Overcoming the Pain of Change.

Minimizing the resistance to a new travel policy

Overview

Implementing a new workplace system — whether it's for health and safety, invoicing, security, IT or business travel — requires changes in behaviour from staff to succeed.

The technical challenges of introducing new technology or admin processes often pale in comparison to the most significant change obstacle of all — internal resistance.

New business travel policies are particularly vulnerable to internal resistance due to their direct impact on an employee's individual experience. While the rationale for implementing changes may be entirely sound, it's often irrelevant to the traveler who has to accept a loss of loyalty status or a reduction in the comfort they regularly enjoy when traveling. Follow the tips provided here to help mitigate this transition more smoothly.

What is change management?

US-based change management consultant Prosci defines change management as, "the process of preparing, equipping and supporting individuals to successfully adopt change to drive organizational success and outcomes".

The application of change management covers three key areas:

1. A process used by project teams to manage system, process and organizational changes.

2. A leadership competency for enabling change within an organization.

3. A strategic capability designed to increase change capacity and responsiveness.

Changing your business travel program

Ensuring a smooth transition and creating behavioural change amongst staff requires upfront communication, sharing of objectives and clear illustration of the detrimental effects of non-compliance.

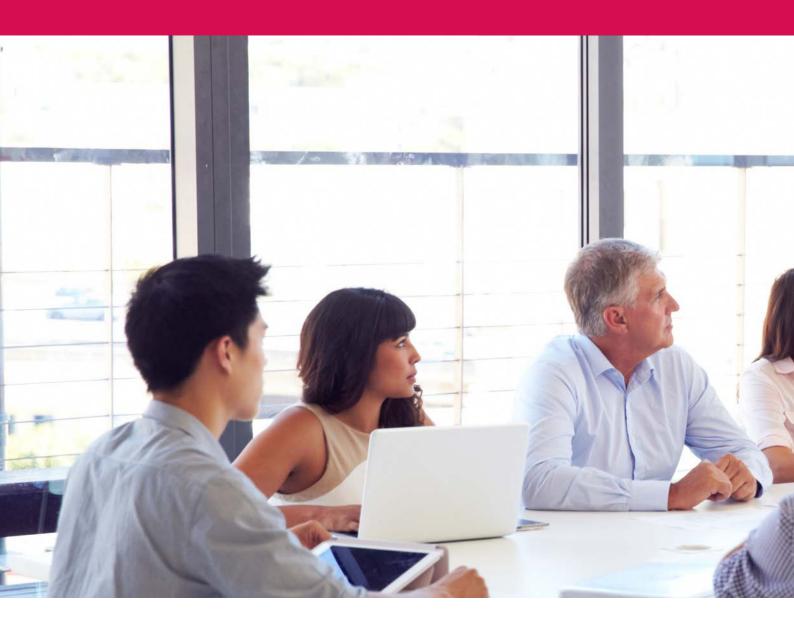Changing a business travel program usually consists of the following:

- Creation and rollout of a new travel policy.

- New technology implementation.

- Implementing new booking and approval processes.

All these elements require engagement and action from internal and external stakeholders. The implementation process also requires day-to-day management to minimize non-compliance after rollout.

Reassure your employees throughout the change. Preference, comfort, convenience and safety are their primary concerns when traveling for business. They are sure to feel unease if they can no longer fly with their preferred airline or if accommodation budgets change. Be sure to make it clear that you share and have sufficiently addressed their concerns **and that the changes will be to their benefit.**

Change management

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A good leader or manager will not just communicate this vision, they will ensure that their employees understand the vision and how it is linked to the planned change.

Clarify leadership

Effective leadership is one of the most important factors during periods of change. Organizational changes, such as to your travel program, require a clear vision. This is what your business aims to achieve through change.

A good leader or manager will not just communicate this vision —they will ensure that their employees understand the vision and how it is linked to the planned change, and even believe in the vision themselves. A successful change leader will then turn this vision into a practical action plan, while never losing sight of the people affected

Change management across the generations

Change management plays an important role in today's multi-generational workforce. Business travel programs are being updated to respond to new trends and maintain relevance for younger, often tech-savvy users. So, while incoming generations, with different sets of expectations, priorities and behaviours, drive many of these changes in the workplace — they, naturally, also respond to change differently.

Before ushering in a host of changes to your travel policy, it is important to understand how to communicate and build trust with the different demographics in your organization. Empathy is key here.

Research conducted by Canadian recruitment agency Robert Half, showed that communication skills, the ability to adapt to change and technological skills are the top three areas where generations differ the most in the workplace.

Generations X and Y often view change "as a vehicle for new opportunities", while Gen Z simply "is accustomed to change and expects it in the workplace". Baby boomers, on the other hand, are more reluctant and cautious when it comes to adapting to changes.

