

THE ROLE OF EXECUTIVE BUSINESS TRAVEL  
IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

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## ABSTRACT

Business travel is ubiquitous and business travelers move by various modes of transportation across geographies, time zones and cultures. This research sought to understand why business travelers, specifically executive leadership, continue to travel for business in the digital age. A qualitative, inductive, flexible pattern-mapping approach (Bouncken et al., 2021) was utilized in seeking to understand patterns and relationships matching the underlying precept of coding and thematic analysis to understand travel for the purpose of conducting business. Additionally, the aim of this research is to contribute to a gap in the literature regarding thought process(es) that take place when senior executives consider a decision to travel for the purpose of conducting business. Social capital theory and its subset, relational capital, was used as references to further develop the interview guide with questions regarding the purpose of senior executive travel.

Specifically, senior executives are defined here as those executives who fill the role of Director, Managing Partner, Vice President (V.P.), Geography General Manager (G.M.), United States government official, or higher, in their respective organizations. The interview guide was used to conduct semi-structured interviews of executives, who hold primary roles within their various organizations. Results from the study indicate four areas these senior executives describe as their main purpose for business travel. These areas are as follows; relationship maintenance, analysis, relationship building, and building social capital – that which facilitates cooperation and coordination such as networking, cognitive understanding, and trust.

## **DEDICATION**

To my children; Jonathan, Michael, Jacob, Madison, and Maycen. You are the light of my life. My wish has always been to provide the opportunity to develop your thoughts and encourage a sense of adventure, curiosity, interest in life-long learning, and excitement about discovery. All those things along with the desire to make the world a better place through the individual gifts each of you have. My hope is that I have provided you a fraction of the joy, sense of pride, and inspiration you have provided me. You've made me better. Thank you.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Business travel is an instrumental activity through which people engage in order to further their own goals or those of the organization they represent. Business travelers rely on various modes of transportation across geographies, time zones, and cultures. This research sought to understand why business travelers, specifically executive leadership, continue to travel for business in the digital age using a qualitative, inductive approach seeking to understand patterns and relationships matching the underlying precept of coding and thematic analysis to understand travel for the purpose of conducting business. This research aimed to contribute to a gap in the literature regarding thought processes that take place when senior executives consider travel for the purpose of conducting business. Social capital theory and its subset, relational capital, was used as a reference to further develop the interview guide regarding the purpose of senior executive travel.

Specifically, senior executives are defined here as those executives who fill the role of Vice President (V.P.), Geography General Manager (G.M.), United States government official, or higher, in their respective organizations. The interview guide was used to conduct semi-structured interviews of executives, representing a variety of organizations, who hold various primary roles within their organization. Results from study one indicate four areas these senior executives describe as their main purpose for business travel. These areas are as follows: relationship maintenance, traveling for the purpose of analysis, relationship building, and the building of social capital (networking)

were further explored in study two. Referencing these four areas and with so many options to facilitate communication, why should senior executives travel for the purpose of conducting business? Connections can be made virtually whether the traveler intends to connect across town, across the country, or across the globe. However, these connections cannot replace business travel as they are void of the nuanced personal interaction associated with face-to-face communication.

Understanding the purpose of business travel lies in recognizing its value and utility. This research focuses on business travel and its applicability in an increasingly connected world. Business executives can connect virtually with customers, clients, suppliers, employees, and even competitors through computer mediated communication tools such as Google Meet, Zoom and Webex. They also have various methods by which they can travel, such as cars, buses, rail, and aircraft.

Aircraft, in particular, can efficiently and effectively transport travelers a great distance in a relatively short amount of time. Business aircraft particularly, afford passengers great flexibility, agility, and security. They provide intellectual property protection as well as personal security and sanctuary (Alverson, 1972). Company owned and operated business aircraft provide the added benefit of not being tied to a regulated schedule. They also do not require the elaborate infrastructure of an airline (Tae, et al., 2020). They eliminate prying eyes and threats from a stranger (or competitor), and they also offer personal space - a “third place” to do work or rest – out of the office and outside the home. This is of great importance to senior executives who make strategic investment decisions, regarding both their business and the tools, such as corporate aircraft, employed to facilitate their business. However, corporate aircraft are expensive.

