Case Study - Implementing A Business Traveller Management Solution

In these pages over the last number of issues there have been many articles about business traveller management issues for Corporates (this author included).

By now most HR, Mobility and Tax teams are aware of the problems – but what happens when you actually go to the implementation stage on a project? Who is in charge? Who is on the project team? How long will it take? Is it too hard?

We have been implementing business traveller management solutions for several years now and would like to share a Case Study on a client's experience in implementing their solution.

In last year's winter issue of *International HR Adviser* we offered some advice on 'How To Build A Business' Case For Business Traveller Management' (available on www.InternationalHRAdviser.com).

In other articles and presentations, we discussed how building a multi-functional team is a pre-requisite for success in delivering a successful project.

A single travel event can affect multiple stakeholders in a business, and it is important to assemble this team in advance of project commencement. We recommend the teams laid out in Fig. 1 are involved.

Each team member can have a different focus on the traveller, and each has a different interpretation of 'Compliance'.

Mobility teams tend to focus on the Tax and Immigration compliance issues, but a single or repeated travel event can also contribute to creation of a Permanent Establishment risk. Corporate Tax and Legal teams are interested in data concerning business travel activity in this increasingly protectionist economic environment.

A single solution – integrated with travel management systems and HRIS or other internal systems can deliver multiple back end solutions to stakeholders – while giving the traveller only one point of interaction.

So, if that is the optimal solution -what happened with our client implementation?

Let's look at the context:

- Company recently divested from Parent – Global Multinational
- Parent retained all 'Systems'
- In need of new 'Mobility Tool'
- Implementing new travel booking and expense management tool
- Implementing new Despatch tool for Service Engineers to cover global client base
- 22 Countries
- 3100 employees
- 1300 regular travellers.

With the recent divestiture all IT systems had to be replaced and there were several different projects in implementation stage when we first got involved.

We were selected as the provider for the 'Mobility Tool' and our main contact was the global immigration lead.

First Stages

In the Bid/RFP process there was a focus on the Tax and Immigration compliance issues – as you would expect. When we first came on site, we found out that several different systems were being implemented across the company. These included a new Employee Portal, New Travel & Expense Tool and a new Despatch tool for management of Service engineers – the main traveller group in the company. The intention was to integrate the travel and despatch systems into the Global Tracker in order to secure the highest level of data in the tool. The Employee portal would house the application in a 'Single Sign On' environment. We provided a company branded 'white label' version of our software to fulfil this desire to present the tool as an internal company process.

We also discovered that there was a separate path procuring a new Risk Management Provider – the client travels often to high risk locations to service equipment and this would be a key provider in the overall service provision.

We knew now that (as we fully expected) there were multiple stakeholders involved and as is common in many companies there wasn't an extensive communication chain between these functions.

We requested that the client got these separate teams into a room where we could discuss the overall service implementation and discuss the overlaps in functionality and ownership across the company.

White Board Session

In a busy company with many moving parts it can often be difficult to get everyone in a room together to discuss a project. In this case many of the functions were located at the HQ so we were successful in getting the entire group into a room. If you can't get everyone into a room most video conferencing tools now incorporate a 'white board' tool that would allow you to bring in remote stakeholders.

Fig. 1

It was at this point we were able to build our first relationship with the IT implementation team – they were the glue that was going to put together these multiple systems and providers into one service to the user that focused on 'User Experience'. Our focus on ensuring the traveller has one interface to multiple stakeholders resonated with their internal focus.

We mapped out several different processes for the different user groups in the company – Service Engineers, EU travellers and US Domestic travellers. By using the white board process, we could quickly identify the sources of data and where we could provide functionality to different users within the company.

We had, through this process, now got different parts of the company to understand how a single travel event impacts different teams that may not ever communicate in the normal course of day to day activity. By harnessing the data from the travel event, it negated the need for multiple processes to be introduced to the traveller – it is after all the same travel event.

Pre-Trip Approval

One of the main features of the client requirement was to implement a robust Pre-Trip approval process. From the White Board session, the Mobility team were able to see that the Finance and Security teams were also looking to introduce a process to assess costs and security risks associated with a travel event. We now advised that these processes be merged in a single process for the traveller.

The selected Travel & Expense management provider could provide a pre-trip module, but this had not been procured, and on examination of the associated cost this provider was excluded.

We were requested to configure the Global Tracker to support the Budget and Security Risk Management functions.

We worked with the Finance team to understand the logic associated with travel approval and set limits for 'Auto Approval' within the tool when the costs were within those thresholds. All other trips would be referred to Finance for approval via the system. Auto approval gave an automatic 'Green Light' and referrals held the trip on 'Orange' or 'Pending'.

