

TEXT: JÜRGEN BALTES

Simplify your travel management!

Was everything simpler in the past? Many travel managers would agree. The mobile revolution, concerns for the safety of the travellers, ever more flexible flight and hotel pricing – and service providers who try to win over travellers directly. All this makes the job of a travel manager much harder. The only answer here is simple solutions.

A travel manager in a large European firm describes his daily challenges as follows. “Ten years ago, travel management wasn’t so complex. The travel agent was in charge of booking and handling; independent bookings and the issue of duty of care were not where they are today. Now, however, there are dozens of ways to book a trip, and security makes things increasingly complicated.” The travel manager is one of the 112 travel executives recently surveyed by the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) about their current concerns and needs. The gist of the survey’s findings? Yes, the job has become more complex. And simplification is required. As time goes on, corporate business travel programmes are becoming ever more complex. New suppliers,

protocols, processes and policies are constantly being added to the mix. Given that complexity and unrestricted growth ultimately mean inefficiency and additional costs, companies are longing for simplicity. A total of 72 percent of those surveyed were actively searching for interfaces where their travel management processes and structures could be simplified.

As high as this figure seems, even ahead of the desire for simplicity on the list of priorities for travel managers are aspects such as “traveller satisfaction”, “data security on the go”, the ongoing issue of “cost saving” and, right at the top of the agenda, “traveller safety”.

Nonetheless, the majority of travel managers are aware that everything that they do to make their travel programme easier impacts on their other



**White paper –
Simplifying Managed
Travel**

The value that travel management contributes is increasingly measured by optimised processes and cross-departmental collaboration. The more complex the business travel programme becomes, the more important it is to improve efficiency and transparency with simplification initiatives. How can companies tackle this challenge? corporate.hrs.com/de/simplify

Safety First

Strategic priority of travel management in 2018

PRIORITY



Duty of care | Traveller safety

cost savings



data security

traveller **satisfaction** 



simplification of the travel programme

implementation of **technology**



digitisation

“It is always wise to look at processes together with other departments. The travel management process does not follow departmental boundaries.”

Jörg Martin, CTC: The need to look beyond your own remit



objectives. This becomes particularly evident on closer examination of those companies that see the issue of simplifying their travel programmes as their “top priority” – in the ACTE study, they are referred to as “top simplifiers”. They perform better than the majority across virtually all areas and there are far fewer “implementation deficits” in their measures.

“Top simplifiers” are more consistent

Travel managers face the challenges of turning their simplification priorities into tactical initiatives and driving forward with the projects. Here, however, an “implementation deficit” can be seen – referred to in the study as an “execution gap”.

This refers to the void between those respondents who generally consider a measure to be important – and those who have already taken action. Companies above all wish to take action regarding traveller and data security (83 and 76 percent respectively). However, 23 and 24 percent of those companies respectively have not yet done anything about it. The “top simplifiers” did better here by just 16



The top tips for simplification

1. Get the travellers on board: For many travel managers, an "improved travel experience" is a vital key performance indicator (KPI). But only a few seek to establish regular contact with their travellers. The majority thus also miss out on potentially valuable input. However, "top simplifiers" tend to see travellers as partners and communicate more closely with them. Last but not least, travellers are more willing to implement company requirements when they understand the reasoning behind it.
2. Speak to other departments: Procurement, HR and IT departments are important partners for travel management; internal communication can also help to interact with travellers. "Top simplifiers" have regular discussions with other departments in the company. There is a link between close interaction and successful simplification in travel management.
3. Seek support from outside: "Top simplifiers" demand more from their service providers and suppliers, such as active consulting, reports, tools and other support. At the end of the day, it's in the partners' interests to simplify the collaboration, too.

Source: ACTE study "Simplifying Managed Travel", October 2017

and 19 percent respectively. In the case of other specific measures, such as adjustments to internal processes or travel policies, the "top simplifiers" are faster to implement them.

The reasons soon become clear on closer inspection of the study results: "top simplifiers" are not put off as much by limited resources and search for active support for their projects. While a total of almost four out of five travel managers see a lack of personnel, time and financial resources as a key obstacle, only three out of four among the "top simplifiers" agree. Parexel Manager Benjamin Park knows that "travel management projects aren't always right at the top of the list when it comes to priorities". Travel managers therefore have to seek allies actively to advance their own plans for simplification, sometimes even "under the radar of official projects".