Airline or rail travel, while less convenient, less secure, and with little in the way of customer service by comparison, is also less expensive than wholly owned aircraft, shares of an aircraft or charter aircraft. Ground-based vehicles such as automobiles, buses, and trains are impractical alternatives for the obvious reasons of speed, convenience, and efficiency but might also be less impactful on the environment.

In the search for solutions to connect with potential partners, associates or colleagues, business executives may consider alternative means such as connecting virtually. Virtual connectivity is an option becoming more and more readily available and more and more accessible to executives who in the past were limited to landline phones or desktop computers without remote access. Devices and applications to connect such as mobile phones and laptop computers have also become much more prevalent, intuitive, and user-friendly breaking down a barrier to inaccessibility, improving user experience, and therefore, naturally encouraging their use. Moreover, the cost of using these tools can be low and the need to understand the complexity of the operating system driving that tool is also low. As a result of these technological improvements, transitioning from business travel for the purpose of meeting face-to-face to meeting virtually using computer mediated communication (CMC) can save time and money. However, CMC can also introduce disadvantages such as gaps or mistakes in communication and the associated challenges with building trust thereby inhibiting relationship growth.

For the purpose of this research, computer mediated communication is defined as systems which use computers to structure and process information and use communications networks to facilitate its exchange (Rice, 1987). Computer mediated communication is further defined here as communication through means other than

face-to-face in-person contact such as mobile phone, videoconferencing or internet web-based mediums.

Computer mediated communication and the associated virtual connectivity (VC – a term used interchangeably with CMC), is an attractive means of long-distance communication for some of the same reasons as business travel such as interacting with others but with, potentially, added benefits. VC can be efficient, easy to schedule and even an airplane is not as fast as digital communication (and certainly far less costly). However, it has shortcomings. It does not provide an opportunity to connect in the same way as face-to-face. Serban et al. (2015, p. 403) highlight four major variables that render “a significant contribution” in both types of communication; “cognitive ability, personality, self-efficacy, and comfort with technology.” These areas are further highlighted by challenges with connectivity, focus, engagement, and accurate recognition of social cues resulting in the failure to collaborate (Bathelt, 2011). Those shortcomings undermine a basic tenet of business relationships - trust.

Computer Mediated Communication has been researched and discussed at an accelerating rate since the advent of electronic mail (e-mail) and access to the internet became widely available in the 1980s. A survey conducted in 1985 reported that 71 percent of Fortune 1000 companies planned to have computer mediated communication systems by 1986 (Rice, 1987), the very next year after its introduction! Virtual communication tools subsequently became the mainstay of regular corporate communication in the 1990s and were forecast to decrease business travel by 40 – 60 percent (Rice, 1987). Despite corporate investment in information technology, business travel has continued to grow. For example, between 1982 and 2007 the annual growth

rate of business travel by passenger into and out of the United Kingdom was roughly 5% (Beaverstock, et al., 2009). In the United States, domestic and international business travel observed a combined revenue increase of over 42% in 2008 compared to the previous five-year period from 2002–2007 (Beaverstock, et al., 2009), which ran counter to earlier predictions that there would be a significant decrease.

This research aimed to explore the role of business travel in building relationships, trust, and social capital comprising the sum of both actual and potential resources embedded in a network (Zimmer & Henry, 2015). Specifically, this research referenced social capital and social exchange theories to evaluate the senior executive perspective on business relationships established and maintained through business travel in the age of virtual communication. Without understanding the role of business travel in developing relationships, we cannot fully appreciate where it may add value and where it may detract from value. It is a matter of gaining information on the message - what a communicator is trying to say, the medium – face-to-face vs CMC, and the means available – equipment, facilities, as well as the will to communicate through either or both CMC and/or face-to-face.