For Security Risk management we worked with the selected Risk Management Provider and integrated their Security Risk database within the Global Tracker. Where a location was rated as a security risk the trip would be referred to internal teams for approval. If Ground Support (close protection security etc.) was required in the location, the traveller could enter their itinerary details so an accurate quote and service provision could be supplied by the Risk Management Provider. When the security teams were happy that the traveller had been briefed on the location risk, they approved the trip. All 'Low risk' locations were automatically approved by the system – giving the traveller a second 'Green Light'.

The core functionality of the Global Tracker is for Tax & Immigration compliance. In a separate session with the Mobility teams we configured the system to reflect the culture of the organisation and the prevailing legislation in the countries they visited. The Global Tracker currently covers 240 jurisdictions for Tax & Immigration.

With a significant volume of travel, it is essential to determine the risk profile of the company and from there to set the 'Auto Approval' logic of the system. There are not many Mobility teams that can analyse every single trip personally, so where automation can remove this workload it frees the Mobility teams to work on the 'hard cases' that arise day after day.

In this process we ask the client to weigh the 'cost of compliance' to the 'risk of non-compliance'. Each client will have a different culture and risk profile and we can easily configure the system to cover each scenario.

We cover this risk scenario by reference to the potential pre-trip information (Destination, Days, Activity etc.) and the existing travel information. Many travellers give limited information to compliance teams in order to get a green light. An example may be a quick phone call to an immigration team to ask if a German national can travel to the US for a 'client meeting' for 5 days on an ESTA Visa Waiver - with that limited data set the answer would most likely be 'Yes'. If, however, that traveller had spent 60 of the last 80 days in the US then the answer should be different – that traveller is most likely 'working' in the US and their Immigration status and work activity should be investigated. With the data in the tool these scenarios are held for examination by the immigration team – giving a 'Pending' status – or if the Mobility team blocks the trip – a 'Red' light – meaning you are not authorised to travel.

Below are are some examples of how pre-trips are represented in the tool.

To drive traveller behaviour to utilise the tool the company mandated use of the tool and would not reimburse travellers for expenses if they had not utilised the tool. To support this process, we issue an 'Approval Code' on every trip once all three levels of approval have been achieved. The approval code must be included in future travel bookings and expense claims to facilitate reimbursement.

In other implementations we have sometime utilised only one level of approval and the system can take any combination or sequence of approvals. In this case the Budget approval was the first level – if the trip was denied for a budgetary reason there would be no call for the Mobility or Security teams to carry out any compliance actions. Once the Budget approval was received those stakeholders could then carry out their administration.

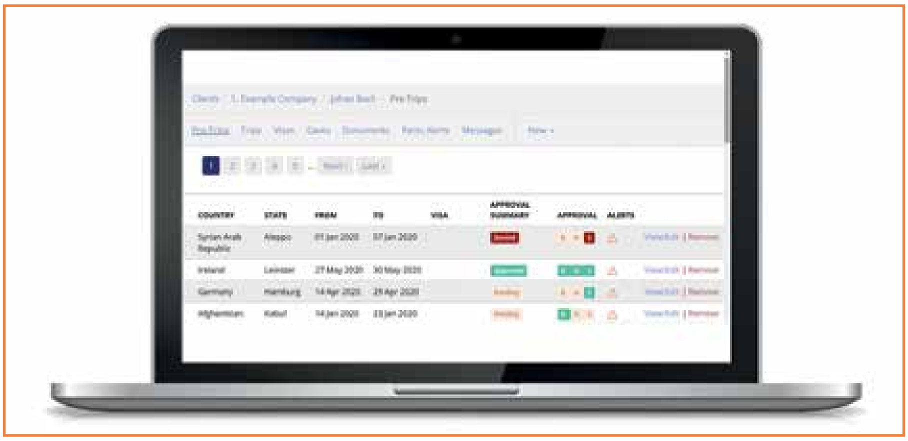
Data Gathering

Once the process for pre-trip Authorisation was complete the focus turned to gathering the data necessary for each traveller profile. As the company was transitioning to a new HR IS system also there was no solid source of truth for this data.

We advised that the company implement a registration process whereby we created a portal for travellers to register their consent under GDPR legislation for the company to share their data with us as a technology vendor and the Tax and Immigration vendors selected during the RFP process.

Following a company-wide communication, travellers entered their details and HR then approved the upload of data directly to the tool. This was one of the first occasions that HR had actually accumulated solid data of the Nationality, Tax Residency, Home Country and other identifying data such as Cost Code and Business unit of their employees in one system – rather than being spread across multiple systems requiring multiple logins to secure data necessary to complete an Immigration application or Tax Event.

At this stage we had detailed consultation with the company data security officer as we would become a Data Processor of their employee data and control the distribution of that data to sub vendors. We supplied penetration test



results and details of our data centre hosting. As we utilise Amazon Web Services we were also able to position the client's unique server in a location they requested rather than in any pre-determined server location. With the impact of Data protection practices this flexibility in server location will become an increasingly important part of cloud service provision.

