Business travel and well-being in the post-pandemic world

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Abstract

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The purpose of this Master's thesis is to demonstrate that, even in the post-pandemic era where virtual communication tools and virtual meetings are often used, business travel is still an essential and strategic element for international organizations to accomplish their objectives and for the well-being of their stakeholders.

The theoretical part of this thesis consists of the theories underlying international business travel research and characteristics of business travel. The theoretical framework was formed using key aspects within work well-being by considering the positive and negative outcomes of business travel, as well, remote and virtual team-work well-being correlations.

The content analysis is based upon data collected by previous studies on business travel growth after the pandemic and videoconferencing continuance connection to business travel reduction intentions and surveys performed in 2023. The research data was analysed by the content and evidenced what is considered to be "new normal" for business travel in the post-pandemic world. Within this new post-pandemic context, positive factors and the caveats of business travel are also presented.

This study explores the impact of the post-pandemic hybrid work environment on business travel. The conclusion reveals that flexible work schedules and hybrid work styles have led to a reduction in business travel due to the use of virtual conferencing for team meetings and internal trainings. However, the study also highlights the importance of in-person communication and face-to-face interactions for deeper social networking and collaboration. The positive impact of business travel on employee motivation and well-being is highlighted through social, psychological, and freedom and pleasure aspects. The study demonstrates that business travel remains a crucial component for international organizations to achieve goals and improve stakeholder well-being and performance. However, it also highlights the drawbacks of using videoconferencing and virtual communication tools, such as professional and social isolation, weaker interpersonal relationships, and cognitive demands due to excessive virtual interactions.

Keywords
Business travel, business traveller well-being, business travel after the pandemic, hybrid work, videoconferencing communication well-being, virtual team-work and well-being

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1   Introduction

In order to introduce the thesis, this chapter is divided in three parts: an introduction which presents the background and context of the project, a second part which introduces the purpose and main objectives of the research and a third part where the thesis structure concerning the topic is presented and linked to the thesis overall conduction and storytelling.

1.1   Background and context

The corona virus pandemic and the movement restrictions imposed by authorities worldwide for managing the spread of the virus had profound impact on the use of office space, the need for in person interactions for business related purposes and consequently business travel in general: teleworking became the new normal and online meetings on virtual platforms replaced the use for business travel in many cases.

After the end of the pandemic, most organizations implemented hybrid policies for work shifts. As Copulsky, Kane and Philips (Spring 2021) state that "the pandemic taught us that remote work can be highly effective – to a degree. Virtual work also allows people to collaborate across geographic, physical, and organizational boundaries". However, despite of the possibility of performing tasks, training and interacting with co-workers on online environments, there is also an element of the well-being, social interactions, relationships strengthening and overall motivation linked to in person professional associations that cannot be attained based upon only virtual interactions.

According to the research led by Copulsky et al. (Spring 2021), after 2020 organizations faced significant challenges when it comes to the implementation of remote working, these challenges can be summarized, as follows:

- Innovation: without the office environment, the ties between colleagues and unexpected interactions have been weakened which directly impacted on their ability to collaborate, share knowledge and innovate together;
- New projects initiatives: although workers were able to finish ongoing projects, virtual collaboration directly affected the initiative for starting new projects which became more challenging and stressful on virtual environment;
- Culture: organizational culture is directly linked to a physical workplace such as how the office is designed, how people dress and interact which cannot be perceived in a virtual setting;
- Mentoring: remote work negatively impacted the mentoring and coaching of employees, especially new hires and younger ones mainly because of lack of feedback which will most likely affect their career development in the future.

Beyond these challenges presented by Copulsky and al. (Spring 2021), there is another element highly affected by the post-pandemic widespread of remote work across organizations which is business travel.

In the first year of the 2020 pandemic, Bill Gates predicted that more than 50% of the business (CNBC Television 17 November 2020, min. 1-3) travel would permanently be extinguished in a world where Zoom meetings and web conferences became preferred and considered essential and for this reason executives would reassess the value of work trips by creating new concepts such as "bleisure" and "return to base" (Kelleher Daily Cover 2022).

According to Kelleher (2022) with the extensive use of videoconferencing and virtual meetings during the pandemic, organizations witnessed that the business can still be run without traveling a lot and without business travels the finance department witnessed fewer expenses, for this reason bigger companies started to scrutinize travel expenses more closely and also reduce significantly the amount of work trips, specially the day-trips.

Whilst business travels may be considered costly and can have a meaningful impact on the organization's budget, there is also a side to it which cannot be measured only by financial results and cost reduction targets. This side is related to the richness of human relationships that can only be achieved through social interactions in person on the same environment.

International organizations tend to build global teams with members residing on different parts of the world who interact on a daily-basis which continued during the pandemic years. This might have given the impression that online interactions can fulfill the need for travel and in person meetings since for many organizations the online environment was enough to keep businesses running. Nonetheless, despite of the cost reduction, limiting business travels can also have a negative impact on the relationships between stakeholders and consequently their overall motivation to perform and well-being as the online environment can also limit the quality of such interactions and become overwhelming.

1.2   Research purpose and objectives

Despite of the possibility of performing tasks, training and interacting with co-workers on online environments, there is also an element of the well-being, social interactions, relationships strengthening and overall motivation linked to business travels that cannot be attained based upon virtual interactions.

The main objective of my thesis is to demonstrate how business travels should still be a strategic and essential element for the international organizations to accomplish their goals once for the

stakeholders it is also an important factor for good performance and well-being in a post-pandemic world.

In a post-pandemic world where there are no movement restrictions currently in place, this thesis purpose is to evidence the benefits of business travel for international organizations and their stakeholders, whose results can positively impact the organizational strategy for future planning because the well-being and social spheres are essential elements for employees' motivation to perform and contribute for the organizations' strategy which go far beyond the financial aspect. The research objectives and questions are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Research objectives and questions

Research Objectives	Research Questions
RO1: Evidence the benefits of business travel for international organizations and their stake-holders	RQ1: How has business travel been impacted by the post-pandemic hybrid work environment?
RO2: Establish the correlation between well-being, social interactions and business travel	RQ2: How does business travel positively impact the motivation and well-being of employees in international organizations?
RO3: Demonstrate the importance of business travel for international organizations	

1.3   Thesis structure

This thesis is composed of five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction of the research where the main objectives, purpose and background of the research are presented. The second chapter consists of the theoretical framework which lays out the background of the research topic and builds the context to its intentions. This chapter is divided into four subchapters: business travel, work well-being linked to business travel and remote work. The third chapter presents the research methodology through data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter details the research results. Finally, the final chapter is the conclusion of the research results according to its main objectives and purposes.

2 Theoretical framework and context

This chapter of the thesis covers the theoretical framework and context. The review of prior literature is divided into four sections of this chapter. The first section describes theoretical concepts of business travel. The second section presents the theory of work well-being and its relation to business travel. The third section builds a bridge between work well-being and remote work. The fourth and final section focuses on the integration of the main concepts in the theoretical framework and the possible correlation of those within the context of this research.

2.1 International business travel (IBT)

According to Jooes et al. (2021, in Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 462) the acceleration of globalization in the recent decades along with the developments in information technology (IT) as well as demographic, geopolitical and economic changes have significantly increased expatriate assignments. In the present global economy international business travel (IBT) represents an important role because globalization implies the internationalization of assignments amongst organizations which impacts business practices, opportunities and the need for international work-related travels for highly skilled employees (Mäkelä, Säärenpää & McNulty 2017). Such international mobility requires employees who are able to travel more often in the face of challenging jobs and global teams.

Although technological tools allow communication and interaction without physical presence, in-person meetings are still needed and important when it comes to the building of personal relationships and trustworthy connections among stakeholders, business partners and such. International business travel signifies work flexibility not bound to any specific place but to many different locations and cultures (Mäkelä et al. 2017, 278).

International business travel is a travel abroad at short notice and over a short time for business reasons, for such travels employees maintain their family and personal lives in their home country (Mäkelä et al. 2017, 278). Ramsey et al. (2011, in Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 462) defined international business travel as travel to another country, for a period of less than 90 days, during which the purpose is to achieve business goals rather than leisure.

In the context of international business travel, international business travelers (IBTs) are defined by McNulty and Brewster (2017, in Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 462) as a "person who travels to a foreign country for a purpose determined by their work role but only stays there a short time, usually ranging from a few hours and overnight to a few days or weeks."

Welch et al. (2007, in Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 462) refer to international business travelers as "employees who make frequent international business visits to foreign markets, units, projects and the like, to one or multiple countries, for periods of one to three weeks, without accompanying family". Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 462) define international business travelers as "an arrangement in which employees travel abroad for business purposes, at short notice and for short time spans, while maintaining family and personal lives in their home country".

For the purpose of this thesis, in summary, international business travel refers to short-term travel to another country for business purposes, typically less than 90 days, with the aim of achieving business goals rather than leisure. International business travelers (IBTs) are considered individuals who travel to a foreign country for work-related purposes, occasionally staying for a few hours or overnight. IBTs often make frequent international business visits to foreign markets or projects without being accompanied by their families.

2.1.1 Theories underlying International Business Travel research

International Business Travel (IBT) research began in the early 2000s through the work of the World Bank and Espino et al. (2002, in Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 463) which focused the health complaints increase of employees who traveled internationally. Scholars adopted phases of IBT, Job-Demands Resources (J-DR) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theories to explore international business travelers' well-being results. Another important theory used in the research of IBT is Lazarova's et al. (2010, in Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 463) model of work-family interface on international assignments (MWFIIA). These theories contribute to understanding IBT in the sphere of its advantages and limitations and based on the research of Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 463-467) are summarized in the below table:

Table 2. International Business Travel theories

Theory name	Main authors	Main concept	Outcomes
Phases of IBT	De Frank et al., Westman, Unger et al.	Business travel is divided in three phases: before, during and after the travel. Each phase presents its own stressors such: • Before travel: planning and work arrangements;	Few longitudinal studies regarding the correlation between business travel, nonetheless, research outcomes support the hypothesis that travel abroad can alleviate job stress and burnout through repeated

			During travel: logistics, health concerns, job factors and host culture issues; Post travel: workplace and home return, physical and emotional recovery from travel strain.	measurements before, during, and after the travel.
Job demands-resources (JD-R)	Demerouti and Bakker, Mäkelä and Kinnunen, Cavanaugh et al.	Work role is a combination of job demands and resources: • Job demands: physical, social, or organizational aspects that require effort; • Job resources: such as control and social support, enable goal achievement and growth. These resources mitigate the negative effects of job demands.		Business travel can trigger both a negative health process and a positive motivational process. Such processes can be simultaneously beneficial and detrimental to travelers' ability to cope with work and travel. Social support, control and self-efficacy contribute to the positive aspects of IBT.
Conservation of Resources (COR)	Halbeslen et al., Kahneman and Tversky	Conservation of resources and the acquisition of new ones are major motivations for action, while depletion leads to stress, emotional exhaustion, and poor performance. COR theory specifies four groups of resources: • Objects: work tools, computer, cars, for instance;		Resource gain can help to minimize the effects of resource loss when individuals are facing stressful circumstances. Thus, when it comes to business travel, job resources may mitigate the impact of job demands which is nominated as a buffer hypothesis on COR

		Personal characteristics: self-esteem, knowhow; • Conditions: supportive work relationships and rank at work; • Energies: knowledge and time.	whereas individuals lacking resources are more impacted by negative events, as well job demands.
Model of work-family interface on international assignments (MWFIIA)	Lazarova et al., Reiche et al., Huitt, Kahn, Shaffer et al.	Expatriate performance as four-phase process: • Cognitive: process of understanding an event or experience through affect, conation, and behavior; • Affective: adjustments as the emotional response to an individual's cognitions and their psychological comfort in a new setting; • Conation: connection between cognition and affect related to the motivation behind a behavioral performance through physical, emotional and cognitive energies; • Behavioral: performance as a range of behaviors in a specific	In the IBT context, cognition, affective, conation and behavioral processes are directly involved in the performance of individuals who travel internationally. The cognitive dimension refers to the IBT own conception of the conditions of the international assignment. The affective dimension concerns the adjustments of the family roles when travelling overseas. The conation dimension is the element of motivation when performing a role during an IBT. The behavioral dimension refers to the adjustments

		role at work and home with the family.	which facilitate performance in both work and family spheres.

In summary, according to Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 467-468) COR and JD-R are stress theories on which some scholars have based their research and are both based on resources and demands. These theories imply the negative impact of job demands such as stress and poor performance and the positive outcomes such as engagement, achievement and commitment. JD-R focuses mainly on demands and resources, whereas COR defines them as gains and losses. MWFIIA, nonetheless, is a model focused on the four dimensions that affect expatriates – cognitive, affective, conation and behavioral – and can be associated with IBTs, as well. All theories are intertwined to some certain extent and can be useful for the purpose of this thesis.

2.1.2 Characteristics of International Business Travel

One of the main characteristics that differentiate International Business Travel (IBT) from other forms of international mobility amongst organizations such as short-term assignments and international commute is the fact that IBT does not imply relocation, as International Business Travelers (IBTs) commonly travel to different countries and the length of the IBT varies according to the objectives of their work in the context of their involvement with several teams on distinct locations (Brewster, Dickmann & Froese 2020, 9).

