

## CMMI, Six Sigma, ISO? Next Step is Travel Management

*by Greg Altieri*

The drive toward standardization to deliver quality in products and services has been around since the dawn of mass production. The subsequent proliferation and the use of “certifications” to help organizations reap the benefits of standardization are now well-entrenched and common place. Underwriters Laboratories have been around since the 1890’s. The International Organization of Standardization (ISO) was chartered in 1947. Since the emergence of Total Quality Management (TQM), Kaizen, Continuous Process Improvement (CPI), and Six Sigma, the corporate push to eliminate inefficiencies and boost productivity has been restless and relentless. In the late 1980’s the Capability Maturity Model (CMM) was born and eight years ago its descendant Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) was released. Whether focused on quality improvement, enhanced efficiencies, cost reduction, safety (eliminating lost productivity), or product development, these disciplines are sought and embraced around the globe. All of these processes are rooted in the holy trinity of business – either to make money, save money, or prevent the loss of money.

Corporations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars every year going through certifications and appraisals to earn the right to boast that they carry an ISO or CMMI pedigree. Earning them is not easy and not cheap. In some cases, without one or both, a company is limited in the work it can perform, depending on the industry/customer, for example, software development, pharmaceuticals, federal contracting sector, etc. More and more bid specifications carry with them the requirement to carry some level of accreditation. These disciplines are no longer capability discriminators; they are table stakes. They are meant to prove to the world (particularly current and perspective clients) that this is a well-run, cost conscious organization with best-in-class processes and management systems. With so many organizations investing in the long, expensive process to achieve these credentials, it is amazing, if not shocking, that these same companies do not use the same level of discipline to manage their second or third largest controllable expense – **business travel**.

As a veteran of the federal contracting arena, who has been through both ISO and CMMI appraisals, it is clear that the success of these programs is dependent on one fundamental dynamic – commitment from the top. No appraiser worth their stripes will work in any organization that does require the senior executive to publicly proclaim the appraisal/certification efforts as a corporate imperative with no room for dissention. The need for adherence and compliance is absolute, because the value is never in question (even if it is not quantifiable). Here then lies the travel management paradox: why don’t senior executives, business owners, presidents and CEOs mandate travel management with as much gusto and conviction?

Topaz International, the recognized leader in travel industry benchmarking data, routinely reports that Travel Management Companies (TMC) deliver much better value (more and better fares, more airline and itinerary options, more vendor advocacy, etc.) than having Travel Anarchy (little or no travel management). A strong TMC will improve productivity, control, savings and support. Not only is the value clearly identifiable and in most cases, very substantial, the time and resources to implement a company wide program are minimal.

The refusal of organizations to mandate managed travel with the same vigor they use to embrace Six Sigma and CMMI is one of the most perplexing management positions in play. A well-managed business travel program is based on principles similar to those in the widely-embraced standardization/quality processes. More importantly it will drive tens of thousands of dollars' out of the expense budget, can reduce costs of operations to help lower overhead, can be passed on to clients and partners, and can help position companies to win price-based, competitive

bids. If company leaders are willing to stand-up and commit their resources (time, money, people) to achieving certification (and its intrinsic value), why are they so reluctant to stand-up and commit their organization to saving money (real value)?

An enterprise level corporate travel management program will deliver on the core reasons companies seek certifications: to make more money, save more money, and prevent the loss of money. It is time the passion for CMMI, Six Sigma, ISO, etc., be focused on business travel management.

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the exact number is dependent on the travel volume and type. Organizations investing in ISO, CMMI, Six Sigma, it is assumed, are generally larger and have a relatively substantial travel budget. Savings are *real* and can be realized regardless of the size of the travel budget.