For the laborer who travels for the purpose of performing manual labor, CMC is not a substitute. However, for those who travel to establish or maintain relationships, CMC could substitute, complement, or be an unacceptable replacement for that travel. According to Beaverstock et al. (2009, p. 193), “... an expansive body of work on mobility, transnational corporations, face-to-face contact as well as other issues directly relevant to business travel provides an important way of analyzing business travel.”

Despite the array of literature Beaverstock refers to, there is little with respect to the senior executive role, specifically.

For senior executives who travel for business, the interaction with a room full of people is fundamentally different from a virtual room on CMC. Face-to-face interaction, and the associated opportunities to create networks as well as analyze the performance of people, processes, facilities, and equipment are an inherent part of business.

Correspondents do not always have the opportunity to fully assess co-communicators through virtual communication as the use of various senses are largely unavailable virtually and certainly when someone's camera is off, for example. While connecting virtually has become more and more prevalent, computer mediated communication has not yet fully replicated the authentic experience associated with face-to-face communication (Denstadli, 2012). Whereas we used to have someone's full attention, we are limited when other people are listening to something else or sending text messages while simultaneously attending a meeting. Subtle cues from facial expression, body language, and sound cannot be fully appreciated as picture quality (if used), consistently reliable connectivity, and focus on the task at hand are difficult, if not impossible, to integrate into the communication. A recent NY Times article, "Why Zoom is Terrible" (nytimes.com, 2020), highlighted some of these points as did Lini Kadaba in the Philadelphia Inquirer article, "Zoom fatigue is real. Why video meetings strain your brain and how to fix it" (inquirer.com, 2020).

The literature review outlines core work focused on social capital, relational capital, and computer mediated communication. It highlights the focus on specific areas that have been studied such as buyer-supplier relationships and how individuals or groups

communicate through computer mediated communication versus face-to-face communication. It also highlights the role of travel in the establishment of social networks and how business relationships are formed through the establishment of trust.

The objective of this research is to explore the reasons senior business executives choose to travel for the purpose of conducting business. Social capital theory and its subset, relational capital, are foundational to the idea that business travel is conducted primarily for the purpose of building networks (social capital) and leveraging the individual relationships (relational capital) to achieve goals such as establishing partnerships, building alliances, or reinforcing certain control or authority over people, processes, and/or facilities. The communication, done largely through face-to-face communication, is facilitated by business travel – a deliberate act in which senior executives engage as they seek to better understand people and their relationships. Despite the physiological effects from sleep deprivation, time zone and schedule changes, and disruption to eating and exercise habits, senior executives continue to commit to business travel in order to be face-to-face (DeFrank, et al., 2000). Face-to-face communication thereby contributes directly to the development of trust, a key component of social capital (Putnam, 2000), between business partners and their organizations.

The literature review reveals that business travel had been researched largely with consideration to building networks (Nahapiet & Ghosal, 1998), return on investment in business travel (Collins & Tisdell, 2004), managing traveler behavior against cost (Gustafson, 2012), and the potential to use computer mediated communication as a substitute for business travel in order to save money (Denstadli, et al., 2012). Additionally, previous research conducted in the controlled environment of a university

study, indicated that over time, there may be little or no difference in the development of trust relationship(s) between team members when using computer mediated communication (Wilson, et al., 2006). However, none of this research has studied senior business executive travel and their purpose for travel.

To fill this gap, this research utilized qualitative methods using an interpretive, flexible pattern mapping approach (Bouncken, et al., 2021) through an additional series of semi-structured interviews of senior executives (Pearse, 2019). Qualitative methods focus on words, processes, and meanings to understand a phenomenon, and qualitative research is interested in answering the why question (Gephart, 2004; Pearse, 2019). Interpretive research specifically examines the phenomena being studied in context with the goal of understanding through the subjects' perspective, language, and words. This interpretive research approach is best suited to examine why business executives travel because interpretive research is most appropriate when trying to understand a phenomenon through the meanings individuals assign to them (Myers, 2020).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Business travel is an activity conducted to achieve a variety of goals dependent upon the work the individual traveler does and/or the firm the traveler represents. The goal of a business traveler ranges from traveling from home to a specific location or job site to conduct manual labor, to senior executives touring facilities located away from their headquarters, meeting with supply chain partners, or negotiating with firms on another continent. Laborers, for example, may travel to perform specific tasks such as a pipeline maintenance technician dispatched for the purpose of conducting preventative maintenance on control mechanisms or oil rig workers transported to a rig in the Gulf of Mexico or North Sea. Senior executives' goals for travel differ from that of the laborer in that travel itineraries may include the projection of power by visiting an area of responsibility that is not co-located at their base of operation. The C-suite executive may seek to analyze an operation, offer a promotion, or take disciplinary action in person rather than remotely. They may also travel as a form of compensation or perhaps, even for pleasure.

