

# Visions in Leisure and Business Monographs

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Volume 1  
Issue 2 *Volume 1 Monograph, 2005*

Article 3

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2005

## Corporate Travel Management: A Model for Change

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### Recommended Citation

Firis, Dorothy M. and Groves, David L. (2005) "Corporate Travel Management: A Model for Change," *Visions in Leisure and Business Monographs*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 3.

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**CORPORATE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT:  
A MODEL FOR CHANGE**

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**CORPORATE TRAVEL STRUCTURE**

Corporate travel is traditionally defined as sales calls are directly related to the business functions. Traditionally, the purpose of sales' calls has been to increase business either through the development of relationships with a client or the demonstration of the value of the product to the client. The more effective the sales call, the greater the volume of business. Meetings and conventions are another important aspect of corporate travel. The primary traditional purpose of meetings and conventions is the improvement of skills, either internally or externally to the organization. The basic premise is that the increase in skills will ultimately lead to an increase in business. Meeting and conventions are a way for people to gather information, and if travel is decreased, it will affect the way that new employees are trained (14). Corporate travel is

also used to increase business through face-to-face meetings. This is a more effective way to do business.

There is also a type of business travel that is indirectly related. Many of these types of travel have been termed "good will" which is also known as hospitality. This type of travel often is related to the development of an environment that will create business in the future. The basic nature of this type of travel depends on the establishment of positive relationships. These infrastructure relationships depend upon corporate travel managers establishing relationships with travel agents and destination managers (33). It is the corporate travel manager's responsibility to establish the relationships that are necessary to develop positive environments with the business community.

Superimposed upon this business travel around function, directly or indirectly, is incentive travel. Incentive, in this context, is a reward for the productions or outcomes related to achievement. Travel agencies understand the corporate view of business travel and will often meet travel needs with incentive travel programs (48). Incentive travel is one of the fastest growing segments in the world's tourist industry (43). Incentives are designed to increase business, motivate employees, and raise morale and sales.

The basis of incentive travel is often amenity driven. Amenities, in this context, are beyond the ordinary. The extraordinary is expected since it is a reward for performance. One of the primary factors that influences corporate travel is the role, position, and station of the traveler. Obviously, if the travel is by the CEO, then the travel is by corporate jet, and all of the arrangements are first-class. If the business traveler is middle or lower management, the amenities are not as much a concern as is cost.

The corporate travel structure is constantly evolving (24). This evolution is caused by internal as well as external factors. It is important to understand their factors and how they will affect the future of corporate travel. The change of the airline fee structure is an example of external factors that have had a significant impact upon the structure of corporate travel. An example of an internal factor that has had a profound impact upon corporate travel structure has been technology and the adaptation of the corporate travel manager to this technology. The future of corporate travel directly depends upon how the industry adjusts to change. The ability to adjust to change is essential for a successful travel operation.

## CHANGE

There are two different perspectives in regard to change: short and long term. It is important to define success in each of these perspectives. Success in the short term may not be the same as success in the long term. It also must be viewed in terms of its continuity. What is the continuity between the objectives and success measures in the short term as it relates to the long-term? The basic perspective in defining success is that the individual has the ability to change the organization through time to meet its objectives in both the short term and the long term. How has the stress associated with changes from 9/11, fee reductions, war, and SARS had an impact upon the corporate travel manager (13, 37, 38). Understanding how corporate travel management has changed during these particular periods of time and the factors that influence it is essential to defining success, specifically in times of stress (11, 21).

Success in this new context requires understanding the factors that make the corporate travel management a success during these troubled times (6, 36, 37). So often attributes that influence success is defined in the short term and not related to the long term (44). Success within these new parameters has to be defined in terms of stress and factors that make the individual successful during the short and long term periods. Another aspect of success is not only understanding the factors that contribute to the success, but understanding performance level on each of these attributes and how performance level influences the success of the operation (3, 16, 46). Performance in this context is how well the travel manager is achieving the objectives of the organization on that particular attribute (12, 19). It is also essential to understand the attribute in terms of its impor-

tance and performance changes through time.