For organizations, there are financial, cultural and operational aspects that drive International Business Travel (IBT). When compared to expatriation, the costs for IBTs are lower whilst their flexibility enables the diversity of projects and locations employees can work, at the same time there is cultural coordination and operational integration such as knowledge transfer, trust-building through face-to-face meetings and stronger relationships between stakeholders. For employees, international travel many times is perceived as a key to career development, especially for those with a global mindset and an international career orientation (2020, 10-11).

Other characteristics of IBTs according to Brewster, Dickmann and Froese (2020, 20) concern:
- Family, home and personal finances for employees: no relocation, family usually does not accompany, thus less family impacts than in long-term expatriation. Salary and taxes based on home location;
- Length of international work: normally just one to few days, frequent travels;

- Main individual motivations: nature of work, international travel possibilities, career development:
- Main organizational motivations: integration, flexibility, knowledge transfer, innovation, control and coordination, relationship building;
- Individual challenges: separation from family, impacts on personal life, stress of travel, health problems;
- Organizational challenges: travel arrangements, legal compliances, and safety issues.

Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 468-472) listed the main characteristics of International Business Travel based on the J-DR and COR theories presented previously which identify the intensity of travel as the combination of frequency and duration of the travel as determining factors concerning stress and negative outcomes. Regarding demands, another characteristic is the ability to achieve goals and personal growth despite the hindrance to job demands associated with IBTs. Perceived control is also considered a key resource for business travelers according to these authors because control over planning and schedule directly impacts how IBTs perceive their time abroad negatively or positively. Social support in the forms of concern, affect, advice, directives, appraisal, affirmation, feedback and instrumental (money) from family, friends, supervisors and peers at work is also listed a resource gain for IBTs. Cultural intelligence is also another characteristic of IBT due to the capacity to interact and adapt to different cultures quickly while achieving job satisfaction and performance targets.

Based on the three-phase model presented in the previous topic, Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 479) demonstrate the characteristics of International Business Travel in the below table:

Table 3. Features of the three-phases of International Business Travel

	Pre-trip	**Trip**	**Post-trip**	**All phases**
Demands	Trip planning, travel arrangements, seeking information, logistics, preparing assignments for the trip, assembling travel documents,	Inconvenience, destination concerns, intensity of the trip, bad weather, delays, long lines for visas and passport control, waiting for lost	Duties at work, paperwork and reports, accounting for expenses, preparation for the next trip, routine tasks, logistics for next trip.	Work-family conflict, duties at home, logistics, long working hours, overload.

	delegating work at the office, bureaucratic duties (passport, visas, reservations), completing tasks at the office, preparing assignments for the family, packing.	luggage, meeting with locals, events, language difficulties, communication, jetlag, sleep deprivation, maintaining healthy life style, loneliness, missing family.		
Resources	Family support, support from manager, support from colleagues, HR support, skills, experience, knowledge, high status, control.	A break from routine, visiting new places, meeting new people, new knowledge, career development, new network of friends and acquaintances, networking skills, high status, support, cultural intelligence.	Recovery, time to wrap up, support from manager, family support, high status.	Growth, high status, prestige, personal resources control, social support, cultural intelligence, self-efficacy, work resources, supportive HR practices, supervisor support, supportive organizational culture.
Motivation	Motivation to prepare for the trip, motivation to leave things in order at the office.	Motivation to make connections, motivation to succeed, motivation to learn about overseas	Motivation to return home, motivation to return back to normal.	Motivation to succeed in the task.

		place, vigor for the mission.		
Engagement	Dedication to preparing for the trip and the mission, adhering to the goals.	Vigor for the mission.	Dedication to debriefing the trip.	(Vigor, dedication, absorption), Engagement in the work, in the role, and in the trip
Adjustment	Adjustment behavior quickly to mission requirements, adjusting to separation from family.	Adjusting behavior to new places, adjusting behavior to new tasks, adaptation to new people, adapting and responding quickly.	Adjustment to back home routine, readjusting to the work routine.	Adaptation to leaving and coming back many times.
Outcomes: Psychological Physiological Behavioral	Anxiety Fatigue	Irritability, anxiety, distress, fatigue, gastro problems, infectious diseases, back aches, excessive drinking, and lowered performance.	Sense of accomplishment and gratification.	Stress, exhaustion, dissatisfaction, hypertension, sleeplessness, cheerfulness, grumpiness.

2.2 Work well-being and business travel

Considering the global environment in which international businesses operate, global mobility and international business travel has become a pillar of many organizations and an important resource when it comes to their success (Mäkelä, Tanskanen, Kangas & Heikkilä 2021, 434-435). For this reason, according to Ye and Xu (2020, 2) due to the increased globalization, business travel is

considered an integral part of working life where regular trips are fundamental for thriving results and performing tasks.

At the same time that business travel can be experienced as an opportunity for excitement, new opportunities, experiences, people and places, as well, a pause for daily routine, it can be also be a source of stress due to challenging conditions and exhaustion which have a considerable impact on the physical health and psychological well-being of business travelers (Ye & Xu 2020, 3).

Well-being concept is often connected to health, happiness, and quality of life in the aspects of the physical, mental, and social dimensions in a state of happiness, health and prosperity. These dimensions are integrated through personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and positive relationships with others to a person's physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social characteristics (Ye & Xu 2020, 3).

Based on research made by Ye and Xu (2020, 7), there are five aspects of well-being impacted by business travel:

- Physical well-being: health issues and body changes due to frequent travel;
- Psychological well-being: moods, emotions, and mental stress related to travel;
- Social well-being: social relationships with family and friends and interpersonal networks for work and business;
- Self-development: personal growth and actualization for one's potentialities;
- Sense of freedom and pleasure: autonomous functioning and resistance to enculturation.

This research has also identified the positive and negative impacts of business travel on the individual well-being when it comes to the job demands and resources. Regarding job demands, three aspects are impacted by business travel (2020, 7):

- Physical well-being: health problems;
- Psychological well-being: increased mental stress;
- Social well-being: inhibiting relationship maintenance at one's home location.

As for job resources, the author identified three aspects impacted the individual's well-being by business travel (2020, 7):

- Sense of freedom and pleasure: emotional pleasure;
- Self-development: contribution to personal growth;
- Social well-being: network expansion in multiple places.

Ye and Xu (2020, 7) summarized the dynamic patterns of business travel's impacts and the influences on the five aspects of well-being, as illustrated on Table 4:

Table 4. General tendencies of business travel's impacts on individual well-being

Impacts of frequent business travel	Valence	Tendency
Physical health	Negative	Accumulating
Psychological well-being	Negative	Decreasing
Social relationship (at multi-places)	Positive	Stabilizing
Social relationship (at residence)	Negative	Accumulating
Self-development	Positive	Stabilizing
Freedom, privilege and pleasure	Positive	Decreasing

Note: valence refers to the impact tending to be negative or positive on aspects of well-being, and Tendency refers to how the impact tends to change with time.

Previous research and literature on business travel has mainly focused on stress models and empirical studies that outlined the negative sides of business travel through evidences on business traveler's health problems based on a number of medical indicators (Ye & Xu 2020, 3). According to Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 472): "the literature on the impact of IBT has mainly focused on stress, physiological and psychological outcomes and, to a lesser degree, on behavioral and organizational outcomes. Although several researches addressed both positive and negative impact of International Business Travel, very few have investigated its positive impact empirically".

The following subtopics will discuss the literature on the negative and positive outcomes of business travel in further detail.

2.2.1 Negative outcomes of international business travel

Stress is the main component identified as a negative outcome in the early studies of IBT: the premise of the research made by Espino et al. (Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 472) is that IBT is stressful and that high levels of stress caused by business travel were associated to the physical and emotional ill-health of international business travelers from the World Bank who reported overload, sense of isolation, heavy workload and less quality time for personal and family life.

Other early studies on business travel identified that IBTs stress is connected to the anxiety of workload accumulation, double responsibilities between home and work, pre-trip arrangements, and the feeling of loneliness. Furthermore, De Frank et al. (Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 477)

created the term "travel stress" to define the stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, and physical symptoms and the relationship between IBT and poor physical and mental health.

According to Mäkelä and Kinnunen (2018, 1288-1289), earlier literature on IBTs identified workload and pressure as stressors because employees working globally have longer hours than those working locally and the issues originated from traveling affect time pressure and the need to rush work because of unexpected events such as delays and pressure on planned schedules. In addition, these studies also linked the risks involved in working in different locations around the world that negatively impact the IBT's well-being as job demands related to health and safety issues, jetlag due to the constant change in time zones, and the use of a foreign language. Moreover, these studies reported that the risk of illness is greater when there is great climatic and cultural contrast between the traveler's country of origin and the destination, as travelers do not have a choice when it comes to the locations and they can be far, challenging, and dangerous.

Later studies focused on the impact of business travel on work-life balance, anxiety, frustration, fatigue, obesity, and psychological disorders (Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 473). These studies show that the negative outcomes of IBT such as decreased productivity and efficiency can negatively impact performance and decrease job satisfaction because the high stress generated by BTs can lead to organizational issues since the travelers suffer behavioral, psychological, physiological, medical, and trauma outcomes (2023, 475).

Mäkelä and Kinnunen's research (2018,1296) supports the view that the high workload and pressure originated from work that requires IBTs is directly related to job exhaustion and the hurry and high workload imposed for IBTs are stressful and may cause poor health, as well, reduced job performance. Their findings showed the intercorrelations between job demands, job exhaustion, and supportive HR practices: workload and pressure and risks of travel destinations related positively to job exhaustion and negatively to satisfaction with work travel, but no vigor at work, whilst supportive HR practices were positively related to vigor and satisfaction with work travel, and negatively to job exhaustion. These correlations are presented in Figure 1 (1292):
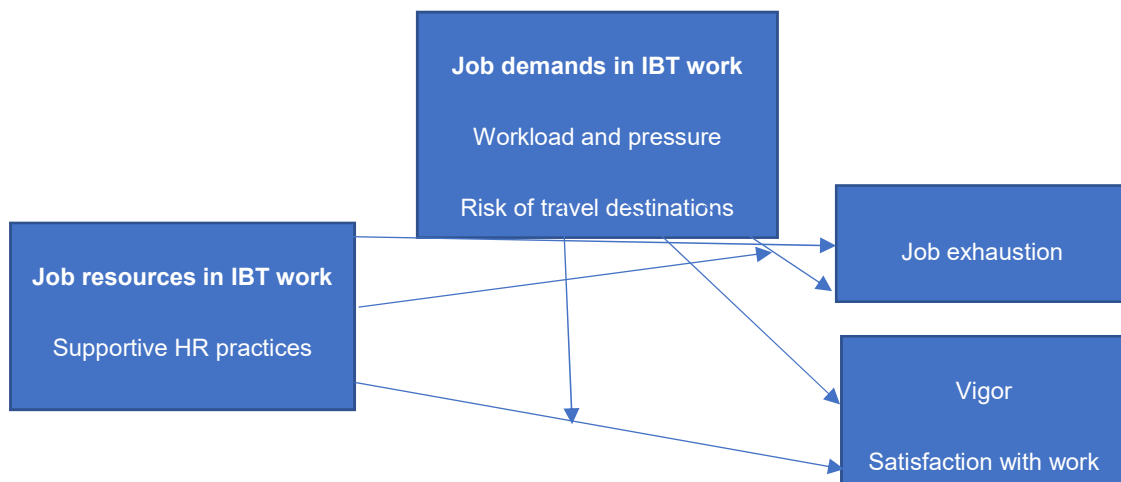
Figure 1. Correlations between job demands, job exhaustion and HR practices in IBT work (adapted from Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2018, 1292)

Later research from Mäkelä et al. (2021, 437) on international business travel and well-being concluded that, besides the job demands of IBTs such as travel logistics, unexpected delays, physical discomfort, cultural and climate differences, health and safety risks, excessive time pressure and workload, the duration and frequency of trips could also indicate the demands caused by travel. The more intensive the travel, the more common problems such as increased alcohol consumption, sleep deprivation, and feelings of insecurity. Increased travel frequency is associated, as well, with dissatisfaction, problems in maintaining social networks, and family conflicts.

According to Brewster, Dickmann and Suutari (2020, 12) the literature on business travel considered the time apart from family as a negative outcome due to the worry IBTs have concerning the impact of their absence on their family which can lead to work-family conflict and emotional upsets. Other negative aspects of business travel identified by these authors in business travel literature are unbalanced diet (more food and alcohol intake), burnout, loneliness, and sleeping problems.

Gustafson (2012, 207-208) points out that another negative outcome of international business travel is the perceived pressure to perform jobs while traveling. According to this author's studies, there is an expectation of making the travel time productive and using it as working time. For this reason, there are no boundaries between working time and leisure time while availability for work when it comes to time and space is expected and complicates the sustainability of IBTs work-life balance.

