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## Issues Influencing Successful Travel Management During Times of Stress

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**ISSUES INFLUENCING SUCCESSFUL TRAVEL  
MANAGEMENT DURING TIMES OF STRESS**

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Corporate travel, like all tourism, has significantly changed since the disaster of September 11, 2001. The travel industry, maybe more than most, has been affected by the downturn in the economy as well as many of the psychological factors that influence the travel population in such disasters. Industry executives are feeling the stress as travel related businesses have slowed and changed since the 9/11 tragedy (11, 35, 42). For example, individuals have an increased fear of flying and security because of this incident. Any research in corporate travel, therefore, must have a perspective prior to and after 9/11. The perspective after 9/11 must include views on crisis management and how to manage operations during this period. The primary question being raised after the 9/11 incident is "Will corporate

travel return to the same status and position or will it change?"

Only time will reveal if the crisis of 9/11 has had a permanent, significant change on travel, specifically corporate travel (34). Fifty-five and three tenths percent of corporate planners report that it will take six months or less for recovery; 26.3% indicate it will take one year to recover; 5.3% believe 18 months to two years; and 13.2% are unsure when recovery will take place. Currently, business travel is looking at a one year recovery rate (40). Corporate planners indicate that meetings have been cancelled due to the fact that the meetings would be held in Washington D.C. or New York; business professionals were reluctant to travel; it was unwise for attendees to travel; and the attack of 9/11, in some ways, led to a change in the corpora-

tion's business plan that negated the need to meet.

Since 9/11, corporate management has sought ways to cut spending; a majority of the reduction in expenses is from travel. For example, corporations are searching for lower hotel prices, narrowing facilities for meetings, sending fewer attendees to meetings, holding meetings closer to headquarters, cutting back on international meetings, scaling back entertainment speaker expenses, shortening programs, lower cost destinations, and cutting back on planning staff (3, 16, 20, 26, 27, 28, 36).

There have been other minor crises--economic disasters, natural disasters, war, SARS, etc.--that have had impacts upon travel, specifically corporate travel (9, 34, 35). Another major crisis that has had a profound impact was the reduction in airline fees. United Airlines reduced ticket sales commissions in 1995. This action caused travel agents and corporate travel managers great stress upon their operations. The direct result is that specific travel agencies minimized business operations, decreased the number of employees, or witnessed the slow reduction of their traditional business. Therefore, these practices have created instability in the travel industry. However, there are travel agencies that have not failed but more so prospered during this time of stress (10). By adjusting to the present economic situation, these creative agencies have developed new ways for successful business and have created a cash flow to make up for the earnings dissipated by the reduction in airline commissions. During times of stress, the infrastructure in a travel agency is very distinct. Those who succeed are indi-

viduals who are able to adapt to the stress.

## INFLUENCES

The two primary factors that have influenced travel, specifically corporate travel, in the past eight years have been 9/11 and the reduction in airline fees. The 9/11 incident is an external factor that could not be controlled but may be classified with such elements as economic, natural disasters, wars, and SARS. The other factor, the reduction in airline fees, is a result of internal factors--infrastructure elements that are contrived to lessen stress within the system. These are two different types of stress, but they have had an equal impact upon travel, specifically corporate travel.

Changes that have occurred as a result of external factors such as 9/11, war, and SARS have been in the structure of travel affected by consumers and their willingness to fly. The changes that have occurred as a result of internal factors such as the reduction of airline fees have been upon the infrastructure and how the services are delivered to the consumer and the incentives that are provided. A corporate travel manager's favorite way to control costs is by using travel vendors with whom they have negotiated special rates and encouraging employees to use the lowest convenient airfares (45). Usually change occurs in one of these sectors but not both, so the current situation places stress in the system at both the external as well as the internal levels. When these crisis incidents occur, most agencies shift to a crisis management mode in order to survive. Some corporate travel agencies are in an expansion mode in order to put

elements in place that will allow them to prosper during this period.

Dorsey (13) categorized eight different types of travel agents. These categories range from agencies that focus primarily on sales and profits to those agencies that strategically plan by developing strong customer relations and satisfaction. These agencies are strategic planners willing to change and invest time to become technologically sophisticated (25). Their ability to accept technology and use it to their advantage is what sets them apart from agencies that do not accept these advances, such as e-mail and internet. Many agencies are being proactive in taking risks to be successful.

