



MEETING PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL

**360° of Teamwork: How Meetings and Travel Professionals
Can Build Strategic Synergies to Drive Results**

A Position Paper from Meeting Professionals International's
Global Corporate Circle of Excellence

The search for collaborative solutions is a goal for staff in all organizations, and corporate meetings and travel professionals are among those discovering the powerful synergies they can achieve by pooling their expertise and working together. The exact shape and character of those partnerships vary among companies, depending on the culture, history and structure of each organization and on the location of meetings and travel departments within the corporate structure. But the common denominator is a shared commitment to delivering measurable, sustainable results for their organizations, while recognizing and taking full advantage of the strengths that the two vital groups of professionals contribute.

For both groups, a united, strategic approach represents an opportunity to move beyond operating in silos and to capitalize on professional synergies that drive day-to-day organizational results. Meetings and travel professionals should sit side by side at the executive table, focusing on a productive, strategic partnership that will deliver value and enhanced productivity for all stakeholders. By benefiting from each other's experience and strengths to grow their organizations, meetings and travel professionals ensure their strategic value and collective power to accelerate change, results and success organization-wide.

Day-to-Day Operations and Business Structures

At the level of day-to-day operations, the ability to deliver value of any kind depends on relationships, and the character of those relationships is shaped in large part by business structure. The increasing realization of the meetings function's importance and the pursuit of opportunities to leverage spend and activities across similar suppliers have

led to the current trend of merging meetings and travel in some major corporations. In turn, having that merged department often report to finance/procurement is the result of a realization at an organization's strategic level of the synergies between the two functions.

When meetings management reports to marketing, the principal areas of focus are the details of customer events, the strategic positioning of the corporate brand to the outside world, and the return on investment on the event. The meetings department is more likely than ever before to practice some form of consolidation or supplier management, but the process of budgeting and tracking expenditures may still be driven and controlled by finance. As a result, lines of communication in some organizations may be indirect, infrequent or ineffectual in this structure.

Either of these scenarios can contribute to a silo mentality, in which divisional priorities that are out of alignment with broader business objectives lead to a loss of focus on those objectives, and on overall strategic vision. The optimal solution is to link attitudes and performance measures with achievement of business objectives, and optimize potential synergies with the organization's mission and strategy to promote collaboration between meetings and travel. Organizations will only benefit from enhanced synergies among internal stakeholders. Meeting professionals can learn key best practices from their colleagues in travel, and vice versa. No role or department is positioned as more important or strategic than the other. The key is not the title, but the function that supports the organization's unique goals.

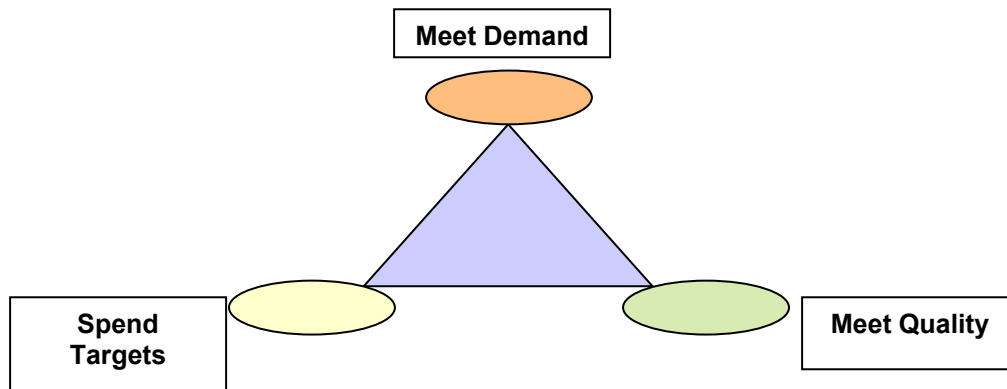
In Pursuit of Synergy

Perceived differences between the workflows and goals of meetings and travel departments have meant that some organizations failed to capitalize on their synergies to drive success. In today's increasingly complex corporations, however, there is every reason for meetings and corporate travel to leverage and respect one another's expertise, both to build their own influence and to benefit their organizations, strategically and logistically. Serving customers, whether internal or external, is a complex task.

At a very fundamental, tactical level, the most integrated, strategic organizations understand that it takes both a travel team *and* a meetings group to stage an event. When a meeting planner is looking for the best air fares for a major gathering, travel management will likely have the knowledge, systems and established contacts to deliver

a substantial discount, as well as a set of policies to control unauthorized costs and mitigate a wide range of risks. If a travel manager is involved with a large meeting that involves food and beverage, audiovisuals, staging and thousands of room nights, it makes sense to work through the meetings department—not only to take advantage of existing vendor relationships, but also to rely on the planner’s ability to negotiate complex site arrangements and spot situations where a preferred supplier is inappropriate. Organizations that fail to understand this synergy can incur extra costs, miss important opportunities and run the risk of knowing less about their own businesses than the vendors they’re working with.