Cohen, Hanna and Gössling (2017, 407) research on the dark side of business travel mentions the negative effect of frequent business travel when it comes to the psychological costs at kinship, friendship, and community levels: despite the worldwide connections business travelers make

through work, IBTs feel loneliness and isolation from their local ties due to less time and presence in social life and home which results on repeated absence from important family events while the time spent at home is jeopardized by the fatigue caused by the last travel and may be limited by the preparations for the next one. These authors also state that the fatigue related to jetlag and its interference with the body's circadian rhythm along with travel stress may cause chronic fatigue called "frequent traveler exhaustion". Such extreme fatigue can affect how business travelers handle sensitive data putting their companies at risk. Other risks listed by these authors for frequent business travelers are the development of deep-vein thrombosis and radiation exposure. They summarize the context of international business travel experience as: "long working days, late evenings, and early mornings, with less time for exercise, usually worse eating habits than when at home, and often, the overconsumption of alcohol" while stressing for work accumulated and delays, technical failures and additional security checks (2017, 408). As per these authors' research negative affective and psychological effects are central elements of frequent business travel and words such as "dread", "anxiety", "tiring" and "loathing" are the core adjectives when frequent business travelers described their experiences during interviews.

Through interviews with business travelers, Ye and Xu's (2020, 8) study revealed that the job demands and stressful aspects related to business travel such as high workload, physical effort, interpersonal conflict, burnout, health complaints, irregular eating and sleeping, travel stress tend to decrease as the individuals get more experienced, nonetheless, negative impacts on family relations and physical health are the most influential in the long term.

Wheatley and Bickerton's (2016, 251-252) research on business travel literature and their case study on travel-for-work concluded that it results in intense schedules, and planning becomes increasingly important to offset the negative impacts. Their studies found that workers often report that travel time is not recognized as work-time, but is often used productively to avoid work overload. Some workers report expectations from employers that they would work during travel, which may translate into increased workloads. These studies also concluded that lengthier and more distant travel requiring absence from home provides the greatest opportunities to increase mobility capital but may also have significant costs to family time and personal health. Travelers often make conscious attempts to minimize travel time and avoid overnight stays due to the impacts on family, social lives, and leisure. The relative infrequency of travel-for-work mediates the impacts, but frequent travel, especially those requiring overnight stays, appears to compound the effects.

In summary, the literature on international business travel has mostly outlined the negative outcomes and its impacts on travelers. Early studies identified stress as a major negative outcome, with high levels of stress associated with physical and emotional ill-health. Later studies focused

on the impact of IBT on work-life balance, anxiety, frustration, fatigue, obesity, and psychological disorders. These negative outcomes can negatively impact performance and job satisfaction, as well as lead to organizational issues. Later research on IBT and well-being found that travel demands, such as travel logistics, unexpected delays, physical discomfort, cultural and climate differences, health and safety risks, excessive time pressure, and workload are also contributors to the overall negative side of international business travel.

2.2.2 Positive outcomes of international business travel

According to Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 475) literature on the positive outcomes of international business travel is minimal and very few studies were published regarding this aspect of IBTs. However, as stated by these authors, "BT can offer opportunities to experience positive emotions because of the sense of accomplishment and the kind of time off and break in routine that it provides" (475).

Previous studies on business travel experiences reported that travelers also had moments of relaxation, time off, and enjoyment when familiar with airports and the comforts offered to privileged passengers (Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 475). Mäkelä and Kinnunen (2018) found that well-functioning, safe travel arrangements and post-travel recovery positively affect vigor. Gustafson (2014) found positive outcomes for IB travelers' careers and lifestyles, including enhanced professional status, cosmopolitan identities, prestige, open-mindedness, and vigor.

Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 475) found that travelers with more control over their travel schedules and satisfaction with their trips experienced higher levels of vigor, which was associated with business travel and crossed over from travelers to their spouses.

According to Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 475) in previous studies on business travel, despite the challenges international business travel presents an opportunity to attain well-being and other valuable outcomes because it provides travelers with diverse experiences that develop social and human capital. These resources help them to adjust to new environments and contribute to career success and satisfaction. Human capital is also developed through IBT, such as cultural knowledge and skills, such as interacting with people from different cultures and adapting to unfamiliar places. Quality interactions with foreign nationals can help employees develop a global mindset, benefiting their global work and making travel easier.

Researchers have found both positive and negative effects of international business travel, with some studies showing positive outcomes such as personal growth, enhanced well-being, escape from routine, and more focused family activities. While some families and travelers complain about the negative impact of business travel, some spouses and travelers find travel-associated stress

low and minimal, as they value companionship and believe it can positively affect family relationships since the absence of the traveler can be perceived as relaxing and engaging in special activities. Despite the challenges, some authors found that business travel also offers exposure to new cultures, insights, self-growth, and some degree of relaxation (Westman, Chen & Eden 2023, 476).

Westman, Chen and Eden (2023, 486) consider that travelers learn and grow due to meeting new people and making new friends and acquaintances another positive aspect of IBT because the expansion of the traveler's network can be valuable and gratifying to the career development and social interactions.

As stated by Brewster, Dickmann and Suutari (2020, 12), one positive effect of international business travel is that "a low effort-reward imbalance can support work-to-life enrichment if coupled with a pronounced international career orientation". These authors also considered the gained professional and personal experiences valuable when it comes to the useful network built abroad which enables possibilities for greater career choices and a positive reputation (13).

The findings of Ye and Xu's research (2020, 6) on business travel positive outcomes revealed that business traveler's continuous movement and changes in the physical and social environment provide new resources and opportunities. They not only find emotional pleasure and hedonic experiences but also enhance self-development and expand networks over time.

According to these authors (2020), when it comes to the sense of freedom, pleasure, and privilege, business travel is similar to leisure travel in some aspects, offering novelty and special experiences. Mobile work allows for visits to domestic and international destinations, local cultures, food, scenery, and communication. Some people find business travel "free" as companies cover hotels, meals, and transportation. This hedonic aspect also relates to the superiority of high-class hotels and flights experienced during business travels. Travelers can also enjoy tourist activities during weekends.

Regarding self-development, according to Ye and Xu (2020, 7), business travel is widely agreed upon as a valuable tool for personal growth and knowledge enrichment. It can provide opportunities for personal development, such as conducting field research and communicating with project leaders. It also offers personal value, such as fulfilling company responsibilities and understanding commercial patterns and consumption cultures. Frequent travel also enhances work-related capacities and life skills, such as planning and making travel arrangements. This can lead to better decision-making and personal growth, making business travel a valuable tool for personal growth.

Concerning network development, Ye and Xu (2020, 7) found that frequent business travelers have short-term interactions in geographically dispersed locations, allowing them to build larger

networks and access resources. This allows them to collaborate with business partners and expand their business networks. This high mobility allows them to maintain interactions with clients and friends worldwide, which can contribute to developing non-business relationships.

Wheatley & Bickerton's research (2016, 242) found that travel-for-work offers workers a break from workplace and family pressures, providing relaxation and respite. While some choose not to complete work during travel, evidence suggests many productively use it to complete work without workplace distractions. These authors also concluded that travel-for-work offers numerous benefits, including career development, which are more pronounced among those travelers with greater frequency of travel and overnight stays because lengthier and more distant travel can provide great opportunities to increase mobility capital.

In summary, researchers on business travel studies have found both positive and negative effects of international business travel, with some studies showing positive outcomes such as personal growth, enhanced well-being, and escape from routine. Despite the challenges, IBT provides a sense of accomplishment, relaxation, time off, and diverse experiences that develop social and human capital, contributing to career success and satisfaction. Human capital, such as cultural knowledge and skills, can be developed through IBT. Business travel also offers exposure to new cultures, insights, self-growth, and opportunities for emotional pleasure, self-development, and network expansion.

2.3   Remote work and well-being

According to Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano and Michailidis (2018, 5), one of the first terms to be used in the literature to refer to remote working arrangements is telecommuting. Later remote working refers to the use of technology to complete work from anywhere and at any time, regardless of location. This term has evolved to "telework" as a reference to virtually conducted work. Remote workers are defined as full-time, home-based telecommuters who communicate mainly through electronic mediums. Although home-based telework is traditionally the most common type of remote working, there has been an increase in people working in multiple locations, such as employees who spend time away from the traditional office and use ICTs to access work.

Wang, Xiao, Wang, Zhang and Chen (2023, 621) defined telework as a flexible work arrangement that allows employees to work from various locations, including home-based and mobile telework, using modern information technology. According to these authors, previous literature on remote work was related to the fact that home-based telework is influenced by organizational and individual characteristics, with factors such as work-family balance, gender, high education, family composition, and individual willingness affecting its implementation. Research has focused on work-

family conflict, job performance, job satisfaction, work well-being, mental and physical health, and other outcomes. Some studies suggest that home-based telework relieves commuting time stress, reduces work-family conflict, and improves individual job satisfaction and performance by enhancing employees' autonomy and perceived supervisor support. However, others suggest that telework may trigger work-family conflict and harm employees' job performance by reducing their willingness and frequency of knowledge sharing.

Nemteanu and Dabija's literature review (2023, 2) regarding remote work suggests that teleworking, remote work, work from home, or online work are approaches to work undertaken outside traditional office spaces. These approaches have been studied through managerial theories and psychology, such as resource drain theory, accommodation theory, and conservation of resource theory. These theories suggest that employees allocate resources to avoid affecting their family relations or social activities. Accommodation theory suggests that employees may opt out of certain work activities to better meet their family needs. This theory evaluates the pressure of teleworking and family, influencing employee volition and satisfaction with professional development, relational capacities, and autonomy. Resource drain theory suggests that employee well-being is diminished when faced with resource drain. Work-life conflict can also be explained by the theory of boundaries, which suggests that if flexibility is a factor, boundaries can become fuzzy. Teleworking has been associated with increased workload and responsibilities, unclear boundaries between work and family responsibilities, and weakened boundaries regarding working hours, co-worker disturbances, and interruptions.

Schulze, Krumm, Eid, Müller and Göritz (2024, 8) found that telework studies often use Social Presence Theory and Media Richness Theory to link telework with social characteristics. These theories suggest that interaction quality suffers when workers rely on media that lack nonverbal cues. Frequent face-to-face interaction may ease interpersonal bonding and psychological closeness. However, other theories suggest a more nuanced view, considering media skills and experience of interaction partners. Electronic Propinquity Theory and Channel Expansion Theory also suggest that remote work establishes physical and temporal boundaries between co-workers, potentially hindering informal communication and networking. These authors concluded, therefore, that a rise in telework intensity is linked to a decrease in social support and feedback from others, while a decline in telework intensity is linked to an increase in social support and feedback which suggests that telework intensity is a significant factor in social support.

When it comes to well-being related to remote work, Charalampous et al. (2018, 7) state that they are linked in various ways. Firstly, it allows workers to focus on individual tasks, eliminating interruptions from co-workers and, thus, increasing job satisfaction. However, physical separation can

lead to missed office interactions and feelings of isolation, which can limit access to social support. While remote work allows autonomy and relies heavily on ICTs to stay connected, working long hours and the expectation to be constantly available from colleagues and supervisors can impair individuals' ability to switch off from work, leading to poor well-being and health problems. Remote work can offer benefits, however, according to these authors, it is essential to balance the need for social support and the autonomy of knowledge work.

Charalampous el at. (2018, 16) studies concluded the following concerning the well-being dimensions and remote work:

- Affective and social facets: social support can negatively impact remote e-workers' emotional states, leading to increased emotional exhaustion. Low social support decreases resources, while organizational support reduces social isolation and increases job satisfaction. Maintaining good relationships is crucial for job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Having compatible co-workers increases commitment to the organization;
- Cognitive and social facets: cognitive stress complaints are linked to low social support, thus the importance of cognitive and social aspects of well-being at work;
- Affective and professional facets: remote work bilaterally impacts professional well-being, with job autonomy playing a significant role in job satisfaction. Autonomy reduces privacy invasion and can alleviate emotional exhaustion. However, time away from the office can negatively impact perceptions of career opportunities and organizational investment in employee training and development;
- Professional and social facets: qualitative studies found increased supervision from managers, despite established trust between employees and supervisors. This increased control can hinder career advancement. However, some studies suggested increased autonomy but also challenges in social relationships and communication.
- Psychosomatic and affective facets: remote workers experience more negative emotions compared to their office-based colleagues. Furthermore, reduced work-life conflict doesn't affect their affective well-being. No links were found between remote work and psychosomatic symptoms;
- Professional and cognitive facets: remote work did not increase autonomy or concentration levels, contradicting qualitative studies suggesting it allowed for greater concentration. However, it also led to increased cognitive stress complaints.
- Psychosomatic and social facets: individuals rarely feel socially isolated and have strategies in place to alleviate these feelings. Nonetheless, health problems, such as backache, are linked to computer use, emphasizing the need for ergonomically sound equipment and furniture when working from home.

Wang et al. (2023, 621-622) studies on the relationship between negative emotions and remote work refers to the fact that telework invisibility leads to employees extending working hours and increasing workloads to maintain trust and keep pace with colleagues. On the other hand, this can cause psychological detachment and work-family conflict, leading to fatigue and negative emotions. Technological progress also presents higher digital challenges, requiring employees to adapt to complex work norms and multitasking. This can lead to task frustration and difficulties in obtaining support, resulting in negative emotions like anger.

