitably is essential for long-term partnerships.
- *Compliance with Law:* Legal compliance forms the minimum standard of ethical conduct.

E. Business Ethics in Practice

- *Corporate Governance*

Strong governance structures prevent mismanagement and fraud. Scandals such as Enron's collapse underscore the need for ethical oversight.

- *Whistleblowing and Ethical Culture*

Organizations such as the Aero Contractors Company of Nigeria Limited encourage whistleblowing to expose corporate misconduct. This is done via a software internally developed called INCIDENT REPORTER. Major cased of thief, SOP violation by ground staff have been reported. A case of attempted Rape, was reported in 2015 involving a station manager in Enugu by a whist blower. After investigation the Station Manager was sacked.

IV. BIBLICAL ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Provision for the poor and strangers (Leviticus 19:9-10): Airlines and manufacturers should ensure accessibility and safety for all, not just the wealthy, and protect the vulnerable (passengers).

Markings for wealth and integrity of leaders (1 Timothy 6:10): Pursuit of profit at the expense of safety reflects misplaced priorities and lack of integrity.

- Principle of equity (Luke 12:48: "To whom much is given, much will be required"): Boeing, as a leader in global aviation, had a greater responsibility to act ethically and safeguard lives.
- Honest wages and fair dealings (James 5:4): Fair treatment of employees, proper training for pilots, and transparent dealings with regulators were neglected

V. SUMMARY

The Boeing 737 MAX and Azman Air crisis illustrates the catastrophic consequences of unethical decision-making in aviation. Applying ethical theories and biblical injunctions demonstrates that businesses must prioritize safety, transparency, fairness, and accountability above profit. The aviation industry, where human lives are directly at stake, requires the highest ethical standards to maintain trust and sustainability.

Although Passenger safety and profitability will always present a dilemma in aviation, but true long term profitability cannot exist without uncompromising safety. Ethical theories and biblical principles agree that safety is a moral obligation. Airlines that prioritize it not only protect lives but also build sustainable trust, brand reputation, and financial resilience. In aviation, safety is not just a regulatory requirement, it is the core of ethical responsibility and the foundation of profitability in the long run.

In aviation, utilitarianism emphasizes safety, fairness, sustainability, and long-term welfare over short-term profit. Ethical airlines following this approach ensure the greatest good for passengers, employees, investors, and society. In aviation, deontological ethics emphasizes on doing the right thing because it is right, not because it maximizes profit or utility. Airlines guided by this principle build trust, credibility, and long-term ethical reputation.

Virtue ethics in aviation focuses on building an ethical corporate character. Airlines guided by virtues foster long-term trust, loyalty, and a culture of ethical decision-making. Business ethics is a vital aspect of organizational success. It provides a framework for making decisions that balance profitability with social responsibility. While modern businesses face complex ethical challenges, companies that embed integrity, accountability, and stakeholder respect into their culture are more likely to achieve sustainable success. The future of business lies in embracing ethics not as an obligation but as a strategic advantage.

Every entrepreneur is first selfish, relationship focused and profit driven despite these attributes, aviation entrepreneurs are to replace selfishness with safety focus. The sequence should be Safety (of customer commitments)- Safety (of investors commitments) – Safety (of Natural environment) – profit – safety (of future generation job opportunity and job security)

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