The agents who are just trying to survive are those individuals who are reactive in the travel industry. The individuals who are prospering during this time are usually proactive and are in a position to try new strategies in order to survive the period (18, 31). Some agents have even been successful during this period of time. It is important to study those travel agents, especially corporate travel managers, who have been successful in identifying the strategies that have made success during these times of stress. The basic emphasis is to understand the processes of adaptation and the adjustment to stress, and how those agencies that have been successful, and have changed during these difficult times of external and internal pressure.

## **CORPORATE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT**

Corporate travel managers must be considered an extension of the travel agent and the destination manager. The corpo-

rate travel manager is also someone who has to have an understanding of the business institution. This is an individual who must understand travel and how it relates to business functions in order to make the corporation a success via travel. It is a skill in which the travel must be mixed and matched with the business functions in order to achieve the objectives of the corporation.

There are a number of different types of corporate travel managers (2). Theoretically, there are those corporate travel managers who focus upon the outcomes and doing the research in terms of destination, property and site selection. At the other end of the continuum are those individuals who are interested in such items as booking, ground transportation, and other details that are associated with the trip. At one end of the continuum are those individuals who have a larger perspective and view their function as part of the corporation, blending travel, destination and site to achieve the corporate objectives. At the other end of the continuum are the individuals who see the details and mechanics and have a limited perspective in relation to the corporation.

The important question is what makes a corporate travel manager successful, specifically in terms of the primary dimensions that are related to the continuum of corporate travel managers (21). It is also important that the corporate travel manager views how such elements as 9/11 and reduction of fees influence the element of change. This is essential because some travel managers may be a situational success but may not be able to handle the change and stress in the system at different times. Those individuals who are truly successful are the

individuals who can handle change in a variety of circumstances.

The information about corporate travel focuses upon two different axis. One is concern about the quality of the experience, and creating the best environment for the travel or the event and the ability to put the traveler in a positive state of mind. Those primary factors that influence quality are directly related to amenities and how these amenities are provided in terms of personal services. Understanding the differentiation of audiences by value is an important element of quality and the allocation of resources to develop the necessary experiences that each of the client levels requires. These individuals can afford whatever they desire, so being able to programmatically look at the amenities and how these amenities can be combined to achieve a different kind of experience is the essential ingredient of success from a corporate perspective. The other end of the axis is a concern about the cost, the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation and its potential contribution to the overall success of the business, industry, or organization (14). Most often the primary concern of resource development is balancing the cost benefit analysis of travel and achieving the mission of the organization. In resource development it is important to synthesis amenities and cost approaches.

There are three different approaches to development of resources (22, 37). One approach is to reduce costs as much as possible. This is a cost-based approach to dealing with corporate travel (12, 24). Another approach is supply-side of the balance sheet in which the money is spent in hopes that there will be excellent outcomes in relation to development

of business (profits) from the expenditure. The third approach is where costs are minimized but dollars are maximized through the use of the supply-side techniques (7). This is a min/max approach. The primary purpose is balance. The administrative processes, in regard to the operations, is that of understanding finances and the revenue sources and how to manipulate these revenue sources to produce the outcomes desired by the manager.

One of the important processes, in regard to corporate travel, has been the relating of quality to the cost side to the balance sheet in relation to operations has been the process of benchmarking. Benchmarking in this context is the insuring of quality standards from corporate travel as well as an approach for increasing performance (5, 6). This standard then becomes the operating procedure for the corporation as compared to other travel programs within the same industry. The factors that influence benchmarking are efforts of the organization to pursue common goals and to manage the corporate travel in an effective and efficient manner (8). Benchmarking is used to reduce business travel costs with no change to a business' travel demands or operating environments (5). Management skills, therefore, are the overriding element that must be effectively reviewed to decide what is the best quality in corporate travel.

The primary purpose of this study was to review corporate travel issues (attributes) and to identify some of the important elements that are significant in the best corporate travel programs in Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan.

## METHODS

The primary methodology used was an importance-performance. The importance performance was used to evaluate the general perspective of crisis management of corporate travel issues. Individuals in the study were asked to refine their views based upon the 9/11 crisis, war, SARS, and fee reduction of how the field has changed.

Various formats were reviewed in order to determine the most effective form of instrumentation. It was found that the importance-performance instrument would provide the best format for development of the instrument to allow the individual to identify attributes, and the importance of these attributes in relation to the importance of performance level related to success, especially during times of stress. Importance-performance has been an outstanding method for exploratory research as it relates to the development of attributes that have an operational context in business institutions (15, 17, 19, 23, 24, 29, 30, 38, 39, 41, 44).