According to Wang et al. (2023, 622) these negative emotions affect the individuals' well-being because workplace isolation is a hidden form of conflict caused by a lack of emotional connection, trust, and support between organizational members. It includes both colleague and company isolation, with the former referring to reduced affective interaction and indifferent interpersonal relationships, and the latter referring to difficulty in gaining attention and recognition from supervisors and limited vocational development. Remote workers are physically separated from other members, relying on digital communication, making it difficult to establish positive emotional contact with supervisors and colleagues. This can lead to "flexibility bias" and coldness between co-workers. Supervisors may trust office workers but neglect teleworkers, resulting in reduced recognition and promotion chances. That being said, workplace isolation can lead to negative emotions, low-quality interpersonal relationships, development bottlenecks, and a lack of supportive resources.

Based on the affect event theory that suggests that work environment features can lead to positive or negative events influencing individuals' emotional reactions and work attitudes, Wang et al. (2023, 623) concluded that negative emotions can damage intrinsic motivation, leading to decreased enthusiasm and avoidance at work. Employees need to invest more resources to resist negative emotions, reducing work engagement. Remote workers may experience negative emotions due to alienation and neglect from supervisors or colleagues, while high response expectations from others can cause anxiety and tension, furthers reducing work engagement. Overall, negative emotions and telepressure can negatively impact work engagement and motivation.

In summary, remote work is a flexible work arrangement that allows employees to work from various locations using modern information technology. Research has focused on work-family conflict, job performance, job satisfaction, and mental and physical health outcomes. Studies highlight the link between remote work and well-being, while it allows workers to focus on tasks, physical separation can lead to missed interactions and isolation. Long hours and constant availability can cause poor well-being and health issues. Research reveals that remote work can lead to negative emotions due to increased workloads, psychological detachment, and work-family conflict. Work-place

isolation, a hidden form of conflict, can lead to reduced affective interaction, indifferent interpersonal relationships, and limited vocational development. Remote workers may experience negative emotions due to alienation and neglect from supervisors or colleagues, while high response expectations can cause anxiety and tension.

2.3.1 Virtual teamwork and well-being

Virtual teamwork involves collaboration between geographically or organizationally dispersed coworkers using a combination of telecommunications and information technologies to accomplish an organizational task, which is different than telework, despite both concepts primarily utilizing information and communication technology for collaboration (Schulze et al. 2024, 5).

According to Rahmani, Zeng, Chen, Fletcher and Goke (2023, 1), the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in organizations has significantly impacted information sharing, culture, and the use of virtual teams. Virtual teams (VTs) are defined as "teams whose members use technology to varying degrees in working across locational, temporal, and relational boundaries to accomplish interdependent tasks". The use of virtual teams, however, presents challenges due to the use of various communication technologies such as email, audio, and visual tools like Zoom, Skype, and Microsoft Teams.

Goel, Game and Vergel (2023, 312) point out the fact that virtual teams are physically dispersed individuals using information and communication technologies, sometimes across different time zones, to increase organizational agility and reduce travel costs, time, money, and stress. According to Klonek, Kanse, Wee, Runneboom and Parker (2022, 186-187), the literature on virtual teams refers to geographic dispersed and technology dependent in work-related interactions among employees and that most teams nowadays are predominantly hybrid, with moderate virtuality levels, utilizing both electronic technology and face-to-face communication, and that these teams can fluctuate over time, driven by internal or external events whether slowly or abruptly.

Virtual teams can be also global virtual teams, Kolm, van Merriënboer, Frambach, Vanherle and Nooijer (2023, 2) defined global virtual teams as "a group of people that have a common goal or a task to perform while separated by distance or time". Shaik, Makhecha and Gouda (2019, 52) studies on the literature regarding global virtual teams (GVTs) defined them as teams with diverse competencies, located across time, space, and cultural boundaries. They differ from local teams due to their reliance on technology, reduced face-to-face interactions, multiple nationalities, time zones, and physical distance between members. These dynamics are illustrated in Figure 2, as follows:
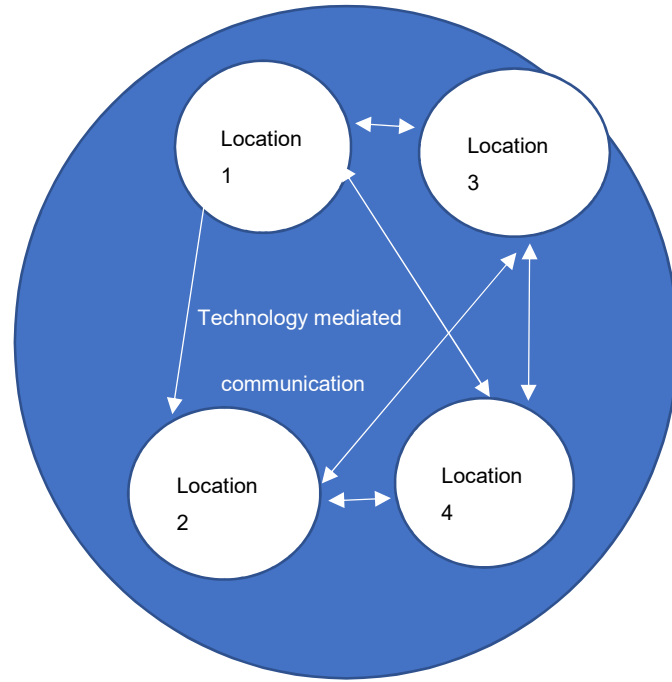
Figure 2. Dynamics in a Global Virtual Team (adapted from Shaik, Makhecha & Gouda 2019, 53)

Virtual teams offer both tensions and benefits for employees, according to Rahmani et al. (2023, 2), VTs provide new tools for employees to connect within and across organizations, share information, establish social networks, and negotiate personal and organizational identities. However, this hyperconnectivity can also create tensions by encouraging team members to stay in touch around the clock and disrupting boundaries between public and private life. Compared to face-to-face communication, VTs require different cultural competencies to interpret conversations and may lack the richness of non-verbal cues. Additionally, utilizing VTs requires technical skills to utilize devices, which may be stressful for less technologically prone employees.

Shaik et al. (2019, 54) summarized the literature regarding the challenges of working in Global Virtual Teams as per Table 5:

Table 5. Challenges of working in GVTs

Challenge	Description	Relevant literature
Communication	Scheduling meetings, inability to see the communication dynamics such as facial expressions.	Aten and Thomas (2016), Gilson et al. (2015), Hedman and Valo (2015), Jimenez et al. (2017), Lockwood (2015), Marlow et

		al. (2017), Srikanth et al. (2016)
Time zone collaboration	Collaborating across multiple time zones due to geographical dispersion.	Blomqvist and Nordstrand (2018), Cooke and Hilton (2015), Dulebohn and Hoch (2017), Peterson et al. (2016)
Technology	Ensuring all the members of GVT have similar proficiency in using and aligning to the technology.	Aten and Thomas (2016), Dulebohn and Hoch (2017), Marlow et al. (2017), Peterson et al. (2016)
Diversity	Establishment of group identity, shared norms and meanings.	Gilson et al. (2015), Hill and Bartol (2016), Jimenez et al. (2017), Peterson et al. (2016), Shokef and Erez (2015)
Trust	Establishment of trust based on performance consistency rather than social bonds.	Alsharo et al. (2017), Dulebohn and Hoch (2017), Ford et al. (2017), Guinalíu and Jordán (2016), Kirkman et al. (2002), Zahedi et al. (2016)
Isolation and detachment	Creation of an environment of inclusiveness and involvement	Grenny and Maxfield (2017), Han and Beyerlein (2016), Kirkman et al. (2002), Krumm et al. (2016)

Regarding the correlation between virtual teams and well-being, Lang, Dony and Roberts' studies (2022, 1085-1086) divided the challenges faced by team members into the following dimensions:

- Cognitive demands: the rise of videoconferencing in team communication raises concerns about team effectiveness and worker health, leading to "Zoom fatigue" due to cognitively taxing virtual meetings and lack of implicit communication, compared to in-person interactions;

- Social isolation: lack of in-person interaction among work team members can lead to professional isolation, causing a perception of distance from colleagues and weaker interpersonal relationships. This negative impact is most pronounced among workers in highly interdependent teams;

- Physical workspace: transitioning to remote work necessitates workers to create a home workspace for collaborative tasks, presentations, and individual work. This can be challenging due to internet bandwidth demands, lack of personal space, and disruptions from sound travel. Additionally, employers have less control over workspace design;

- Remote onboarding: the pandemic has led to remote onboarding and the formation of new teams, requiring deliberate intervention to foster interpersonal relationships and shared mental models, which may hinder team cohesion and coordination.

Lang et al.'s research (2022, 1086) also found that not all aspects of virtual teams are detrimental and identified the following strengths in the below spheres:

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion: workers who have experienced discrimination in the workplace, including race, ethnicity, and disability status, are more likely to prefer remote work. The decrease in microaggressions in virtual work environments is linked to worker wellbeing, engagement, and psychological safety. This allows team members to contribute, take risks, and bring new ideas without fear of punishment;

- Motivation: studies show that remote work correlates with higher motivation and productivity when framed as a nonpecuniary incentive. It also promotes a family-friendly organizational culture and reduces conflict;

- Productivity: remote work, despite its challenges, has been shown to increase productivity and performance among telecommuters due to factors such as autonomy and schedule flexibility, as well as lower absenteeism and turnover.

When it comes to the use of technology and well-being in virtual teams, Rahmani et al. (2023, 2) found that the Adaptive Structuration Theory suggests the integration of new information communication technologies in workplaces impacts social structure and organizational relationships. The integration of technology is not linear and can produce unintended results, as users adapt to it ac-

cording to their individual preferences. The quality and quantity of team communication significantly influence performance, knowledge sharing, decision-making, trust, and commitment in VTs. These authors also identified that while Information and Communication Technology (IT) promotes teamwork and equality, it also faces challenges such as geographical, temporal, perceived distance, and team configuration. When implemented well, VTs can diversify employees' skills and knowledge, increase organizational communication, and democratize organizational culture. However, if not implemented properly, they can increase the risk of cyberbullying, security breaches, misinformation, misunderstandings, reduced information seeking, and incoherent messages.

Goel et al.'s research (2023, 312-313) found that in virtual teams employees cannot rely on informal socializing to maintain good relationships which directly affects their work engagement. Work engagement is crucial for employee well-being and is negatively impacted by job demands in virtual teamwork, such as limited social interaction, working across time zones, and cultural communications. Their research found that virtual employees are either anxiously or avoidantly attached to virtual teams which can lead to different levels of work engagement and collaborative job-crafting (328).

In summary, virtual teamwork involves collaboration between geographically or organizationally dispersed coworkers using telecommunications and information technologies. The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in organizations has significantly impacted information sharing, culture, and the use of virtual teams. Global virtual teams are groups with diverse competencies, located across time, space, and cultural boundaries. They provide new tools for employees to connect within and across organizations, share information, establish social networks, and negotiate personal and organizational identities. However, hyperconnectivity can create tensions by encouraging team members to stay in touch around the clock and disrupting boundaries between public and private life. Challenges faced by team members include cognitive demands and social isolation. Despite these challenges, virtual teams can offer benefits such as diversity, equity, inclusion, motivation, and productivity.

2.4   Integrating key concepts

This thesis work is conducted to demonstrate the strategic importance of business travel for international organizations in a post-pandemic world, emphasizing the benefits of travel for stakeholders, including well-being, social interactions, and overall motivation. The thesis argues that these benefits can positively impact the organization's strategy for future planning, as well-being and social spheres are essential for employees' motivation to perform. Consequently, this theoretical

framework evaluates multiple aspects of international business travel and well-being at the intersection of three topics: international business travel, the correlation between business travel and well-being, and lastly, the correspondence between remote work and well-being.

The first section introduced the basic concepts of international business travel, along with the main characteristics of this topic and the theories underlying international business travel research. The second section focused on the connection between work well-being and business travel, by presenting its negative and positive outcomes as per previous research. The third and last section of this theoretical framework dealt with key concepts of remote work and well-being, as well, as virtual teamwork and well-being.

The literature on international business travel (IBT) has primarily focused on stress models and empirical studies that highlight the negative impacts of job demands such as stress and poor performance. However, some studies have found positive outcomes such as personal growth, enhanced well-being, and escape from routine. Previous research found evidence that IBT provides a sense of accomplishment, relaxation, time off, and diverse experiences that develop social and human capital, contributing to career success and satisfaction.

The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has impacted information sharing, culture, and the use of remote work and virtual teams. Remote work, a flexible work arrangement that allows employees to work from various locations using modern information technology, has been linked to work-family conflict, job performance, job satisfaction, and mental and physical health outcomes. Virtual teamwork involves collaboration between geographically or organizationally dispersed coworkers using telecommunications and information technologies. Previous studies demonstrate that both remote workers and members of virtual teams may experience negative emotions due to increased workloads, psychological detachment, workplace isolation, and neglect from supervisors or colleagues. Overall the literature on remote and virtual teamwork has a complex interplay of stress, and physiological and psychological outcomes, despite benefits such as productivity and inclusion also presented by some studies.

Considering the positive and negative outcomes of international business travel and remote/virtual ream work, when it comes to well-being the key concepts presented in this theoretical framework can be integrated as follows:

International business travel negatively impacts individuals' well-being, nonetheless, while remote and virtual teamwork usage can substitute physical and in-person interactions such as those result from business travel and have other benefits, it also has negative impacts on the well-being of workers and does not cover all aspects that a business travel does, especially the social ones.