Strategic planning is the ability to adapt or adjust to new situations, especially stressful ones in the short and long term (1, 2, 17, 21). One aspect of change is the development of strategies with the potential to have an impact upon the operations. Another aspect of the change process is the ability to assess the risk of each of the strategies, and to be able to select the one strategy that has maximum impact given the current circumstances. These elements influence the ability to cope or change, the ability of the individual to have perspective on global issues, and the ability to research these issues and how they impact the corporate travel management program (16, 47).

Research indicates that change is one of the most important elements to success. Effectiveness in this context is understanding the organization's position and historically how it has evolved and the factors that have influenced its evolution (1, 2). Another important aspect of change is the ability of the corporate travel manager to accept change as a process and see this process as an element to future endeavors (42). Research further indicates that in order to make a change, risk is an essential element for adaptation and adjustment (17). Risk in this context must be viewed in a longitudinal perspective. An individual must be able to operate in an environment where change and risk are inevitable. Success is the acceptance of change as an element of survival. Another important element to change is the ability to understand the factors influence these operational elements in times of stress to be successful (22). An individual must have a positive attitude. Change must be viewed not only as a survival but an opportunity in which the organization can reengineer itself to be successful. In order to prosper during times of

stress, it is important to understand the conditions and factors that influence these conditions and be prepared to take advantage opportunities (23). Success is seeing the operational elements and knowing how to manipulate these operational elements during times of stress. It is essential that the corporate travel manager have the proper positive perspective towards stress and his or her ability to manage the organization during these times (9). Attitude is the element that allows the individual to have confidence during these times of stress and the development of contingency plans for these times of stress. It is important to be on the cutting edge of these operational systems and understand how these various operational systems react to various conditions.

A common thread among the elements of perspective, risk, and the attitude toward risk, and operational attributes is a systems approach. A systems approach is an open, dynamic process to problem solving and understanding the elements that it takes to have a successful operation based on the infrastructure of both the corporate travel as well as the general travel perspectives (11). It is important in this systems context that the nature of travel, both corporate and general, be related to the business institution and its objectives. This ability to determine the variety and complexity of the business institutions and how to relate travel and integrate these systems that success is achieved (10, 39). What makes this even more difficult is the culture of each institution and how this culture has adapted to travel as a process of achieving the corporate objectives. The corporate culture places the system into a different perspective. This different perspective is the understanding of strategies and how these strategies influence the organization during times of stress. These strategies must be understood in terms of how they relate to the various business functions and the role

of travel benefits to each of these corporate functions.

### **COPING WITH CHANGE AS A CORPORATE TRAVEL MANAGER**

After the crises of 9/11, fee reduction, war, and SARS many corporate travel managers had the struggle of dealing with the change process. Everyday situations changed and burdened the corporate travel manager (21). Corporate travel managers must now consider where it is safe to hold meetings, traveling by plane, fee reduction, reduction in business, price increase, will crises decline the amount of revenue coming to a specific state, and recovery questions must be considered (15, 20, 26, 30, 31, 32, 40)). Corporate travel managers understand the impact is significant to the organizations as well as its employees (17). The organization lost profit and productivity. The individual lost jobs, wages, status, and has had emotional distress. Successful corporate travel managers are the ones who are honest, direct, and open in their lines of communication. They knew how to cope with the change process.

After a crisis has occurred, change is inevitable and the management of change is a crucial factor in an organizations performance. During the change process there are several different avenues to consider. Benamati and Lederer (5) state that there are four steps to help in the change process:

- Education and training: Educate and train employees of changes being made.
- Internal procedures: Be sure that all employees understand the change.
- Vendor support: Let vendors know of change.
- Consultant support: Get outside help if needed with the change.

The key attributes from this study indicate that knowledge and support are the common

elements to success. Change according to Benamati and Lederer is a dynamic interactive process.

Good management skills are the key to help companies through times of change (7). Managers must understand change themselves to help inspire their staff (18). An open line of communication must be held within the company. Stevens and Grambrell (45) list five goals for a company during a period of change:

1. Soliciting ideas from every available source.
2. Reviewing and improving ideas that have been provided.
3. Screening negative changes.
4. Implementing positive changes.
5. Creating an environment that is fair and full of innovative and productive people

Success, according to Stevens and Grambrell, is based upon assessment and evaluation processes. Important attributes are research, creativity, and policy.