Networked travel management is essential on all sides

This begins in your own company. 57 percent of travel managers see the purchasing department and forty percent the communications department as key strategic partners. Among the "top simplifiers", however, many more are aware

of the importance of these partnerships, namely 70 and 52 percent respectively. "It is always wise to look at processes together with other departments," adds Jörg Martin from CTC Corporate Travel Consulting. "After all, the travel management process isn't restricted by departmental boundaries." But since, understandably, each department acts first and foremost only in its own area of responsibility, it is often only by holding joint discussions that the consequences of measures applied in one place on other departments become clear, says Martin. A typical scenario: "Oh, does this data need to be re-entered in accounting? But we didn't know that."

For Timo Darr, long-term Lufthansa travel manager and now consultant, networking travel management on all sides is absolutely essential. "Up to the management board, down to the travellers, and simultaneously across the other departments." But all too often, this is not put in place, says Darr. Sometimes there is not even a clear area of responsibility. "Purchasing might book the flight, the Facility Manager takes care of car hire and hotels are booked in multiple locations in an uncoordinated way." But in a key position like travel management, someone needs to be "pull-

Simplification: a lack of implementation

The execution gap is the void between perceived importance and the projects initiated

	Execution gap*	Execution gap of the "top simplifiers"***
Traveller safety	23%	16%
Data security†	24%	19%
Travel policies	13%	1%
Internal processes	18%	11%
TMC reporting	18%	18%



*Implementation deficit: the gap between respondents perceiving a measure as important, and respondents who have already taken action.

***Top simplifiers: travel managers who see the issue of travel programme simplification as a "top priority".

Source: ACTE study "Simplifying Managed Travel", October 2017

ing the strings" to control the overall process, so that individual departments don't develop a life of their own - and so that, at the end of the day, "the background work isn't trebled by changes made up front".

Call for support!

This applies to collaboration with external partners too. "It's often my experience that travel managers request all the reports they can get their hand on from travel agencies, airlines, hotels and car hire providers," says Darr, "but then it turns out these aren't actually of interest to anyone in the operation." In such cases, there is no clear concept. Of course, partners, whether service providers, travel agencies or technology providers, can provide valuable assistance. "But I first have to know what I want from them," advises Darr. His recipe for success? First of all, define travel management objectives together with management and then make these measurable with key performance indicators (KPI). These could, for example, be specific cost savings, reduced time for certain processes or even higher traveller satisfac-

tion. Only then is it valid to call for the right figures and further support from partners.

The "top simplifiers" in the ACTE study seem to have understood this. They are much more inclined to view service providers, travel agencies and other suppliers as equal partners and therefore also request their active support, either in the form of best practice examples, specific business models or tools and applications. While, for example, 35 percent of all those surveyed wanted more technical support from their hotel partners, at 44 percent, this is significantly higher among the "top simplifiers".

One travel manager gets right to the crux of the matter. "I'm always asking my partners for advice and support. Why shouldn't I benefit from what works in other companies, too?" The ACTE study's recommendation is along the same lines. Companies ought to demand more from their partners. This is a piece of advice that should be taken, in particular, by the significant proportion of travel managers who, by their own admission, have never received support from hotels (34 percent) or airlines (37 percent).