Therefore, despite the positive outcomes of remote and virtual teamwork, the benefits of business travel are intrinsic to the travel experience itself and cannot be replaced by remote and virtual teamwork. Further studies on this aspect of this research will be further discussed in the following chapters of this thesis project.

3 Research methodology

This chapter of the thesis discusses the research methodology. In addition to research methodology aspects, the documentary and content analysis of international business travel is also presented in the research context. The introduction of the analysis is followed by an introduction to the research approach. This chapter concludes with the presentation of data collection, data analysis, and limitations of the study.

3.1 Research context

3.1.1 Post-pandemic business travel

According to Wang, Nicolau and Deng (2024, 1) business travel is a crucial part of the tourism industry and has been studied through various perspectives, including economics, customer behavior, organizational behavior, human geography, and sociology. Despite its benefits, business travel can cause stress for travelers and raise environmental concerns. The increasing frequency of business trips has intensified tensions between work and leisure and between business efficiency and sustainability.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted business travel routines, leading to discussions on business travel reduction. Videoconferencing (VC) software, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet, has become a common practice in the post-pandemic era (Wang, Nicolau & Deng 2024, 1).

Business travel is a dual mode that combines work-related commitments with tourism-related experiences. It has been impacted by factors such as family, travelers' well-being, travel time value, and cost savings. Globalization and the demand for business-level communication have led to the development of "portfolios of mobility", which include physical travel and virtual meetings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual meetings emerged as an alternative to physical meetings, offering flexibility, travel time savings, and reduced environmental impact. However, virtual communication tools have drawbacks, such as "zoom fatigue", privacy concerns, and a lack of face-to-face interactions. Post-pandemic, debates have arisen regarding the choices between VC and business travel. These debates argue that VC cannot replace business travel, while some others argue that environmental and economic pressures can encourage the substitution of business travel by VC in the post-pandemic world (Wang, Nicolau & Deng 2024, 2).

In 2020, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates predicted a 50% reduction in business travel and a 30% reduction in office days post-pandemic, predicting a high threshold for business travel (Wang, Nicolau & Deng 2024, 2). However, more recent evidence shows a slow recovery of business travel

despite some restrictions. The most recent report on business travel published by Deloitte (Caputo, Crowley, Soderberg, Daher, Rauch, Terry, Rosenberger & Naiki 2023), stated that leisure travel in the US and Europe reached pre-COVID-19 levels, following the rollout of vaccines in early 2021. Business travel has been slower to return, with decisions affecting factors like traveler safety, client interest, conference value, and the potential of virtual conferencing platforms, but Deloitte's study in 2023 evidenced that business travel grew 57% of 2019 levels in the first half of the year, and expected to be nearly three-quarters of the pre-pandemic mark by the end of the year 2023. More of this study will be discussed in the next subtopics of this chapter.

3.1.2 Post-pandemic business travel well-being

IBTs are individuals who travel for work purposes but only stay for a short time, typically days or weeks. Before COVID-19, studies explored the impact of travel stressors on the health and well-being of frequent business travelers (IBTs) (Kumpikaite-Valiuliene, Pinto & Gurbanov 2022, 172-173).

According to Kumpikaite-Valiuliene, Pinto & Gurbanov (2022, 176) the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the autonomy of International Business Travelers (IBTs), leading to job losses and increased childcare responsibilities. Studies suggest that instead of experiencing a positive work-life change, these demands may have increased workload and stress, leading to further work-life difficulties. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the number of business travels has decreased, but that is not the only factor affecting IBTs' stress, work-life difficulties, and work-life balance (WLB). The WLB of IBTs following COVID-19 is influenced by perceived changes in stress, work-life difficulties, and job demands, such as business travel and workload (Kumpikaite-Valiuliene, Pinto & Gurbanov 2022, 176). Although International Business Travelers reported cancellations of business travel and a decrease in workload, they did not experience a significant decrease in stress and relational difficulties. Some IBTs may experience job satisfaction and work-life accomplishment from business traveling, especially when travel demands are manageable (2022, 184).

Another aspect related to the well-being and business travel in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions is the structural change in the relationship between virtual conferences (VC) and business travel. The adoption of VC tools has an impact on the substitution of business travel for such tools. The richer, higher-quality VC tools that emerged during the pandemic provided conditions for business travel reduction (Wang, Nicolau & Deng 2024, 2), nonetheless, virtual meetings faced debates about their potential limitations such as tiredness originating from virtual interactions, security, and privacy issues, the lack of "serendipitous encounters", and the added value of face-to-face meetings which goes beyond serving operations (Standaert, Muylle & Basu 2022, 269). According to Standaet, Muylle and Basu (2022, 269), the lack of informal and

social interactions is the most notable drawback of virtual meetings, "which harms well-being and is caused by both the relatively limited nonverbal cues supported by technologies and the absence of ancillary interaction".

3.2   Research approach

The research uses secondary content and documentary analysis with qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative content analysis secondary method focuses on content generated by another qualitative method such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, or observations in ethnography, and plays a supportive analytical role with these methods (Roller & Lavrac 2015, 242).

According to Cheong, Lyons and Majumdar (2023), secondary qualitative data analysis offers valuable insights. Secondary qualitative data databases can be found in various forms, and analysis has become a credible method for research. This method removes the obstacle of first-hand data collection and its associated challenges, such as recruitment and the burden on interviewers and interviewees. As research efficiency and value for money increase, reusing existing data rather than generating new ones is increasingly favored.

For the purposes of this thesis, secondary qualitative data has been collected from previous studies and other publications related to business travel, well-being, and virtual versus in-person social interactions in the recent years after the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3   Data collection

3.3.1   Corporate travel study

In February 2023 Deloitte (Caputo et al. 2023) made a study on corporate travel based on a survey of 334 travel managers, and executives with different job positions and budgets. This survey involved 106 United States respondents and 228 European respondents based in the United Kingdom (56), Germany (57), Spain (59), and France (56).

Deloitte's study aimed to track the following key aspects and development of business travel:
- Flexible travel bookings due to the shift to flexible work and reshaping of travel;
- Companies' business travel strategy;
- Replacement of travel considering technology and conferencing tools;
- Travel buyers, suppliers, and contract negotiations correlation;
- Sustainability efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 influenced negatively the start of this year when it comes to corporate travel, nonetheless, travel grew from the beginning to the

end of the year as shown in Figure 3. The expectation for 2023 is that business travel will reach figures of 57% of 2019 levels in the first half of the year and mark three-quarters of the pre-pandemic figures by the end of 2023.
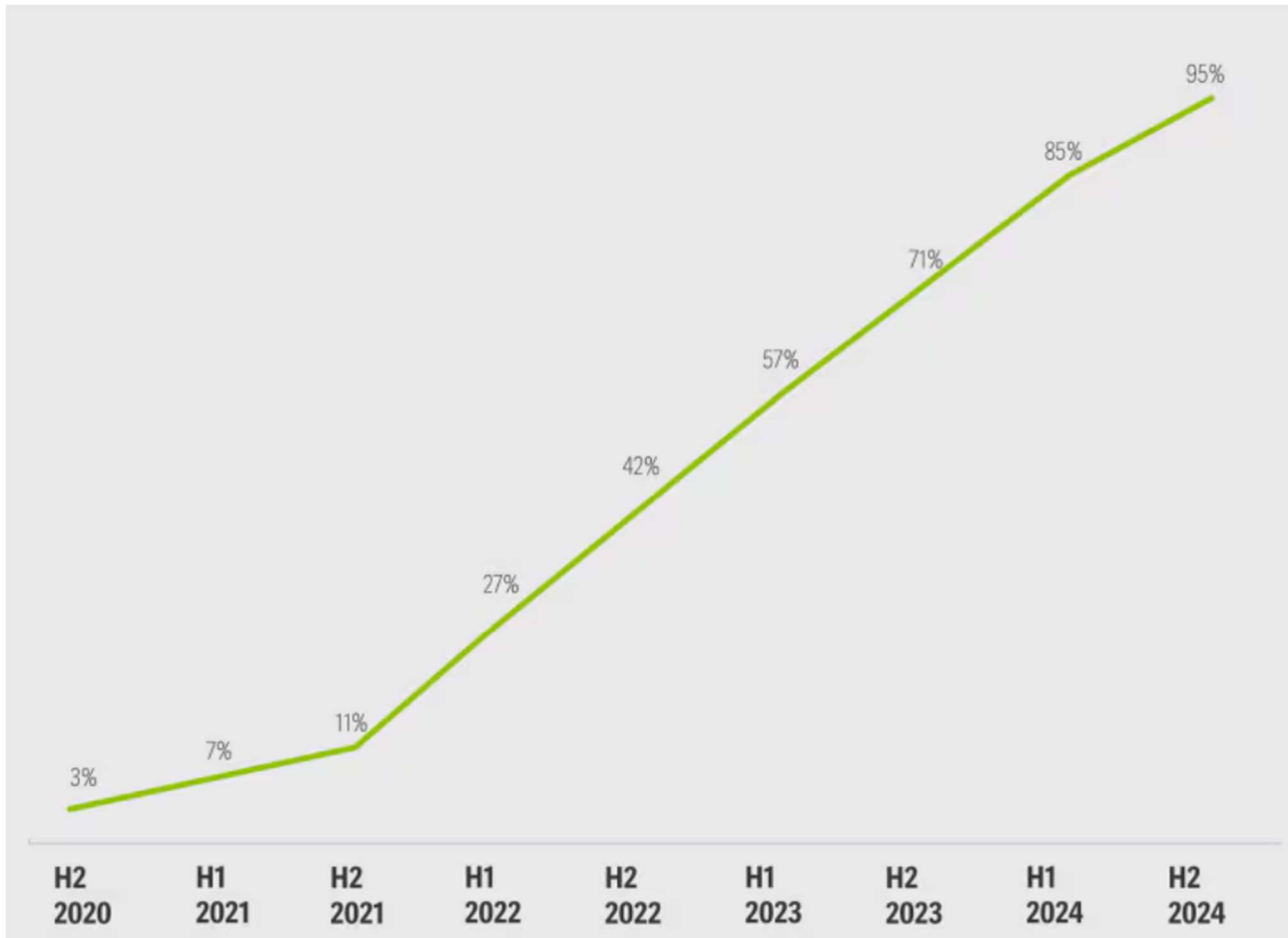

Figure 3. Corporate travel as a percentage of 2019 spend, United States and Europe combined (adapted from Caputo et al. 2023)

When it comes to expectations for 2024, Deloitte's (Caputo et al. 2023) third survey shows that travel managers' expectations have shifted slightly from the previous survey, with 24% of US and European companies expecting their travel spending to exceed 2019 in the first half of 2023, and 53% by the second half. The share of US companies expecting full recovery grows fourfold from 2023 to 2024 as presented in Figure 4.
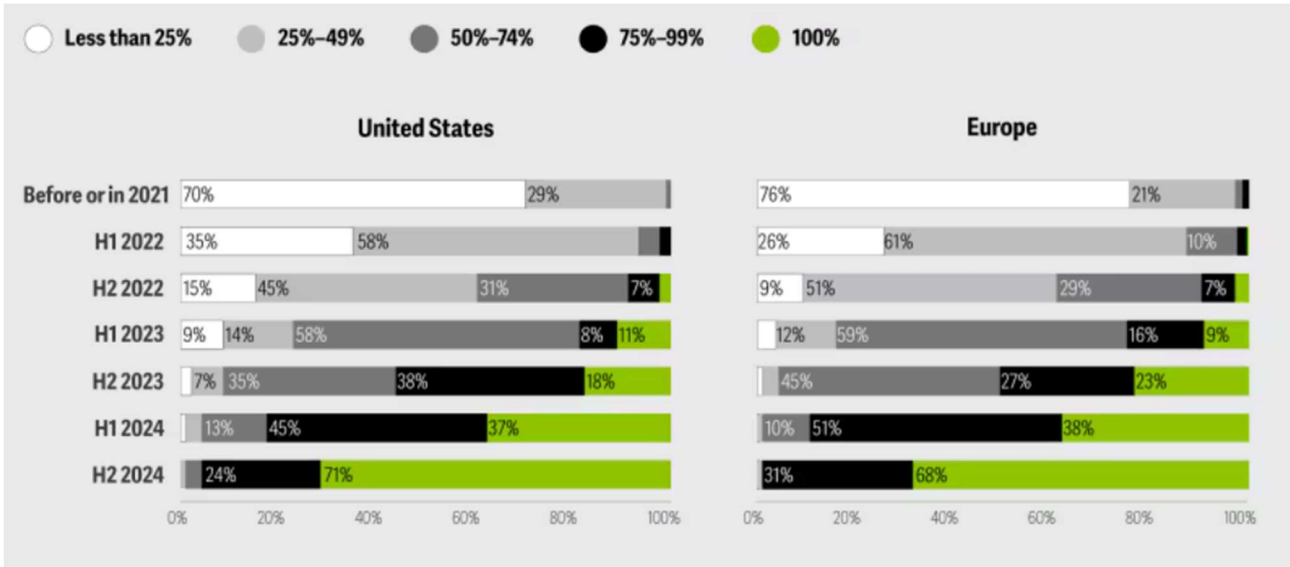
Figure 4. Expectations of full recovery in travel spend by US and European companies by the end of 2024 (adapted from Caputo et al. 2023)

Deloitte's survey (Caputo et al. 2023) predicts a continued increase in travel due to the growth of live events and the ease of restrictions. As international borders are now open, US respondents expect international trips to account for 33% of 2023 spending, up from 21% in Deloitte's 2022 survey. However, long-haul corporate trips from Europe are still recovering, as demonstrated by Figure 5.