Being prepared is essential to managing change. This readiness leads to positive attitudes and a framework for problem solving. After a crisis has occurred, Buckley (8) indicates five coping strategies identified with the process of change:

1. Be optimistic.
2. Go one step at a time.
3. Keep the faith.
4. Analyze the situation.
5. Take action.

Good attitudes and intuitive are essential attributes to successful corporate travel management programs. Often these attributes are directly associated with good perspective and a plan of action.

The purpose of this study was to identify important factors that have made corporate travel management programs successful, especially in times of stress.

## METHODS

Various formats to study corporate travel management during times of stress were reviewed in order to determine the most effective instrumentation. The most effective instrumentation format identified was case studies because they provide the only data source that has a practical management context.

Ten vignettes of successful travel corporate management programs were given to corporate travel agents to develop a case study format (28, 34, 41, 50, 51). The material that has been reviewed has been those case studies and descriptions of successful travel agencies that have adapted/adjusted to the stress during the past five years. Publications such as *Travel Agent* and *Business Travel News* have been avidly covering the adaptation/adjustment stories and case studies for the past eight years. These publications have revealed individuals who have been successful, especially during the stress time period, in order to allow their readers to find patterns that may be able to be used in their adjustment/adaptation process. Participants were to review these vignettes and identify the one factor that made their organization effective, specifically during times of stress. The results from this pilot study were used to modify the instrument and develop a final instrument that would be used with corporate travel managers.

Fifty-two award winning case studies of successful corporate travel management programs were identified to be used in the

study and five were randomly selected to be used with the corporate travel managers. The material in the case studies were descriptions of successful travel agencies that have adapted/adjusted to the stress. Publications such as *Travel Agent* and *Business Travel News* have been covering the adaptation/adjustment stories and case studies avidly for the past eight years. These publications have sought out individuals who have been successful, especially during the stress time period, in order to allow their readers to find patterns that may be able to be used in their adjustment/adaptation process. Corporate travel managers in the study were asked to identify the primary element that allowed the organizations in the case study to be successful during times of stress. Corporate travel managers were identified through an employee service organization. The employee service directors were asked to identify successful corporate travel managers in their region (Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana) that possessed flourishing operations based upon previous experience. Forty-three 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 for the case studies was a form of nominal scaling. A Thurstian system of judgment was used to place responses in a category (three judges were used in the analysis process. Judges classified this material from the corporate travel managers alone and then met as a group to form the final categories). A cross tabulation of responses was performed and there were no consistent relationships among the categories. A conceptual analysis was used to form categories and threads among the responses.

## RESULTS

Case studies of five successful corporate travel management programs that had won awards nationally were analyzed in order to determine important factors that made them a success (See Tables 1-5). In an initial cross tabulation of the responses there were no consistent patterns among the five case studies used.

Being that there were no consistent responses, a conceptual classification system was used to analyze the responses on the five case studies. Three content experts analyzed the categories from each of the case studies and based them on the factors identified in the principle component analysis. Five base categories from the responses were established. The categories were employees, technology, service, management, and planning (See Table 6). There were fifteen items or responses under employees. There were three items or responses under technology. There were seven items or responses under planning. There were eight items or responses under service. There were eleven items or responses under management. A distribution of the responses was tabulated in terms of percentages.

Of those items under employees, the ones with the greatest percentage were training, performance, individualized approach, and employee incentives. The common thread through the employee category was training and the competence level of the individual in terms of performance. Even though the technology category only had three items, the largest of these three items was web technology. There are not enough categories under technology to make a generalization except to say that the expectations for technology were higher than the current categories and percentages. In the service category, the highest response rates were quality peo-

ple, diverse customers, and customer service in terms of sophistication. The common thread was the interface between the employee and the customer in providing amenity services. In the management category, the highest response rates were negotiation, qualitative management, and consolidation. The common thread to these responses was a systematic approach to management, especially in terms of performance and outcomes. In the final category of planning, the largest responses were benchmarking and strategic planning. The common thread through the responses was idea development and the ability to position the organization in regard to development to these ideas.

## IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify important factors that have made corporate travel management programs successful. The data from the case studies was collected in terms of specific corporate travel management programs.

Results from the case studies indicate that there are five important dimensions: employees, technology, service, planning, and management. These are the specific skills that are needed to be successful as a corporate travel manager in turn of importance and performance. It should also be noted the authors expected those organizations that are successful in terms of travel management would be very high tech (4). These results indicate that the traditional perspective of employees and service are primarily the most important element to success in terms of skills (25, 27, 33). These results indicate that the management and technology must be focused around quality employees and services to be successful (29).

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 (49). 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 management 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 (49). 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: Response to Case Study**

**Organization: Odom**

<u>Response</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Always trying to improve	7.69%
2. Structure	10.26%
3. Vision	10.26%
4. Strategic Planning	10.26%
5. Work smarter – not harder	10.26%
6. Service Oriented	12.82%
7. Sales Skills	2.56%
8. Change causes need to improve	2.56%
9. Communication	5.13%
10. Consolidation	10.26%
11. Individualized approach	17.95

**Table 2: Response to Case Study**

**Organization: World Trade Partners**

<u>Response</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Centralized	7.69%
2. Vendors	5.13%
3. Negotiation	15.38%
4. Customer Services	10.26%
5. Citizenship	10.26%
6. Need different audience	7.69%
7. Technology	17.95%
8. Employee incentives	15.38%
9. Diverse customers	10.26%

**Table 3: Response to Case Study**

**Organization: Dell**

<u>Response</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Quality data	5.13%
2. Technology	15.38%
3. Research	7.69%
4. Quantitative management	12.82%
5. Scientific management	12.82%
6. Individualization	10.26%
7. Training	12.82%
8. Systems development	17.95%
9. Non-responsive	5.12%

**Table 4: Response to Case Study**

**Organization: Johnson & Johnson**

<u>Response</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Communication	2.56%
2. Benchmarking	25.64%
3. Services	10.26%
4. Consolidation	5.13%
5. Negotiation	7.69%
6. Straightforward	5.13%
7. Reports	15.38%
8. Web technology	28.21%

**Table 5: Response to Case Study**

**Organization: Best In Show**

<u>Response</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Performance	15.38%
2. Customer service	7.69%
3. Training	23.08%
4. Certification	7.69%
5. Quality people	15.38%
6. FAM trips	5.13%
7. Education	5.13%
8. Incentives	7.69%
9. Quality employees	12.82%

**Table 6: Conceptual Classification**

<b>Employees</b>	
Sales Skills	2.56%
Vendors	5.13%
Education	5.13%
Negotiations	7.69%
Incentives	7.69%
Certification	7.69%
Work Smarter, not harder	10.3%
Individualization	10.3%
Training	10.3%
Service Oriented	12.8%
Quality Employees	12.8%
Performance	15.4%
Employee Incentives	15.4%
Individualized Approach	17.9%
Training	23.1%
<b>Service</b>	
Always Trying to Improve	7.69%
Need Different Audience	7.69%
Customer Service	7.69%
Customer Service	10.3%
Citizenship	10.3%
Diverse Customer	10.3%
Services	10.3%
Quality People	15.4%
<b>Planning</b>	
Change Causes Improve	2.56%
Quality Data	5.13%
FAM Trips	5.13%
Research	7.69%
Vision	10.3%
Strategic Planning	10.3%
Benchmarking	25.6%
<b>Technology</b>	
Technology	15.3%
Technology	17.9%
Web Technology	28.2%

**Management**

Communication	2.56%
Communication	5.13%
Consolidation	5.13%
Straightforward	5.13%
Centralized	7.69%
Consolidation	10.3%
Structure	10.3%
Quantitative Mgmt.	12.8%
Scientific Mgmt.	12.8%
Negotiation	15.4%
Reports	15.4%

- All responses from the five case studies were placed into the five conceptual classifications and that is why there are repeated categories under the same classification.

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