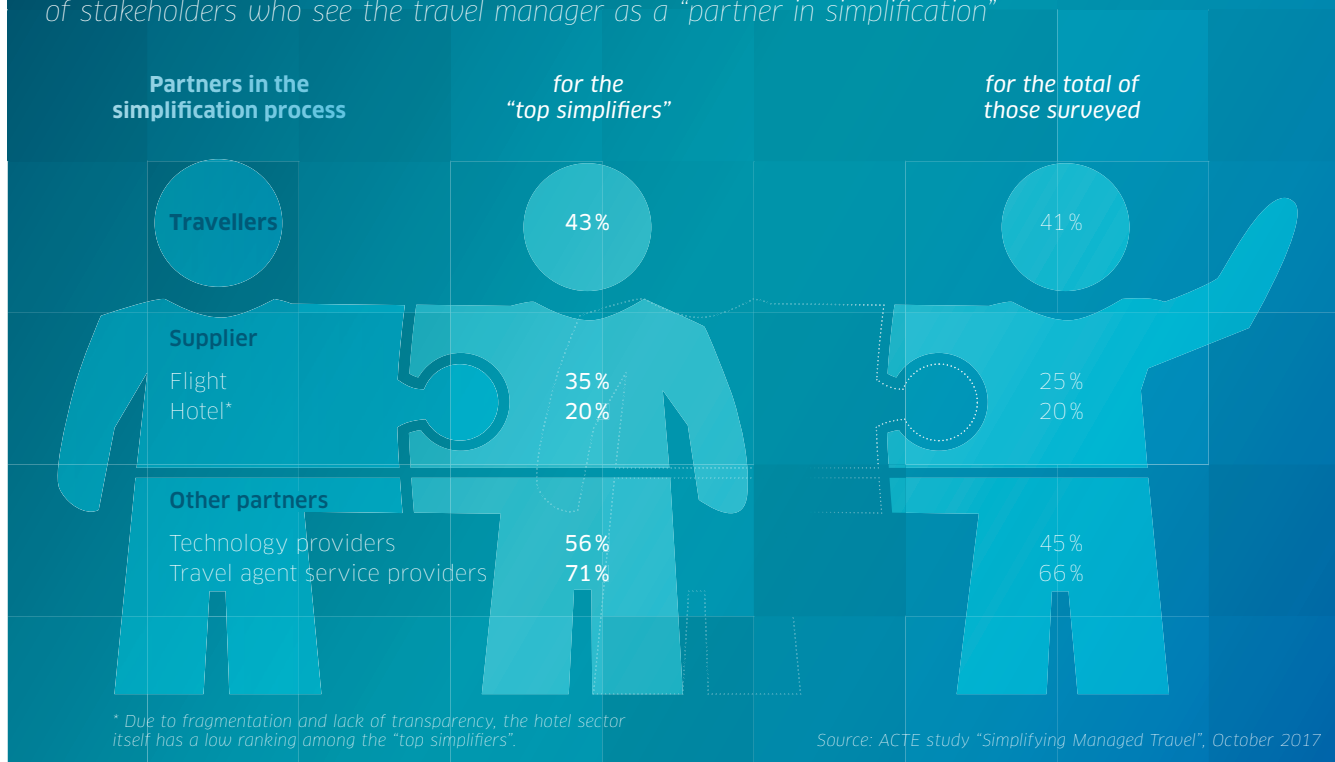
It is also worth requesting simpler solutions for interaction with service providers. "All too often, hotels complicate matters unnecessarily," says the

Consultant Timo Darr: The concept comes first, then the right reports



Important stakeholders in simplification

The influence of travel agencies, suppliers and travellers – the number of stakeholders who see the travel manager as a “partner in simplification”



global hotel purchaser of a European company. For example, he had just received prices from a hotel partner, offering options ranging from queen size to king size beds or with views over the park – a lack of standards and non-transparent pricing often make simplification far more difficult.

The central issues are still the same, but the environment is more complex

Irrespective of the issues that travel managers face, whether it’s a new means of payment, the consolidation of the travel agency market or artificial intelligence, for Darr as a specialist it is clear that “as a travel manager, I cannot influence or stop such external developments”. The world has always changed and will continue to do so, says Darr.

In any case, business travel experts also agree that the technical developments of the last ten years have had a much more serious influence on the sector than those of the ten years before that. In this respect, the core issues of travel management – defining and implementing the right KPIs – have remained the same, albeit in a far more complex environment with a steadily increasing number of opportunities. Or, to put it in the words of the European travel manager at the

start, “I would love to give my travellers the freedom to book their business trips exactly how they want to, but given my duty of care, I simply have to know where they are and when.”

The main challenge to a simple travel programme also lies in making things as easy as possible for the traveller, without disturbing or complicating processes in the background. This is a task that a travel manager cannot cope with alone, but can only be managed in conjunction with partners, both internal and external, who ideally can even relieve him of some of the operational work. 🤖