Figure 5. International travel as a share of corporate travel spend, United States and Europe, 2023 (adapted from Caputo et al. 2023)

According to Deloitte's study (Caputo et al. 2023), international trips are primarily driven by connecting with clients and prospects, with client project work being the top reason for trips in Europe. American companies are more likely to connect with global industry colleagues at conferences and build client relationships. Live events are expected to be a major contributor to business travel demand, with increased event attendance being the top driver of growing spend, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Top five developments triggering business travel return and top five factors slowing business travel return, 2023 (adapted from Caputo et al. 2023)

Deloitte's survey (Caputo et al. 2023) also links the ability to leverage technology as a factor that supports travel reduction because companies can use some degree of replaceability for travel, such as internal training and team meetings. Internal training and team meetings are rated as the most replaceable, with over 44% of respondents rating them as low-need-in-person interactions. Only 7% and 11% rate client acquisition and rapport-building as replaceable. Some companies are also using technology to enable working from home, which is expected to continue in the future, as presented in Figure 7.
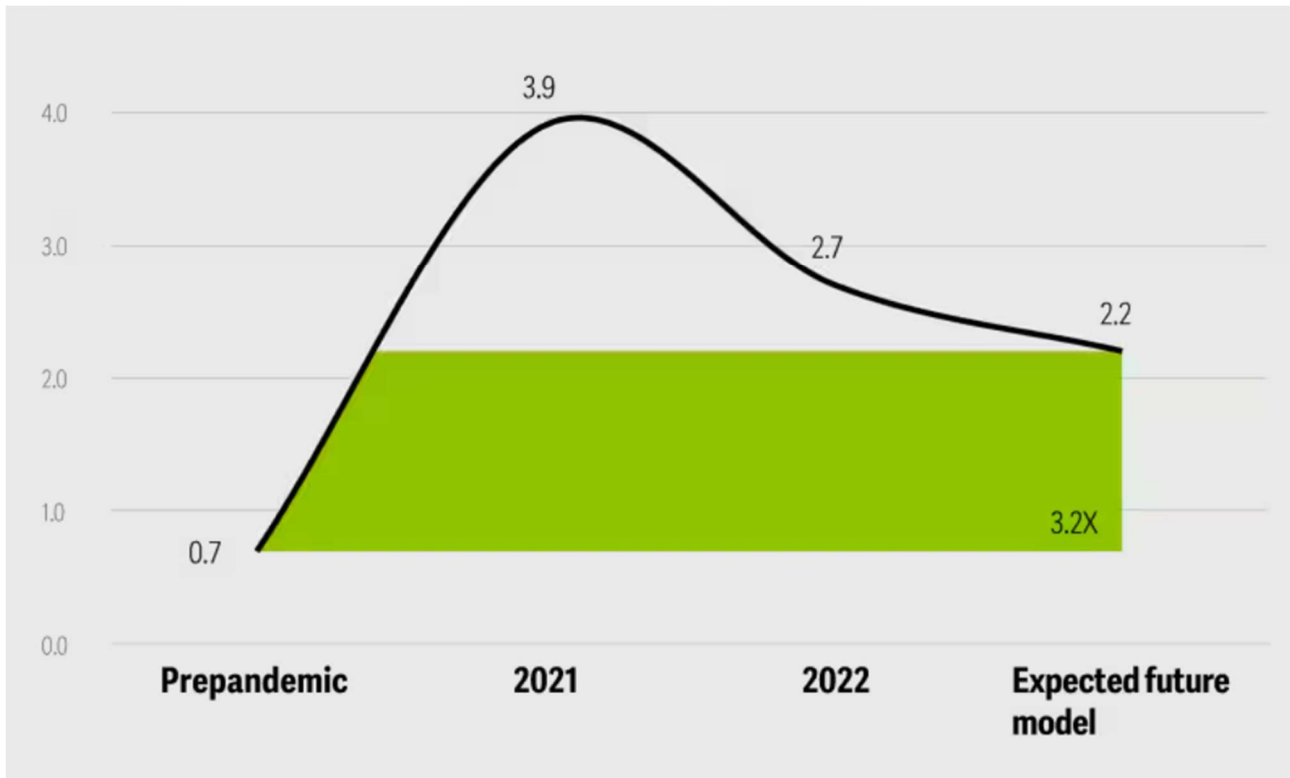
Figure 7. Workplace flexibility over time: days per week work from home (adapted from Caputo et al. 2023)

Flexible work arrangements are impacting travel volume indirectly by enabling virtual conferencing to meet business needs, while distributed workforces complicate in-person meetings with clients, prospects, and internal teams with fewer office days.

When it comes to travel's strategic positioning, Deloitte's survey (Caputo et al. 2023) found that, despite the millions saved in travel during 2020 and 2021, travel is way beyond an expense and it is also about strategic positioning. Historically, travel management has focused on controlling costs, but many are still in the early stages of tracking benefits. Corporate travel suppliers and partners can help companies optimize by supporting positive trip outcomes and measuring trip impact.

Regarding different approaches companies could take for justifying the value of travel, 63% of respondents said their company adopted at least three approaches, with seven in ten strategically evaluating and prioritizing travel's potential outcomes and side effects, these numbers are presented in Figure 8.
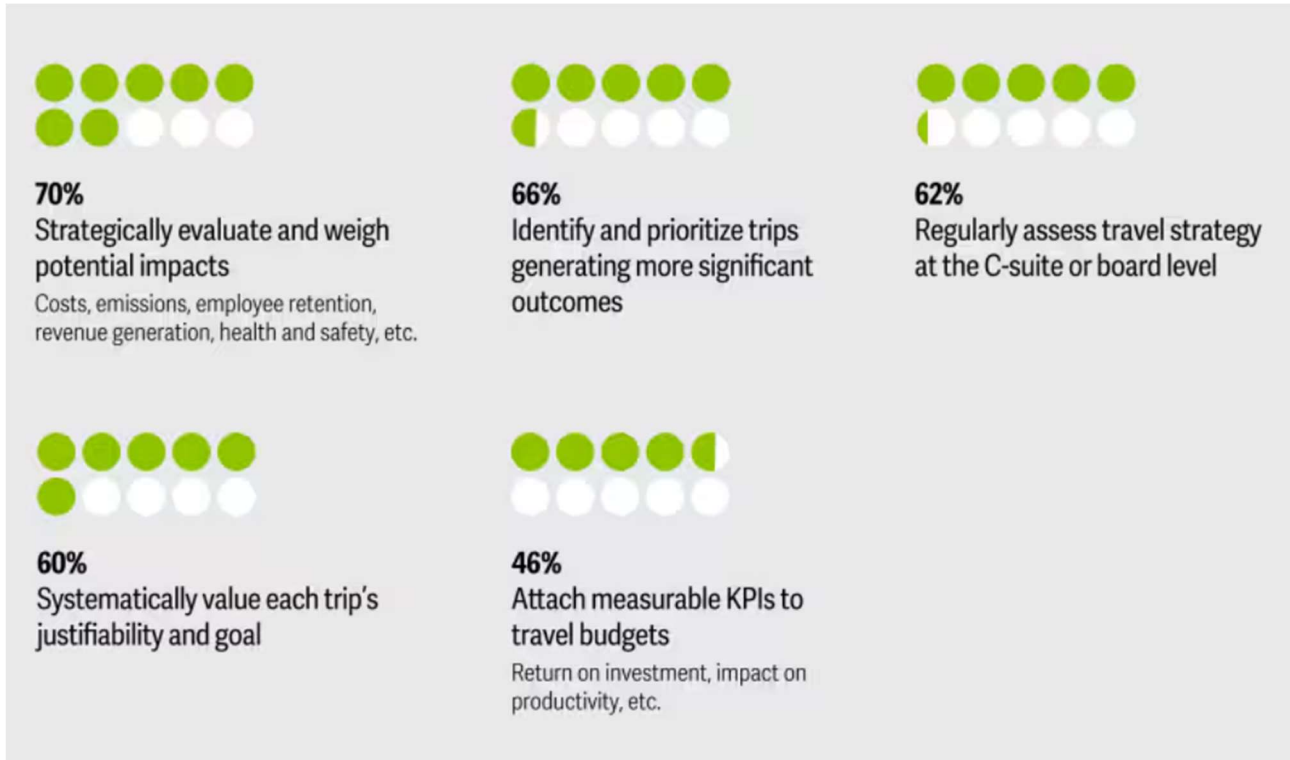
Figure 8. Travel's strategic positioning within respondent companies (adapted from Caputo et al. 2023)

Regarding sustainability, Deloitte's research (Caputo et al. 2023) considers that travel is a significant contributor to emissions, and companies are investing in initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint and demonstrate their green commitment. However, only one in seven US and one in five European companies expect sustainability drivers to reduce travel in 2023. Over 40% of these companies are working to optimize their corporate travel policy to decrease their environmental impact. Four in 10 European companies and a third in the US need to reduce travel per employee by more than 20% by 2030 to meet sustainability targets. Many companies are building this into their policies, with 43% of respondents implementing a structure to assign carbon-emission budgets to teams alongside financial budgets. However, consistent emissions tracking and mandating such budgets present challenges. These findings are presented in Figure 9.
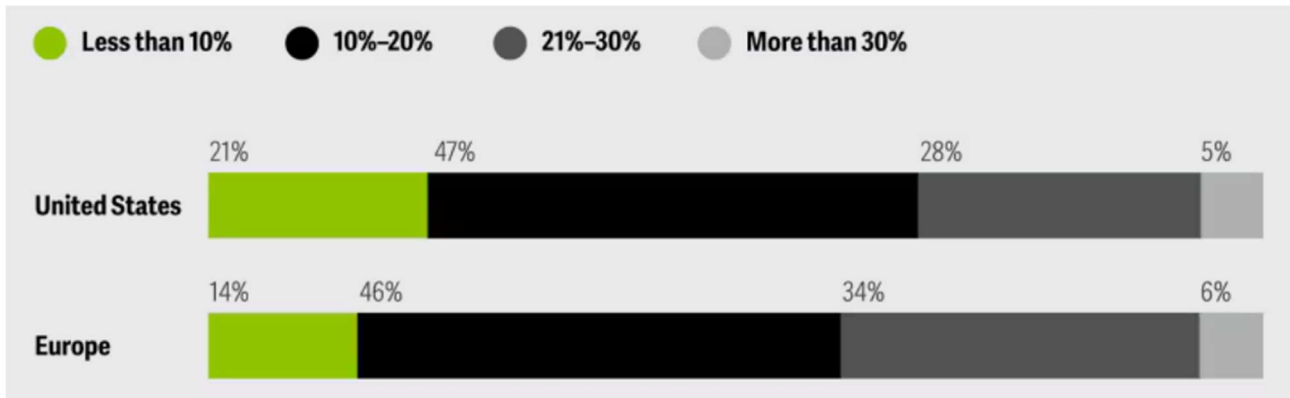
Figure 9. Reduction in per employee travel spend needed to meet 2030 sustainability targets (adapted from Caputo et al. 2023)

3.3.2 Videoconferencing and business travel reduction

Wang et al.'s study (2024, 5) collected data from firms that have a considerable number of business travel and targeted decision-makers who authorize business travel. The data has been collected through an online survey in April 2022 which gathered 856 observations, 454 from Hong Kong and 402 from the United States. These numbers are presented in Figure 10.

		HK ($n1 = 454$)	US ($n2 = 402$)	Total ($N = 856$)
Gender	Female	58.2	61.0	55.8
	Male	41.8	39.0	44.2
Age group	20–29	14.6	10.2	18.6
	30–39	38.6	39.5	37.9
	40–49	26.6	23.9	29.1
	50–59	14.4	16.1	12.9
	Above 60	5.7	10.2	1.5
Average annual business trips before the	0–2	59.1	59.7	58.6
COVID-19 pandemic	3–6	26.0	26.9	25.2
	7–10	8.9	8.0	9.7
	>10	5.9	5.4	6.4
Industries	Financial services	14.4	11.8	16.8
	Manufacturing	12.9	11.3	14.3
	Retailing	12.6	13.0	12.2
	Trading	8.7	1.8	14.8
	Other	51.4	62.1	41.9

Figure 10. Respondents' profile (adapted from Wang et al. 2024)

Regarding the correlation between videoconferencing continuance and business trip reduction, Wang et al. (2024, 6) worked with the following hypothesis:

Figure 11. Videoconferencing and business travel reduction model (adapted from Wang et al. 2024, 6)

Figure 12 summarizes Wang et al.'s study (2024, 7) variables for analysis and Figure 13 shows the equation 1 which provides evidence for videoconferencing continuance and equation 2 which illustrates the factors that influence business trip reductions intentions of decision-makers.