The method used to perform this travel, like goals, also vary but they are generally aligned with the task to be performed. Isaac Stone Simonelli, in his 2019 article, "High Function, Low Impact Air Services," published in the transportation section of *Alaska Business Monthly*, highlighted the variety of services provided by aviation companies to businesses to facilitate the success of business travelers. They include surveying for the U.S. Geological Survey, support of mining operations, oil and

gas companies as well as transportation of Scientists for the Bureau of Land Management. Simonelli's (2019) descriptions include a pipeline technician who may fly aboard a commercial airliner to a central location, be transported aboard a company aircraft from that central location and complete the remaining part of the journey to the job site via suitable ground transportation. An oil rig worker is likely flown from a shore-based hub of operation to the rig via company or contracted helicopter. Business travelers such as sales representatives and company executives also travel by commercial air from their home base to a meeting place (or places). Senior leadership, along with their respective teams, may fly via charter or company owned business aircraft. The variety of goals, as well as the tools used to travel, is diverse. However, the fundamental purpose is goal oriented: to perform a specific task or achieve a defined goal such as fostering a relationship, closing a deal, or completing a mission.

What is of particular interest, and why this research matters, is what lies ahead after the global COVID-19 pandemic which has forced individuals away from business travel and increased work from home while under the direction of national government recommendations led by, in the case of the United States, individual states. More explicitly, the gap in research in-the-area of social science regarding social behavior and travel in an increasingly mobile and connected world, as outlined by Sheller and Urry (2006) in their new mobilities paradigm, offers opportunity to explore the connection between travel and communication.

The literature review (Table 1) included areas of previous research which focused on economics and the value of suitable alternatives to business travel such as computer mediated communication (Zimmer & Henry, 2015). Trust, a key component of social

capital (Putnam, 2000) and relational capital (Kale, et al., 2000), was also reviewed along with computer mediated communication as an alternative to business travel. Authors Picolli & Ives (2005) provide good reference associated with the economics of suitable alternatives to business travel having emphasized efficiencies gained when firms implement technological solutions which gain employees time and subsequently save employers money. These areas provide the foundation to this study's propositions surrounding senior executives' travel purposes.

### Economics

Prior research on business travel has focused largely on the favorable economic impact of computer mediated communication (CMC). Firms can save money by substituting computer mediated communication for travel (Zimmer & Henry, 2015). As demonstrated by the number of peer reviewed articles generated through several data bases to include Business Source Complete and Academic Source Complete, a search of scholarly (peer reviewed) journal articles published between 2004 and 2021 using the terms "computer mediated communication" and "economics" yielded 299 results. Picolli and Ives (2005) summarize much of this body of work, highlighting technology's role in creating economic value for a business by gaining efficiencies in other areas. In narrowing the focus of economics-based research associated with computer mediated communication, the researcher substituted the search term "economics" with "business travel" which caused a decrease in the yield to just 2 results. In his research, Haynes (2010) focuses on the complementary aspects of business travel and communication technology. Specifically, he notes that computer mediated communication is a suitable substitute for travel when the information exchange is simple. However, when more

complex and nuanced interaction is required in circumstances where collaboration on a project is necessary, business travel to meet face-to-face is required to support positive outcomes for both parties. Additionally, in their research focused on local and global networks, Chen et al. (2009) found that frequent business travel of entrepreneurs is positively correlated to core networks; the more frequently the executives traveled, the more ties to core networks existed.

