**September blog #3**

**Balancing renewed confidence in travelling with virtual connectivity**

In 2019, a survey of business travel professionals found that 90% considered face-to-face meetings critical to business growth.[[1]](#footnote-1) Eighteen months on, predictions that the shift to remote working would rival the great workplace transformations of the 19th and 20th centuries have proven premature.

Although the pandemic has made working from home necessary and acceptable, enabled by technology, virtual working has quickly lost its lustre. Employees feel disengaged and it’s becoming harder for employers to maintain company morale digitally.

Slow return to travel

Employers keen to maintain productivity in challenging trading conditions are having to balance the need to get sales moving again. That means getting employees back on the road whilst ensuring the connectivity required to work remotely and thereby avoid un-necessary travel.

It will take time for business travel to recover. Travel for sales and client-related meetings will return first as domestic travel resumes, regardless of whether client offices will reopen.

Further impetus will come from increased pressure to return to travel to win business among key customers. It may take longer for internal meetings to recover, as greater scrutiny is applied to what constitutes business-critical travel and technology replaces face-to-face where it can.

At Capita Travel and Events, we are helping companies to strike the right balance between in-person travel and the use of digital technology to replace un-necessary travel. We are also helping them to empower their people to make conscious decisions about how they meet and the best way to travel to and from those meetings.

Future working patterns

Some working practices have changed for good. Just under half of all workers will work remotely part or all week post-Covid 19, compared to 30% pre-lockdown.[[2]](#footnote-2) Others will see their hours radically altered as employers downsize.

Connectivity is key to the success of the new-look workplace. It provides the fuel that drives productivity. Done well, company growth is propelled; done badly, competitive advantage can be lost.

Connectivity is crucial to give travellers the confidence to start travelling again. Half of business travellers’ employers have invested in medical and security assistance to support them, but 51% of these travellers aren’t sure what it means or offers. Only a fifth are confident using their 24/7 medical and security assistance in the event of something going wrong while abroad. Effective connectivity and communication is vital if these concerns are to be addressed.[[3]](#footnote-3)

As the return to normality gathers pace, employers will ramp-up workplace social distancing, hygiene and disease surveillance, whilst allowing international travel. Connectivity will provide the agility that travel policies will need during this period. From pre-trip approvals to the advice given to travellers such as wearing face masks when visiting certain countries or leaving more time for airport security and screening.

The challenge for companies is balancing employee comfort, experience and safety while travelling. The ability to communicate with travellers in real-time, receive their feedback and turn those insights into action will be of paramount importance.

Impact of virtual on corporate travel.

The death of business travel has been wildly exaggerated. Only a small proportion of company executives don’t believe business travel adds value. 89% favour face-to-face meetings over virtual when meeting new customers and understanding their needs. [[4]](#footnote-4)

Even video conferencing companies see corporate travel is perceived as critical to connect with people. At Zoom, there’s no travel manager but there is a travel policy. They keep travel to a minimum, because of the nature of what they sell, but they recognise the value of visiting customers for on-boarding and even for internal meetings. It’s a question of prioritising travel for these types of customers over other interactions that may get to the same outcome if done virtually. [[5]](#footnote-5)

Creating unique experiences

Covid-19 gave meeting organizers the choice or going digital or cancelling. Many were surprised to see their digital events attract greater numbers of attendees. The challenge is how to get mass participation and interaction in an unfamiliar environment.

To thrive, virtual meetings have to deliver unique, beneficial, experiences to hosts and participants. Gen Z - the gaming generation – has already figured out how to live in a virtual world. Some employers are incorporating some elements of online games in their engagement strategies, a trend corporate travel partially embraced through gamification in the early 2010’s and extended by bringing mobile devices into the traveller experience instead of competing with them. [[6]](#footnote-6)

TMCs will be central to restoration of confidence amongst business travellers. They are at the heart of the travel eco-system, able to provide the tools required and deliver the right message to the right traveller at the right time.

1. <https://tripactions.com/resources/10-business-travel-trends-for-2019> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/9-future-of-work-trends-post-covid-19/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.collinsongroup.com/en/insights/travel-assistance-ambiguity-leaving-business-travellers-unaware-of-whats-on-offer-to-them> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Harvard Business Review [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://skift.com/2020/06/11/what-does-zoom-really-think-about-the-future-of-corporate-travel/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.businesstravelnews.com/Strategic-Meetings-Report/2020/What-Virtual-Meetings-Must-Learn-from-Video-Games> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)