Rules Configuration

As the Global Tracker has over 6 million algorithms with varying degrees of alerts we work with a client to implement the system according to the risk profile we discussed above. Bespoke messaging advising travellers on the exact action required to secure visas, work permits, or tax support were incorporated with the existing messaging.

In this way the Immigration and Tax teams could send simple information that was repetitive to the traveller advising them for instance to apply directly on an Immigration provider website for a self-service business visa (including the client account identifier for billing purposes), or direct application at a Consulate. The net effect of this process was to reduce the number of calls to the Mobility team for simple applications.

This process took almost two weeks of to and fro with the client fine tuning the messaging and the risk profile.

Case Management with Third Party Vendors

With the fine tuning of the rules engine this allowed the Subject matter experts in Immigration and Tax to focus on the difficult cases and not be distracted by the simple cases.

The Global Tracker has a 'Case' management function to create a 'Case' from a pre-trip or live trip and transmit this case directly to a third-party service provider. In this way the Mobility teams have a single view of trips, days spent, cases, documents and alerts associated with each traveller. Milestones of each case can be updated in the tool automatically or via manual intervention.

The productivity impact was significant in that a pre-trip that triggered a 'Pending' status based on the rules discussed above would lead an Immigration or Tax internal subject expert to decide if they can resolve the issue internally (e.g. Posted Worker registration or A1 production) or if they needed the external vendor to be involved. There was no need to jump to other systems and start filling in long forms – where the data existed in the system it could be communicated to the vendor in a few clicks.

Any necessary documents that could support an application could be uploaded by HR or the traveller and this has had the impact of speeding up case resolution.

As many government agencies are at different levels of automation, where an agency allows for automatic filing of A1 or Posted Worker documents, the system can automatically compile the documents to complete this task. This is an important area of focus in the near future as government agencies develop their electronic filing processes.

Training, Communication & Rollout

We worked with the client to deliver a series of classroom and Webinar training to global HR teams and other stakeholders prior to launch and rollout. The client had no option but to go with a 'big bang' global launch as their old systems were being retired on a specific date.

A company wide communication was coordinated with the Finance, HR & IT teams to ensure all processes were explained. Training manuals and bite size video tutorials were all available to new users.

We supported this launch with online chat support for all travellers who had difficulty with the instructions. The most common problem was travellers not reading the communication and simply clicking on to the site to find their way around. We handled over 100 calls in the first few days and our support teams took travellers through the process – ultimately shielding the client from this usual type of human behaviour. In full operation there is a chat line support 24/7 for travellers across the globe.

Integration with Scheduling & Travel systems

We discussed the pre-trip process above – those trips do eventually become 'live' trips when the traveller actually takes the trip. The ultimate intention was to integrate with Scheduling and Travel systems and the groundwork for this is in place and is dependent on the external systems availability. At first launch one particular scheduling system was envisaged – this was changed and now the scheduling system under development will integrate with the tool to deliver detailed trip information of travelling engineers. All other travellers trip data will come in via the Travel tool integration when that roll out is complete.

Each traveller has smartphone access to cover those trips that are not entered via the travel agency and this was a major focus as a significant number of trips are taken cross border in personal or company vehicles. Capturing this accumulating data is critical in a robust traveller management programme.

Learning & Refinement

When we first came on site, we had a single internal client with a single objective. Through discussion we were able to initiate communication with other relevant teams and identified complementary processes. At the time of writing now we have three major functions – Mobility, Finance and Security operating daily on the system processing many thousand business trips.

We have regular communication with the client to refine and develop the system alerting and sensitivity as new incidences are discovered by the clients travel profile.

From conception to launch was 12 weeks – a suitable time for a client with a significant traveller base moving across borders every day.

So if we recap our original questions –

Who is in charge?

Once you have determined that the business issue fits across multiple stakeholders then the project leader should be the stakeholder that is impacted most – they will drive the project to completion.

Who should be on the project team?

All companies have different organisational structures and cultures, but there are many consistent threads. At a minimum the team should include Mobility /HR, Finance, Corporate Tax, Legal, Travel, Safety & IT. It is important that a single travel event and the data associated with that is directed to the multiple teams in a single process. The traveller will thank you for implementing a single process and you will have a more successful project.

How long will it take?

This will depend on the volume and scale of the traveller constituency – schedule 12 -16 weeks for implementation – this will of course vary depending on the systems and processes of the company.

Is it too hard?

I am biased of course – but if you follow the project team approach you will find that it is a lot easier than you think!

If you would like to hear more about this case study, or if you recognise some of your own company problems and structures in this piece, please get in touch with us at www.gtglobaltracker.com.

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CEO & Founder of the GT Global Tracker, an award-winning software platform that powers many of the mobility industry's business traveller management platforms. Liam has over 25 years' experience in the global travel, relocation and internet services industries. For more information on how to use technology to manage your business travellers visit www.gtglobaltracker.com or contact Liam on liam@gtglobaltracker.com.