The concept is often referred to as the “Total Cost of Ownership,” or “TCO.” TCO refers to spend, efficiency of process, service and quality. Under this concept, it is not just about reporting or spend, but how organizations can recognize, create and utilize synergies. This includes improvements in services, safety, increased productivity and decreased workload. The “procurement pyramid” in many ways recognizes this, as the three corners of this pyramid are: 1) meeting demand; 2) quality of product and service and 3) spend. The first step in the TCO model is building relationships.



Meetings and travel professionals must focus on the power of partnership to improve spend management, overall process efficiencies and customer service. One way of achieving this level of partnership is to create an enterprise-wide meetings and travel council that brings together senior representatives of all the relevant groups within an organization. By improving coordination, creating familiarity and helping professionals in each discipline appreciate the knowledge and experience that the other can offer, this approach can build synergies that will deliver sustained value for years to come.

Consider the following synergies that unite meetings and travel departments:

Meetings-Travel Synergies

Similarities and Overlaps

- Both must have a seat at the table in supplier discussions and negotiations.
- Both book preferred hotels, where appropriate.
- Both require group airfares; corporate travel may have best processes for tracking least expensive rates and dates.
- Both have immutable deadlines.
- Both have a customer service mandate.
- Both are concerned with risk management and must work together in crisis situations.
- Both face regulatory compliance issues.
- Both realize that by working together and sharing data and best practices, they wield more strategic power within their organizations and achieve more recognition of their value from senior management.

More Potential Synergies

- Consolidated data management would support compliance checking with preferred suppliers and integration of market share between meetings and transient travel.
- A single booking tool would help consolidate relationships and maximize savings with airline and hotel vendors.
- A shared master hotel contract would decrease liability and attrition costs while increasing attrition allowances and leveraging best practices and rate ranges.
- A shared corporate compliance policy that is monitored and measured would ultimately deliver tremendous rewards organization-wide.
- Enhanced communication across departments would help strategic utilization of key vendors that the departments have in common.

An Integrated Approach: Defining the Power of Teamwork

The most effective working relationship between meeting and travel departments enables both to perform at optimum capacity and to deliver sustained, strategic value to the organization they serve. One way of achieving this level of partnership is to create an

enterprise-wide meeting and travel council that brings together senior representatives of all relevant groups within an organization.

Meeting professionals strive for the best approach to serving the broad objectives behind an event. Corporate travel managers, meanwhile, may feel they have no mandate related to the overall purpose of a meeting, but they can be consistently strategic in fulfilling their mandate for consolidation and cost efficiency. Each approach brings specific value to the larger organization, and their combined impact is far greater than the sum of the parts.

Integration between meetings and corporate travel can be as simple as picking up the phone and talking to each other, or as broad and structured as the aforementioned global meetings and travel council. The common thread is a shared undertaking to maximize the advantage that each discipline brings to the table.

Greater integration is also possible in vendor terms and data, and even in the underlying assumptions and tactics that each profession brings to joint tasks. Such integration at the levels of enterprises, business units and individual professionals is already receiving a boost from professional associations. For instance, MPI and the National Business Travel Association (NBTA) are communicating and sharing white papers on issues of common interest. At that level, the associations can create venues for meeting professionals and corporate travel managers to meet, communicate and develop better understandings of the synergies they share in their day-to-day work.

Greater integration sets the stage for meetings management and corporate travel to improve process efficiencies in several areas, both in-house and in their relationships with suppliers. In-house, the first step is to fully integrate data on common vendors. Common systems enable organizations to consolidate spending and leverage rates and benefits across all categories of transient and business travel (by individuals or groups), including air, hotel, ground travel and car rentals. The general principle could extend to integrated payment systems for transient and business travel. A sharper focus on integration and consolidation may also help position organizations to demand some simple but powerful process improvements from suppliers.

The Power of Partnership: A Shared Strategic Vision

Meetings management and corporate travel departments may have had different functional mandates over time, but the most successful organizations have focused

strongly on building a powerful partnership between the two, beginning with a complete understanding of the goals they hold in common.

This level of integration may already be a foregone conclusion in organizations where meetings and corporate travel report to a common director. Elsewhere, a global council or some other form of monthly or quarterly gathering may be the ideal mechanism to foster communication, collaboration and mutual understanding. Either way, it is essential to formalize a relationship and institutionalize modes of communication that may currently rely on informal contact. Building relationships is the pivotal first step in facilitating synergistic operations and vital collaboration within an organization.

Also, as meeting and travel professionals continue to create stronger, more effective, synergistic relationships, a vital role exists for their professional associations and other resource groups in fostering innovation and communicating best practices. MPI and the MPI Foundation, NBTA, ACTE, supply chain management organizations, post-secondary hospitality programs and other interested organizations can advance the state of knowledge on the synergies between meetings and travel by developing cost and benchmark data; exchanging magazine articles and research; participating in one another's conferences; organizing joint forums at the international, national, or regional levels; sharing white papers; and issuing joint policy statements.