Approaches such as blended technology help to bridge the gap between generations with different technological preferences. Blended technology acknowledges the importance of human interactions (e.g. between the traveler and agent or consultant) amidst this new age of innovation and technology. Designing a change that achieves balance such as this will help to make your employees, no matter their age or experience, feel considered.
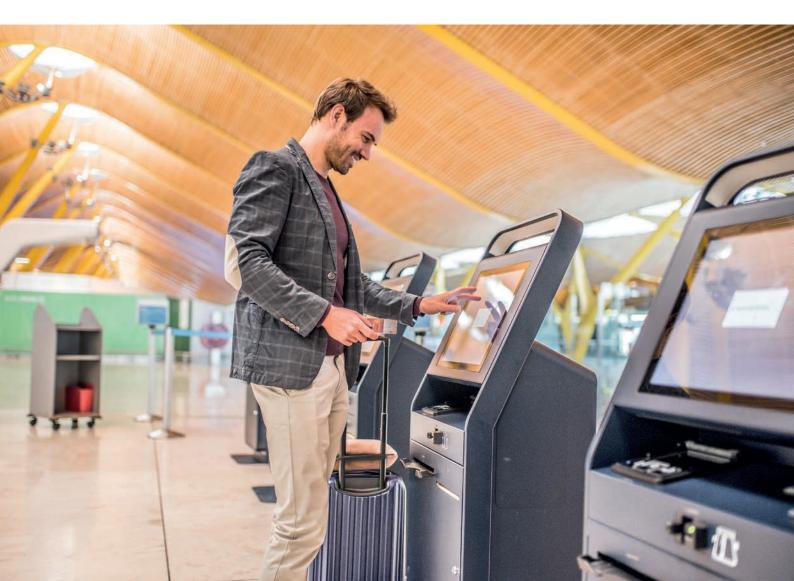
Three steps for effective change management:

1.

Designing a change

Identify what you want to achieve with your new travel program.

Engage a professional Travel Manager to design a policy that meets your business objectives. This step should identify the top-level goals for your travel program such as spending reductions, more efficient booking processes, simpler cost reconciliation and increased visibility of your expenditure.

Remember that saving money is just one concern that should be addressed in the travel policy. Creating efficiencies, reducing stress and risk management are all essential policy considerations. Breaking down these components will help travellers form a better understanding of how following the policy will get the best outcome for them and the business. Travel policies should be flexible. For instance, it can be important to allow people to go over budget if they have a good reason. VIP travellers need to be able to bypass certain requirements.

Work with your travel implementation team to anticipate problems and formulate a strategy for rolling out your changes.

2.

Deploying a change

Communicate your new policy throughout your business.

Work alongside your travel implementation team to identify the best ways to educate your staff on tracking success. A common cause of traveler friction is a poorly communicated rationale for change. Counteracting this friction requires circulation and explanation of your new policy as well as training on new booking systems and procedures. You want to avoid employees feeling confronted with a change they feel they were not informed of properly.

Other steps you can take include:

- Engaging with your travellers to identify those who will incur a loss in status or rewards as a result of the new policy.

- Take advantage of your Travel Manager's network to compensate staff who may lose benefits as a result of the changes. This can include recompense items such as airline lounge passes or individual concessions for higher booking classes.

- Tailor communication to affected travellers outlining the need for policy changes, the objectives for your new policy and any efforts the company is taking to alleviate losses in status and rewards.

Remember that, no matter how practical or necessary, changes to your business travel program closely impact individuals in your organization. Encouraging their input throughout the process will help to ease apprehension that can arise during this time of change.

3.

Driving a change

Promote the importance of policy compliance.

Engage with your Travel Manager for reporting and commentary on how you are tracking against your objectives. Your Travel Manager can analyze where your policy is leaking and determine new tactics to optimise and combat non-compliance. Your company should also consistently report your rate of policy compliance to your travellers. Identifying and recruiting key people in your organization to help drive the behaviour change is also a valuable countermeasure to non-compliance.

Encourage compliance by having a clearly written travel policy that is widely distributed and accessible. If you're still using a manual travel management system, consider automating your processes.

Bring an expert on board

Review regularly

Your travel policy should not be considered a static document. People and behaviours change; trends and technology change. Create a culture in which change is embraced and communicated as a catalyst for improvement.

You should review your travel policies on a regular basis. Ensure that your employees have a platform to provide constructive feedback on your travel program so that when change does occur, it is relevant, pertinent and effective.

Be sure to acknowledge any feedback received and work together with employee stakeholders and your Travel Manager to determine how to best respond. Transparency throughout the process is essential.