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Do you know why we at Swissair haven't put in more seats? Because we hope for more passengers.

The chief job of management in any organization is decision making. To do this honestly – in the best interests of staff and share-holders – it must put the question of outlay and earnings first.

But sometimes decisions have to be made that look as if they could be dealt with by the simple formula of “less outlay = more earnings,” but at the second glance they turn out to be dilemmas of principle.

One such decision was whether or not to fit our DC-10-30s and Jumbo jets with more seats, as many other airlines have done and are doing.

It was a great temptation to adapt economy class in the DC-10 to take 9 instead of 8 seats abreast, and in the Jumbo with 10 instead of 9, which would mean 23 to 38 more seats per flight to sell.

But a closer look showed us what that would mean: our DC-10 passengers might have two people instead of one, at most, sitting next to them. In the DC-10 and the Jumbo they would have narrower arm-rests and less elbow room. It would be difficult for passengers to read their papers without folding them, and hard to relax comfortably. The aisles would be narrower. The toilets would be used by more people. The cabin crew would have to attend to more passengers resulting in less attention per passenger.

When we had weighed up all these consequences, we were forced to the conclusion that we are a service organization. And for a service organization as we understand it, the formula “more outlay = more earnings” may sometimes apply.

To maintain our position with our airline colleagues, many of whom have larger fleets and are not private concerns like us, we must remain true to ourselves. What really matters is not only how many passengers per flight we carry from A to B but also *how* we carry our passengers from A to B. How pleasantly, how conveniently, how luxuriously. It is a matter of consequence whether the hours between Manila and Zurich, say, were pleasant ones: they are part of life like any others.

All these considerations finally made us decide not to fit more seats in our DC-10s and Jumbos.

The Swiss way of putting it might be to say that the innkeeper who fries his grated potatoes (Rösti, we call them) in butter makes less money than the one who fries them in fat.

But he may make it more often.