Ultimately, the strategic synergies of meetings and travel professionals deliver value and enhanced productivity for all stakeholders. All can benefit from each other's experience and strengths to grow their organizations.

The Toolkit: A Systematic Approach to Meetings-Travel Synergies

In many organizations, taking advantage of meetings and travel professionals' strategic synergies may still be a work in progress. Consider the following steps to ensure your organization is maximizing collaborative approaches to common goals.

Step 1: Conduct a thorough situational analysis and share perspectives.

- Assess the current situation together: Where are we now, how did we get here, where do we want to go and how do we get there?
- Base objectives on organizational culture and values. How do we strike a balance among the goals of cutting costs, maximizing safety, reconciling

global and local priorities, delivering quality service, maximizing return on investment and other objectives?

- Gather data on suppliers and spending.
- Identify internal stakeholders. Engage with procurement, legal and other interested parties.
- Define the current meetings and travel management processes.
- Develop a comprehensive organization chart to map the current process, identify the players and spot potential missed opportunities.
- Create “tour of duty” assignments in each other’s departments and report back key learnings.
- Articulate the respective core competencies of meetings management and business travel professionals in a format where members of each group can explain their operations to the other.
- Map core competencies back to business strategy.
- Identify existing and potential synergies.

Step 2: Define relationships, synergies and potential partnerships with in-house stakeholders – including procurement, marketing, administration, legal, technology, risk management and human resources.

Step 3: Create a joint business case uniting meetings and travel.

- Align with organizational culture, goals and objectives.
- Define “SMART” objectives – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed – in an effort to balance cost savings and process alignment. Specific focal points could include shared data systems, improved reporting, scalability, outsourcing or supplier management.
- Identify “C-level” (i.e, CFO, CEO) sponsors.
- Gather input from stakeholders, staff and suppliers.
- Create a broad, estimated Phase I budget, sufficient for C-level buy-in.

Step 4: Define success measures and desired or acceptable returns on investment.

- Define success measures against each objective: cost savings, customer satisfaction, existence of mandated global policies, awareness of global policies, local implementation and compliance rates.
- Identify suitable data and reporting tools within the management information system.

Step 5: Seek C-level endorsement.

- Liaise with C-level sponsor/advocate. (Meet with C-level sponsor/advocates together when applicable.)
- Identify and lobby key partners (marketing, finance, procurement), consistent with the objectives and focal points in the C-level submission.
- Produce the C-level submission in the format and language of business. Demonstrate alignment with business goals and objectives, use an eye-catching presentation style and provide a one-page executive summary.
- Supply the appropriate amount of information—enough to support decision-making, not enough to bog down the decision. Prepare supporting documentation to respond to questions.
- After the process concludes, communicate the results out to stakeholders, staff and suppliers.

Step 6: Identify potential process improvements and cost efficiencies arising from the joint plan.

- Changes to internal supply or decision chain
- Changes to vendor relations or contract management
 - Sharing of data
 - Common list of preferred vendors. Encourage vendors to consider total amount of transient and meeting spend.
 - Joint RFPs
 - Collaborative sourcing/proposal review
 - Better coordination of spend data across categories and departments

- Coordinated or shared payment systems
- Enabling mechanisms and ongoing communications
- Linkages to regulatory compliance
- Detailed budget/agreed funding mechanisms

Step 7: Identify technologies that enable closer interaction and collaboration.

- Shared coordination/databases, purchased or in-house
- Direct booking/management tools
- Reservation systems
- Budget controls

Step 8: Measure results.

- Set benchmarks.
- Collect, analyze and report data on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis, using available templates for intranet reports geared to financial and other measures.

Step 9: Roll out and communicate.

- Communicate objectives, initiatives and results to internal and external partners.
- Establish profile as the strategic point of contact for travel and meetings management questions.
- Assemble a stakeholder advisory board to provide regular feedback.

Members of MPI's Global Corporate Circle of Excellence convened to develop this position paper, which explores how members of meetings and travel departments benefit from each other's experience and strengths to drive results in their organizations. This is the fifth in a series of position papers on topics vital to meeting planners and suppliers.

The previous four papers – released beginning in January 2005 – are:

- *The Power of Partnership: Capitalizing on the Collaborative Efforts of Strategic Meeting Professionals and Procurement Departments*
- *360 Degrees of Influence: Demonstrating Professional Value Through the Development of a Strategic Meetings Management Program*

- *360 Degrees of Partnership: Uniting Planners and Suppliers Through Collaborative Business Processes in Strategic Meetings Management Environments*
- *Defining a Strategic Meetings Management Program: How Meetings Drive Business in Partnership-Focused Companies*

For more from MPI's Global Corporate Circle of Excellence—including the group's previous position papers and a toolkit offering several indispensable resources, documents and templates for meeting professionals—visit www.mpiweb.org and click on the "Publications & Research" link.