Category	Variable	Item code	Description
Dependent variables	Videoconferencing continuance	VCC	The continuous behavior of using videoconferencing (VC) technology after adoption.
	Business trip reduction	BTR	The intention to reduce business trips.
Independent variables			
Technological variables	Perceived usefulness	T_PU	The perception of using VC to enhance job performance.
	Satisfaction	T_S	The degree to which the use of VC is consistent with perceived usefulness.
	Confirmation	T_C	To confirm the expectation of VC use.
	Relative advantage	T_RA	The degree to which the use of VC is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes.
Organizational variables	Firm size	O_FS	A firm's internal assets, market capitalization, and number of employees.
	Global scope	O_GS	A firm's external activities and strategies.
	Top management	O_TM	The support for VC usage from the decision-makers of a firm.
	Openness and experimentation capability	O_OEC	A paradigm for accepting changes and pursuing innovative activities for organizational value creation.
Environmental variables	Competition intensity	E_CI	The degree to which the company is affected by competitors in the market.
	Network size	E_NS	The percentage of using VC for work communication with business partners.
	Environmental sustainability orientation	E_ESO	The choice of the decision-maker to be environmentally friendly.

Figure 12. Variables for analysis of videoconferencing and business trip reduction (adapted from Wang et al. 2024, 7)

	SUR Model parameter estimates Dependent variables						FIML Model parameter estimates Dependent variables					
	Videoconferencing continuance Equation 1			Business trip reduction Equation 2			Videoconferencing continuance Equation A			Business trip reduction Equation B		
Independent variables	Parameter	Standard error	P-value	Parameter	Standard error	P-value	Parameter	Standard error	P-value	Parameter	Standard error	P-value
Technological variables												
T_PU	0.1087	0.0457	0.0175	0.0467	0.0595	0.4329	0.1087	0.0514	0.0343	0.0467	0.0656	0.4765
T_S	0.0404	0.0344	0.2402	−0.1580	0.0447	0.0004	0.0404	0.0405	0.3180	−0.1580	0.0475	0.0009
T_C	0.2266	0.0489	0.0000	0.0377	0.0642	0.5572	0.2266	0.0626	0.0003	0.0377	0.1112	0.7347
T_RA	0.4455	0.0414	0.0000	0.2615	0.0573	0.0000	0.4455	0.0503	0.0000	0.2615	0.1533	0.0879
Organizational variables												
O_FS	0.0017	0.0237	0.9433	−0.0378	0.0308	0.2192	0.0017	0.0254	0.9479	−0.0378	0.0315	0.2291
O_GS	−0.0246	0.0448	0.5826	0.1167	0.0581	0.0448	−0.0246	0.0479	0.6071	0.1167	0.0613	0.0567
O_TM	0.1801	0.0455	0.0001	0.1970	0.0595	0.0010	0.1801	0.0692	0.0092	0.1970	0.0995	0.0478
O_OEC	−0.0315	0.0491	0.5215	−0.1108	0.0637	0.0820	−0.0315	0.0653	0.6302	−0.1108	0.0811	0.1718
Environmental variables												
E_CI	0.0841	0.0313	0.0073	0.1790	0.0408	0.0000	0.0841	0.0347	0.0155	0.1790	0.0586	0.0022
E_NS	0.0449	0.0476	0.3457	0.0802	0.0617	0.1942	0.0449	0.0496	0.3653	0.0802	0.0640	0.2104
E_ESO	−0.0227	0.0344	0.5089	0.2410	0.0446	0.0000	−0.0227	0.0334	0.4966	0.2410	0.0576	0.0000
Gender	−0.0352	0.0595	0.5548	0.0531	0.0773	0.4911	−0.0352	0.0586	0.5483	0.0531	0.0771	0.4911
Age	0.0547	0.0279	0.0502	−0.0422	0.0363	0.2453	0.0547	0.0293	0.0616	−0.0422	0.0388	0.2766
Education level	0.0191	0.0255	0.4556	0.0153	0.0331	0.6448	0.0191	0.0260	0.4634	0.0153	0.0316	0.6292
Annual household income	0.0011	0.0241	0.9631	0.0292	0.0313	0.3504	0.0011	0.0244	0.9636	0.0292	0.0302	0.3336
Country	−0.0834	0.0678	0.2189	0.1073	0.0881	0.2233	−0.0834	0.0697	0.2314	0.1073	0.1011	0.2887
Overall model's goodness of fit												
R-squared	0.6267			0.4013			0.6267			0.4013		
Adj. R-squared	0.6187			0.3877			0.6187			0.3877		
Observations	856			856			856			856		

Figure 13. Results of videoconferencing continuance equation 1 and business trip reduction equation 2 (adapted from Wang et al. 2024, 8)

Wang et al.'s (2024) study utilized the Theory of Expectation (TOE) framework to examine the videoconferencing continuance (VCC) and business trip reduction (BTR) intentions of decision-makers. The results showed that the factors influencing VCC and BTR intentions are multi-dimensional. The analysis of the results from this study are presented and discussed in the following subtopic.

3.4   Data analysis

Deloitte's study (Caputo et al. 2023) on corporate travel's key finding is that corporate travel is expected to rebound in the US and Europe, with spending surpassing half of 2019 levels in the first half of 2023 and two-thirds by the end of the year. However, adjusting for lost growth and inflation, corporate travel is likely to be smaller than before the pandemic. International trips are expected to grow, with US respondents expecting international travel costs to jump from 21% in 2022 to 33% in 2023. Live-event attendance is expected to be a significant growth driver, with over half of travel managers in both countries expecting industry events to drive travel growth. Supplier contracts frozen during the pandemic are now being renegotiated, with some suppliers pushing for higher rates. Climate concerns may limit corporate travel gains in the future.

From the data collected, Deloitte's study (Caputo et al. 2023) concludes that the "new normal" for corporate travel in 2023 and 2024 may bring upward trends, but with caveats due to variants, health concerns, and economic instability, it is expected to return to single-digit gains. Changes in work processes and sustainability commitments may limit travel growth, but there is an opportunity for greener travel. The balance between cost, value, and strategic positioning of travel is shifting, creating opportunities for smarter partnerships and collaborations between travel suppliers and intermediaries. These developments could unlock travel's competitive advantages while minimizing its downsides, making it a challenging but potentially rewarding industry.

Wang et al.'s (2024, 9-10) study evidenced that technological factors play a significant role in technology adoption and post-adoption at both individual and organizational levels. Perceived usefulness and relative advantage are crucial for videoconferencing continuance (VCC) intentions. However, satisfaction has little effect on VCC, possibly because it was not essential to convince companies to continue using VC after the pandemic. Top management is the most significant facilitator of VCC, providing financial support and adapting to new communication modes post-pandemic. Firm size, global scope, openness, and experimental capability have less significant impacts on VCC than top management support. Competition intensity is negatively associated with VCC, as business travelers prefer face-to-face communication for deeper social networking or collaboration. Network size and environmental sustainability are not correlated with VCC, as corporations primarily use videoconferencing for practical reasons.

According to the data collected by Wang et al. (2024, 10-11), in the technological context, satisfaction and perceived relative advantage of virtual communication can significantly influence business travel reduction (BTR) intentions. However, the positive effect of relative advantage is weak for BTR in Equation B. Confirmation and perceived usefulness are non-significant factors in facilitating BTR. In the organizational context, support from top management has a positive and statistically

significant effect on decision-makers' BTR intentions. Global scope is positively associated with business travel in each equation. Firm size does not significantly influence BTR intention. In the environmental context, both environmental sustainability and competition intensity have statistically significant impacts on BTR. The findings suggest that modifying satisfaction to apply to the post-continuance stage can facilitate BTR behavioral intentions, reconstructing the impact factor of satisfaction. Companies often consider climate change in their travel policies, but network size doesn't significantly reduce business trips. Competition intensity negatively affects decision-makers' BTR intention, with more competitive environments reducing BTR intention. Virtual communication is difficult to replace face-to-face meetings in highly competitive markets. Control variables like gender, education, and income don't significantly affect VCC, suggesting weak personal preferences at the organizational level. Age and country attributes are non-significant, supporting the idea that virtual alternatives will not completely replace business travel.

In summary, the analysis of the data collected both by Deloitte (Caputo et al. 2023) and Wang et al. (2024) demonstrates that business travel is expected to grow but is likely to be smaller than before the pandemic due to videoconferencing continuance and sustainability commitments which directly impacts business travel reduction.

3.5   Limitations of the study

There are two major limitations in this study that should be addressed. Firstly, it was not possible to find specific data collected regarding business travel and well-being after the pandemic due to the lack of prior research studies on this topic. The research on business travel and well-being which mostly composed the literature review section of this thesis was published before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, the empirical data on this topic is still very recent and limited.

Furthermore, the second major limitation regarding the data collected on previous studies on business travel and presented in this chapter is based on surveys performed in 2022 and 2023, thus they present projections and expectations for 2024 onwards. Such projections and expectations may not be fulfilled by the time this thesis is published. The data collected from previous studies on business travel and videoconferencing continuance is limited, nonetheless, it empirically supports the main purpose of this project which is to evidence that business travel – despite its reduction and limitations after the pandemic – cannot be entirely replaced by videoconferencing.

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4 Content analysis

This chapter connects the data collected and analyzed in previous studies of post-pandemic business travel presented in Chapter 3 – Research Methodology to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. This correlation is firstly contextualized in the face of the "new normal" after the pandemic and then divided into three subsections. The first subsection describes the well-being associated with business travel versus using virtual tools for meetings such as videoconferencing. The second subsection presents the factors that positively influence business travel after the COVID-19 pandemic. The third and final subsection focuses on the caveats of business travel in the post-pandemic world.

4.1 The "new normal" for business travel

According to the Global Business Travel Association (Global Business Travel Association 2023), business travel encompasses various activities for various business objectives, such as sales, training, customer support, incentives, professional development, team building, conferences, and operations. It can be viewed differently by various organizations, including travel suppliers as a revenue source, corporate management as a critical investment, travel managers as a resource optimization challenge, policymakers as a job generator, and travelers as a perk or logistical labor.

Despite Bill Gates's prediction in the first year of the pandemic that more than 50% of business travel will disappear in the post-pandemic world (CNBC Television 17 November 2020, min. 1-3), even though the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the global business travel industry, according to the GTBA the business travel growth level and rate is influenced by the following characteristics (Global Business Travel Association 2023):

- Size of the economy: the degree of overall economic activity is crucial;
- Land mass, population, and business dispersion: nations with extensive territory and widely separated populations need more travel as a tool for business and economic growth;
- Industry mix: the proportion of business travel to employment, production, or population will be higher in nations whose economies are dominated by industries that require a lot of travel;
- Technology and business travel productivity: almost every industry uses business travel as a material or service input. It is susceptible to increases and decreases in productivity like other inputs;

- Degree of export domination: nations with significant trade sectors – such as Brazil, Germany, Japan, and Indonesia – tend to send more business people abroad. Domestic business travel is more common in nations like the United States and India where consumption dominates economic activity;
- Physical location: in order to prosper, countries that are remote from their suppliers or markets will need to send more business travelers to those places more frequently;

Considering these characteristics, the GBTA (Global Business Travel Association 2023) does not consider the COVID-19 pandemic as the primary factor influencing business travel behavior, a change that has occurred after 2020. Even while the recovery is still ongoing, factors such as changes in workplace norms, environmental initiatives, and macroeconomic conditions, are having a greater overall impact on business travel trends than the pandemic. In fact, the GBTA anticipates that, by the end of 2027, business travel worldwide will increase to around $1.8 trillion from its pre-pandemic total of $1.4 trillion in 2024 which is two years earlier than the projected recovery reported by the same association in 2022. These estimates and forecasts are presented in Figure 14.
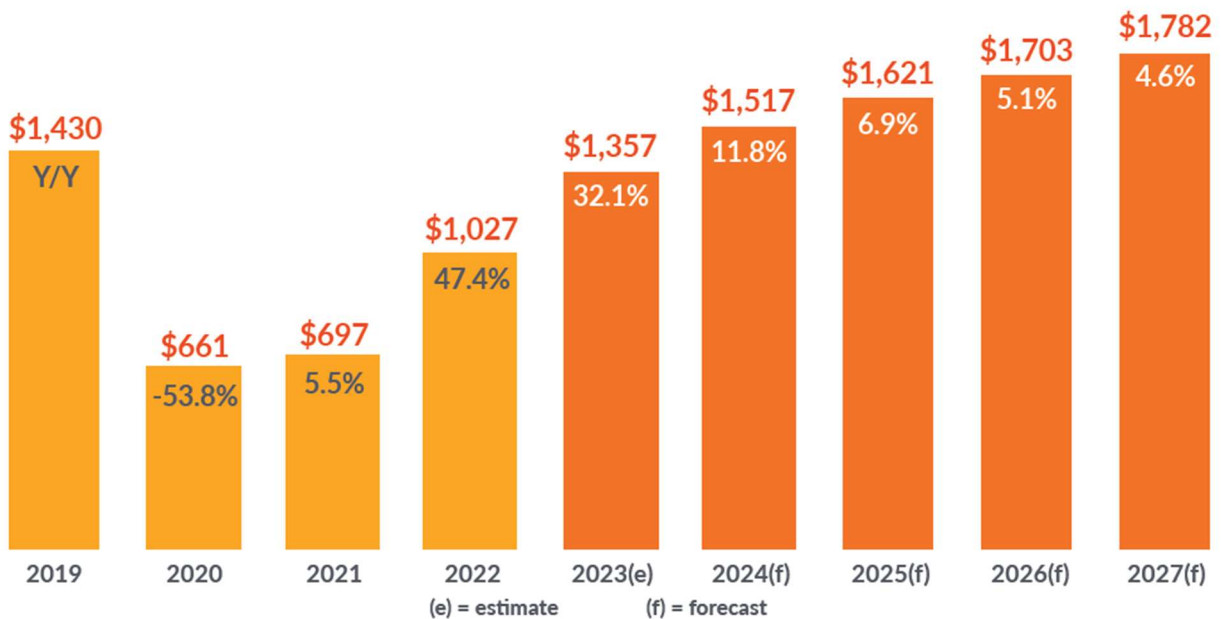
Figure 14. Global business travel spend, billions US $ (adapted from Global Business Travel Association 2023)

GBTA's figures are aligned with what Deloitte (Caputo et al. 2023) considered as the "new normal" for business travel in 2023 and 2024's increasing trends and single-digit gains anticipated. Live events have a significant role in the demand for business travel as from 2022 to 2023 they jumped from being the fifth most common cause for American corporations to travel abroad to the top

sport. This trend also applies to domestic travel and business in Europe, which identified increased event attendance as the main reason for rising business travel spending. Event attendance is also the main driver of foreign travel for US corporations.