The critical issue in the development of an importance-performance instrument is to understand the factors that influence corporate travel management during times of stress (15, 17, 19, 23, 24, 29, 30, 38, 39, 41, 44). In order to develop a list of attributes that influence corporate management during times of stress, travel publications were reviewed. The types of travel publications reviewed were *Business Travel News*, *Travel Agent*, and *The Business Traveler's Survey*. Items/attributes identified in literature were reviewed by three content experts. A Thurstonian system of judgment was used. This is a system in which

common judging among common experts is used to develop consensus. The process used for this was that each individual developed a list and then there was a meeting, a consensus process was used to develop the final list. These items were prioritized based upon their frequency of appearance in the professional literature.

An instrument was developed using the importance-performance analysis format and the attributes that had been prioritized in the first part of the study from the review of literature. This instrument was reviewed several times internally for its consistence as well as the formatting to be used with corporate travel managers. This allowed for the development of a consistent format. After the final instrument was developed, a pilot test was conducted with 30 corporate travel agents. The format for the pilot test was that the instrument was given to the corporate travel agents and they were asked to review the items as to their saliency in corporate travel management. The corporate travel agents reviewed the attributes and make any necessary adjustments to these attributes to make the instrument more effective. The evaluation scale was a one to five scale: one indicating does not apply and five being critically important. An attribute with mean score of FOUR or above was included in the final instrument.

Once the pilot test was completed and the instrument refined, employee service directors were asked to identify successful corporate travel managers in their region (Michigan, Ohio, Indiana) that possessed flourishing operations based upon previous experience. Forty-three successful programs were identified and surveys were sent out, forty-one were

returned, and two were unusable. This is a response rate of ninety-five percent.

The type of analysis used in this study was a factor analysis of an importance-performance instrument. The form of factor analysis used was a principle component analysis. There were two components to the instruments to assess the attributes. One was the importance of the attribute to a successful operation and the performance level needed to achieve success. The purpose of the analysis was an exploratory study to begin to formulate a framework of important dimensions that influence success during times of stress. Even though the sample size is limited, the analysis was performed to obtain a preliminary perspective.

## RESULTS

An importance-performance was completed in order to determine what factors or attributes are most important to a successful corporate travel management program, especially during times of stress. There were two elements assessed in the study. One was the importance of an attribute, and the other was performance in relation to success. When an analysis of mean scores was completed, it was found that the attributes or factors with the highest mean scores were: incentives, preferred vendors, research, and expense reports. This represents a mean of four or above and a very important level on the rating scale. It was found that the critical factors on performance were salary and preferred vendors. These are the factors that have an average mean of four, and it represents a very important level on the rating scale used (See Table 1-2).

There were eighteen items in the importance-performance instrument. In order to get an indication about the relationships among the factors or attributes, a principle component analysis was conducted on the factors relating to importance of that factor and how critical performance impacted that factor. The eigen values were used to determine the best factor structure of importance. (A proportional level of .1.) A 0.3 factor loading was used in the study to determine variable that would be included in the structure for a factor. Attributes that loaded on more than one factor were not included in the factor structure but were used to help interpret the nature of a factor. When a principle component analysis was conducted on importance, the eigen values were used to determine the number of factors. (A proportion level of .1.) The number of factors used in the principle component analysis of importance was four. The variables or attributes identified in factor one were benchmarking, research, format of reservation, and negotiations. Factor one represents a vitality factor in terms of establishing a corporate travel management program. The attributes in the second factor were incentives, research, car rentals, contracts, and negotiations. This factor represents maturity in regard to a corporate travel management program. The variables for attributes in the third factor were travel policy and booking fees. These are variables or attributes that represent stability. The fourth factor was composed of competition, preferred vendors, and on-line booking. This is a factor related to quality of services. Importance is composed of four factors vitality, maturity, stability, and quality of service (See Table 3).

When a principle component analysis was conducted on performance, the eigen values were used to determine the number of factors. (A proportion level of .1.) The number of factors used in the principle component analysis of performance was four. The first factor was composed of salary, age and experience, preferred vendors, and negotiations. This first factor focuses upon leadership. The second factor was composed of travel policy and research. This represents a focus on developmental issues. The attributes in factor three were benchmarking, car rentals, and expense reports. The focus on the third issue is assessment processes. The fourth factor was composed of the following attributes: conferences, salary, competition, and diversity. The focus of this factor is survival skills. Performance is related to leadership, developmental issues, assessment processes, and survival skills (See Table 4).

## IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify important factors that have made corporate travel management programs successful. The methodology used was an importance performance. The importance-performance data was collected from a general perspective.

The results from the principle component analysis of importance indicated that there are four important factors: vitality, maturity, stability, and quality of services. These factors indicate that a successful corporate travel management program has to be very innovative and open to change. A successful corporate travel management program must have the necessary position as well as the

necessary vision to make change. Vision, in this context, is from a leadership position and having the necessary resources to bring change that is necessary.

The principle component of the performance indicates that there are four basic dimensions: leadership, developmental issues, assessment processes, and survival skills. These factors indicate that a successful corporate travel management program is always in the process of viewing ways to change and that they have a systematic process in place to bring change. They have the necessary perspective from leadership and have a global perspective of the industry and are able to change and divert their resources from one area to another in order to accommodate the current situation. They have the ability to change their operations on short notice and have the ability to put their resources and diversify their resources because of the expanse of their operation.

It is extremely important to the future for travel management operations to know what factors are important to be successful, specifically in times of stress (43). As the travel industry, specifically the corporate aspect, looks into the future, there are many stresses that will be placed upon this industry that has not been there in the past. The perspective of successful travel management operations must be reflected throughout the industry. The industry as a whole must be willing to make change in order to be successful. Up to this point in time, what has primarily happened in corporate travel management has been that the successful corporate travel managements have served as a model for the development of other corporate travel manage-

ment programs. There has not been a thorough investigation of what makes these corporate travel management programs successful so that the dynamics and causal factors could be understood (43). It is important to understand how and why these corporate travel management programs have been successful so

that training programs can be developed by the industry that is not based strictly on imitation but upon an instructional process that has some causal dimensions behind it and is focused upon what causes change and how this change can be prepared for the future, especially during times of stress.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics: Importance**

| <b><u>Variable</u></b> | <b><u>Number</u></b> | <b><u>Mean</u></b> | <b><u>Standard Deviation</u></b> |
|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Benchmarking           | 39                   | 3.897              | 0.718                            |
| Conferences            | 39                   | 3.385              | 0.493                            |
| Incentives             | 39                   | 4.436              | 0.680                            |
| Salary                 | 39                   | 4.103              | 0.680                            |
| Travel Policy          | 39                   | 3.462              | 0.790                            |
| Competition            | 39                   | 3.564              | 0.718                            |
| Age & Experience       | 39                   | 3.846              | 0.670                            |
| Diversity              | 39                   | 3.615              | 0.633                            |
| Preferred Vendors      | 39                   | 4.128              | 0.469                            |
| Creativity             | 39                   | 3.897              | 0.718                            |
| Research               | 39                   | 4.205              | 0.833                            |
| Format of Reservation  | 39                   | 2.923              | 0.480                            |
| Car Rental             | 39                   | 3.000              | 0.397                            |
| Booking Fees           | 39                   | 3.615              | 0.590                            |
| Expense Reports        | 39                   | 4.051              | 0.686                            |
| Contracts              | 39                   | 3.949              | 0.510                            |
| Negotiations           | 39                   | 3.974              | 0.743                            |
| On-line Booking        | 39                   | 3.282              | 0.455                            |

**Table 2: Descriptive Study: Performance**

| <b><u>Variable</u></b> | <b><u>Number</u></b> | <b><u>Mean</u></b> | <b><u>Standard Deviation</u></b> |
|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Benchmarking           | 39                   | 3.615              | 0.633                            |
| Conferences            | 39                   | 3.051              | 0.223                            |
| Incentives             | 39                   | 3.949              | 0.686                            |
| Salary                 | 39                   | 4.077              | 0.532                            |
| Travel Policy          | 39                   | 3.385              | 0.747                            |
| Competition            | 39                   | 3.282              | 0.605                            |
| Age & Experience       | 39                   | 3.641              | 0.628                            |
| Diversity              | 39                   | 3.564              | 0.552                            |
| Preferred Vendors      | 39                   | 4.026              | 0.486                            |
| Creativity             | 39                   | 3.538              | 0.720                            |
| Research               | 39                   | 3.590              | 0.785                            |
| Format of Reservation  | 39                   | 2.795              | 0.409                            |
| Car Rental             | 39                   | 3.000              | 0.397                            |
| Booking Fees           | 39                   | 3.410              | 0.595                            |
| Expense Reports        | 39                   | 3.897              | 0.718                            |
| Contracts              | 39                   | 3.769              | 0.706                            |
| Negotiations           | 39                   | 3.256              | 0.549                            |
| On-line Booking        | 39                   | 3.051              | 0.224                            |