Despite the growth, Deloitte also considers that the "new normal" is affected by likely limitations because of variations, medical emergencies, and unstable economic conditions (Caputo et al. 2023). Although there is potential for greener travel, changes in business practices and sustainability pledges may limit the expansion of travel. The travel industry's balance between price, value, and strategic placement continues to change and these advancements have the potential to maximize travel's benefits. These positive factors as well as the caveats of business travel in the post-pandemic will be discussed in the following subtopics taking into consideration travelers' well-being and videoconferencing usage.

4.1.1 Business travel well-being and videoconferencing well-being

Prior studies and literature on business travel have primarily concentrated on stress models and empirical investigations that delineated the adverse aspects of business travel by providing evidence of health issues experienced by business travelers based on various medical indicators (Ye & Xu 2020, 3). Few studies have objectively examined the good effects of international business travel, even though many have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of doing so.

Regarding well-being, physical, psychological, social, and self-development aspects are affected by business travel. Despite the health issues, mental stress, and relationship maintenance challenges, there are also positive outcomes related to business travel and well-being such as a sense of freedom and pleasure and network expansion in multiple locations. In fact, previous research in business travel and well-being discovered that, in terms of network formation, business travelers' extensive network is a valuable job resource because brief encounters at widely separated sites enable them to expand their network, stay in touch with friends and clients around the globe, which can help them forge relationships outside of the workplace (Ye & Xu 2020). A lot can be informally achieved on coffee breaks, lunch, and dinners when stakeholders can interact in person and add a face to a virtual contact. Such serendipitous encounters and bond-strengthening interactions positively contribute to the well-being of business travelers and are not possible through remote work, videoconferencing, and virtual meetings.

Previous literature on remote work, videoconferencing, and virtual meetings (Lang, Dony & Roberts 2022) highlights the challenges faced by virtual teams in terms of well-being. These include cognitive demands due to videoconferencing, social isolation due to lack of in-person interaction, physical workspace challenges due to internet bandwidth demands, and lack of personal space.

These challenges can lead to "Zoom fatigue" and weaker interpersonal relationships, particularly among workers in highly interdependent teams. Employees in virtual teams cannot rely on casual socializing to maintain positive relationships, which has a direct impact on their work engagement (Goel et al. 2023). The demands of virtual teamwork, include limited social connection, working across time zones, and cultural communication.

Wang et al.'s study (2023) demonstrated that companies continue virtual communication (VC) after the pandemic mainly for financial and convenience reasons such as satisfaction with technology, which is linked to business travel reduction intentions and is supported by top management. Even though this study evidenced the linkage between videoconferencing continuance and business travel reduction intentions after the pandemic, this study also concluded the following statements through the data collected:

- Business travelers still prefer in-person communication for deeper social networking and collaboration;
- Business travel has a favorable correlation with global scope;
- In fiercely competitive markets, face-to-face meetings are hard to replace with virtual communication;
- Videoconferencing continuance will not entirely replace business travel.

Considering the concept of well-being as the link between health, happiness, and quality of life in the physical, mental, and social domains (Ye & Xu 2020), business travel and well-being are the main connectors and reasons why business travel cannot be entirely replaced by virtual communication tools in the post-pandemic world, therefore, is the social aspect and richness of the interactions that only in-person meetings can provide. Despite the main focus of previous pre-pandemic literature on the negative outcomes of business travel on business travelers' well-being, post-pandemic research evidences that face-to-face meetings and their consequent networking are a key element for business travelers' well-being that cannot achieve the same results through videoconferencing and other virtual communication tools.

4.1.2 Positive factors influencing business travel after the pandemic

The unexpected stability of the world economy has been a major driver of the resurgence in business travel. It was predicted that many developed economies would contract considerably, if not enter a recession, in 2023, although, according to the GBTA (Global Business Travel Association 2023), this has not happened. Policymakers faced difficulties worldwide as due to the pandemic during the past two years. In 2020, unprecedented fiscal and monetary stimulus was required to prevent a collapse of the world economy. This boost caused inflation to surge and remain high, which was further compounded by other factors like problems with the supply chain and labor

shortages. Central bankers changed their strategies and accelerated the tightening of monetary policy in an attempt to combat this inflation.

Numerous market analysts expressed concern that the swift increase in interest rates might push numerous significant economies into a recession. Although the tightening cycle has caused economic growth to stall, according to the GBTA (Global Business Travel Association 2023) a significant decline in the world's economies has not yet been observed. Indeed, several developed economies, such as the US and the EU, are seeing record employment levels at the moment, and corporate earnings are continuing to rise even after reaching all-time highs in 2022.

According to the GBTA (Global Business Travel Association 2023), the majority of economic factors influencing business travel point to further progress in the drawn-out recuperation from the pandemic's lowest points. Real GDP indicates that the overall economy is still stabilizing and expanding from the 2021 upsurge. In 2021 and 2022, the global GDP increased by 6.1% and 3.3%, respectively. Nevertheless, despite obstacles from supply chains, tighter fiscal policies from central banks, and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the majority were able to sustain positive growth rates.

Another positive factor influencing business travel after the pandemic, according to Deloitte (Caputo et al. 2023) is travel's strategic positioning. The pandemic years saved companies millions in travel spend, however, executives see the value of travel which goes beyond expenditures and its benefits, especially those attained during conferences, live events, client project work, sales meetings, and internal events.

4.1.3 Caveats of business travel after the pandemic

One caveat mentioned in Deloitte's most recent corporate travel report (Caputo et al. 2023) is the potential to use technology to reduce the number of visits required. Team meetings and internal trainings are thought to be the most replaceable. Even after the pandemic, some businesses are utilizing technology to allow employees to work from home, and these workers appear to prefer the hybrid work style over working from the office every day. Employees are traveling to more places that are within driving distance of their home, and those who have relocated are making more visits to the corporate headquarters as a result of the growing preference for working from home. The largest effects of flexible work schedules on the amount of travel are indirect because some business requirements that travel fulfills can be supported by virtual conferencing.

Another caveat considered by Deloitte is the challenging cost environment companies are facing (Caputo et al. 2023). Increasing ticket and hotel rates are the main causes of cost growth and the main thing preventing people from taking as many trips. Costs rose in 2023 as a result of rising employee expectations for luxurious services, flexible or last-minute booking policies, and the

search for sustainable suppliers. Due to the pandemic, several businesses have been renegotiating contracts after two or more years. According to three out of ten respondents, suppliers would freeze their negotiated rates in 2020 and 2021 because of increased volume in 2019. Negotiations may be impacted by the prospect of extended reductions in business travel, with certain suppliers facing large pricing rises. Higher rates likely have a dampening effect on the number of trips taken, but less so than last year.

Lastly, Deloitte considered sustainability as a caveat for business travel growth after the pandemic because travel is a significant contributor to emissions, and companies are investing in initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint and demonstrate their green commitment (Caputo et al. 2023). Attracting and keeping corporate clientele is another goal shared by a lot of hotels and airlines. In order to satisfy sustainability standards, a third of US corporations and four out of ten European companies must reduce staff travel by more than 20% by 2030. With 43% of respondents putting in place a framework to allocate carbon-emission budgets to teams alongside cash budgets, many are incorporating this into their policies. The majority of adoption is focused on electrified car rentals, airline seat upgrades, and carbon emissions per trip route, with relatively little mandated use. Travel providers and intermediaries must maintain regular communication with corporate purchasers regarding their advancements in monitoring travel-related emissions and furnishing travelers with relevant information to enable them to select the most sustainable option.

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5 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the thesis work's contribution, firstly by answering the research questions and secondly by addressing the research objectives to the content analyzed in previous chapters. This chapter concludes with a self-evaluation and reflection of the researcher's own learning, then followed by the inputs for possible future research on business travel and well-being.

5.1 Research questions

This thesis work aimed to answer two research questions:

- *How has business travel been impacted by the post-pandemic hybrid work environment?*
- *How does business travel positively impact the motivation and well-being of employees in international organizations?*

As an answer to the first question, the findings of this study demonstrated that business travel has been impacted by the post-pandemic hybrid work environment in two different ways. Firstly, due to flexible work schedules and a preference for hybrid work styles, businesses still allow employees to work from home even after the pandemic. The same technology tools that enable remote work can also replace business travel, as virtual conferencing can support some business requirements such as team meetings and internal trainings. In that sense, videoconferencing continuance is connected to business travel reduction in the post-pandemic hybrid work environment for convenience and cost reduction reasons. The second way business travel is impacted by the post-pandemic hybrid work environment, nonetheless, is the realization that deeper social networking and collaboration can only be achieved by in-person communication and face-to-face encounters. Such interactions are enabled by the serendipitous dynamics and opportunity offered by the social side of live events and conferences, as these were the biggest drivers of business travel recovery and growth after the pandemic.

The second research question seeks answers on the positive impact of business travel regarding the motivation and well-being of employees in international organizations. This impact, as presented by this thesis work, can be answered through three different aspects: social, psychological, and a sense of freedom and pleasure. Despite the fact business travel literature has mainly focused on the negative outcomes regarding business travel aspects and well-being, the positive aspects of business travelers and well-being have been highlighted by this work thesis. The first aspect – social – is related to the possibility of socializing and extending one's network in various locations because business trips offer unique opportunities to interact and strengthen bonds with peers that could exchange experiences, and knowledge and assist in future opportunities. The second aspect – psychological – is related to the emotional fulfillment brought along by business trips

due to the self-development and growth originating from the exposure to different cultures and insights. The last aspect is connected to the sense of freedom and pleasure derived from the break from routine, leisure, time off, and a sense of independence when having time away from the office and a regular work schedule.

This thesis's main goal is to show that, in the post-pandemic world, business travel remains a crucial and strategic component for international organizations to achieve their goals, as well as a critical component for stakeholder well-being and performance. This has been evidenced by demonstrating the benefits of business travel for international organizations, the correlation between well-being, social interactions, and business travel, and the overall importance of business travel for international organizations.

Furthermore, this thesis work also revealed the drawbacks of using videoconferencing and virtual communication tools and well-being such as professional and social isolation, weaker interpersonal relationships, and cognitive demands due to the fatigue caused by excessive virtual interactions and online availability. When videoconferencing and virtual meetings are considered a replacement for business travel, the negative outcomes of such tools should also be taken into consideration.

5.2 Self-evaluation and reflection of the researcher's own learning

The experience of writing my thesis has been gratifying despite its challenges. My own professional experience regarding business travel and well-being inspired the crafting of this work, even though I had no academic knowledge related to the thesis topic, I travel for work regularly.

In addition to my professional obligations, juggling the thesis research with my own business trips has been quite challenging. Thus, my research and writing pace has not been the fastest, nonetheless I would say that reading previous research on the topic and linking these findings to my own experiences when traveling for work has been endearing and explained aspects of these experiences that I have not realized by myself before working on this thesis project.

I learned a lot about the overall benefits and challenges of business travel, as well as its place within the context of hybrid work environments and the usage of virtual communication tools after the pandemic. I currently see well-being and business travel from a wider perspective and am aware of how these impact my own future business travel experiences. All things considered, this thesis experience helped me advance professionally and personally in several ways.

5.3   Future research

This research highlighted the lack of specific and recent data regarding business travel and well-being after the pandemic. Moreover, the research on this topic has been published mostly before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus future research's primary goal should be to perform empirical studies through surveys and interviews that consider business travel and well-being after the pandemic. Future research could also investigate the sustainability aspect of business travel policies in organizations, as this seems to be a current trend that is becoming even more relevant in the years to come. As business travel numbers continue to grow and recover to near pre-pandemic numbers, such research could contribute to understanding the impact of business travel on well-being within the context of hybrid work and sustainability goals that most organizations will likely be compliant with.

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