**Table 3: Principle Component Analysis: Importance**

| <u>Variable</u>   | <u>Vitality</u> | <u>Maturity</u> | <u>Stability</u> | <u>Quality of Service</u> |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Benchmarking      | <b>-0.348</b>   | 0.267           | -0.209           | -0.113                    |
| Conferences       | 0.143           | -0.247          | 0.088            | 0.110                     |
| Incentives        | -0.063          | <b>0.413</b>    | 0.035            | 0.384                     |
| Salary            | -0.283          | -0.207          | 0.166            | -0.127                    |
| Travel Policy     | 0.122           | -0.153          | <b>0.504</b>     | 0.187                     |
| Competition       | -0.209          | 0.024           | -0.193           | <b>0.449</b>              |
| Age & Experience  | 0.166           | 0.299           | 0.133            | -0.299                    |
| Diversity         | -0.185          | 0.144           | 0.288            | 0.219                     |
| Preferred Vendors | -0.256          | -0.058          | 0.134            | <b>-0.402</b>             |
| Creativity        | -0.268          | -0.151          | -0.280           | -0.127                    |
| Research          | <b>-0.325</b>   | <b>0.317</b>    | -0.021           | -0.079                    |
| Format of Res.    | <b>-0.351</b>   | -0.240          | 0.169            | 0.102                     |
| Car Rental        | -0.291          | <b>-0.377</b>   | 0.256            | -0.025                    |
| Booking Fee       | 0.067           | 0.149           | <b>0.375</b>     | -0.272                    |
| Expense Report    | -0.216          | 0.178           | -0.015           | -0.030                    |
| Contract          | 0.139           | <b>0.319</b>    | 0.291            | -0.204                    |
| Negotiation       | <b>-0.36</b>    | 0.182           | 0.250            | 0.042                     |
| On-line Booking   | 0.009           | 0.069           | 0.224            | <b>0.401</b>              |
| Eigenvalue        | 4.364           | 2.690           | 2.321            | 1.994                     |
| Proportion        | 0.242           | 0.149           | 0.129            | 0.111                     |

**Table 4: Principle Component Analysis: Performance**

| <b>Variable</b>   | <b>Leadership</b> | <b>Developmental</b> | <b>Assessment</b>     | <b>Survival</b>      |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
|                   |                   | <u><b>Issues</b></u> | <u><b>Process</b></u> | <u><b>Skills</b></u> |
| Benchmarking      | -0.040            | 0.275                | <b>-0.471</b>         | 0.061                |
| Conferences       | -0.023            | 0.080                | 0.004                 | <b>0.507</b>         |
| Incentives        | -0.201            | 0.276                | 0.105                 | 0.071                |
| Salary            | <b>-0.340</b>     | 0.042                | 0.001                 | <b>0.434</b>         |
| Travel Policy     | 0.015             | <b>-0.373</b>        | 0.114                 | 0.294                |
| Competition       | 0.223             | 0.279                | 0.067                 | <b>0.355</b>         |
| Age & Experience  | <b>-0.365</b>     | -0.248               | -0.058                | 0.169                |
| Diversity         | 0.185             | 0.000                | 0.246                 | <b>0.322</b>         |
| Preferred Vendors | <b>-0.382</b>     | 0.022                | -0.062                | 0.244                |
| Creativity        | -0.179            | 0.279                | 0.169                 | 0.232                |
| Research          | -0.259            | <b>0.447</b>         | 0.104                 | 0.061                |
| Format of Res.    | 0.260             | 0.265                | 0.209                 | 0.128                |
| Car Rental        | -0.251            | -0.046               | <b>0.441</b>          | 0.009                |
| Booking Fee       | -0.260            | -0.288               | 0.069                 | 0.148                |
| Expense Report    | -0.041            | -0.073               | <b>-0.522</b>         | 0.083                |
| Contract          | -0.276            | -0.053               | -0.276                | 0.043                |
| Negotiation       | <b>-0.321</b>     | 0.180                | 0.220                 | 0.173                |
| On-line Booking   | 0.001             | 0.296                | -0.048                | 0.85                 |
| Eigenvalue        | 3.903             | 3.123                | 2.461                 | 1.899                |
| Proportion        | 0.217             | 0.174                | 0.137                 | 0.899                |

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