In comparison to the plethora of economics-based research, little research has examined computer mediated communication and business travel. Alverson (1972) argued that business aviation could be an excellent tool for a company: “the airplane, like the computer, can completely revamp traditional ways of doing business” (Alverson, 1972, p. 87). However, he also cautioned against misguided use and cautioned that operating a corporate flight department is expensive. Although computers were also expensive business tools, Alverson took the position that companies that invest in useful innovations should expect the investment to pay for itself in the form of improved productivity which could lead to increased revenue and profit margins, or decreased costs. Unfortunately, this view fails to account for the intangible value of relationships that are afforded by business travel.

#### Social Capital Theory

Using the heuristic-systemic model (HSM) to assess cognitive processing, Cummings & Dennis (2018) find that first impressions can have lasting effects on individuals in that they form the basis for future interaction, team cohesiveness, decision making, and how team members understand others behavior. Hence, social capital forms

the structure, identification, and trust upon which relational capital is built (Cummings & Dennis, 2018).

Studying only economics as a purpose for business travel ignores what is often the core reason for executives to leave their home and offices - building relationships. Moran (2005, p. 1129) argues, "...social capital is a valuable asset and its value stems from the access to resources that it engenders through an actor's social relationships." This research intends to explore, through the lens of social capital theory, and relational capital, the connection between business travel, face-to-face communication, and CMC. Relational capital, as a subset of social capital, is the individual relationship and social capital is that which is built through networks into relationships. Relational capital is defined by Kale et al. (2000, p. 218) as, "mutual trust, respect and friendship that resides at the individual level between alliance partners and upon close interaction at the personal level between alliance partners." To reiterate the gap in research, a search of peer reviewed journals through business source complete using the words "corporate aviation" yields only 14 results. A similar search using the terms "business travel" and "social capital theory" yields only two results. This is of interest as "the view of organizational advantage is fundamentally a social one" (Nahapiet et al., 1998, p. 260). Of added interest is that while the proliferation of tools available to communicate virtually has grown significantly, business travel has become the second largest corporate cost (Sigala, 2007). If CMC has become both more widely available and easier to access via computer, phone and internet, and is additionally of better quality, then the expectation would be a significant increase in CMC utilization and corresponding decrease in business travel, the

associated cost of that travel, and potentially the value of social capital and relational capital developed through face-to-face communication.

With the prevalence of computer mediated communication increasing, more employees working from home, and fewer face-to-face meetings it is important to first examine how members of a team initially interact (Cummings & Dennis, 2018).

Cummings & Dennis (2018) start with reference to first impressions looking to understand how enterprise social networking sites (ESNS) facilitate the individual formation of impressions, social capital and subsequent team relationships.

### Relational Capital

Organizations are fundamentally social communities that facilitate or hinder the communication and transfer of knowledge both internally and externally (Zimmer & Henry, 2015). Prior research in the field of relational capital has largely examined the strategic alliances of firms at the organizational level, with a specific focus on how relationships vary from firm-to-firm, industry partner-to-industry partner and buyer-to-supplier. Gligor and Autry (2012) looked specifically at how personal relationships between individual employees affected communication between supply chain partners. Their work highlights that interaction between organizations is just as important as strategic alliances which are formed for the purpose of competitive advantage.

Firms may form alliances to leverage advances in technology, gain access to certain markets, recognize economies of scale, or seize opportunities to eliminate competitors. Due to sensitive elements of these alliances, mutual trust between partners is essential to their success and the trust formed is based on information sharing between individual actors who seek to ensure alliance partnerships are successful. Finally,

measurement of partnership success includes the protection of intellectual property and proprietary information, as well as reputation management, which is the responsibility of individuals (Kale et al., 2000).

There is scant research on social capital, and its subset relational capital, with regards to senior executives and relationships with other executives (Byun et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2009). Trust and future goodwill are essential ingredients for successful business relationships (Child, 2001). Much of the research in the field of relational capital, a component of social capital, and social exchange theory (Zimmer & Henry, 2015) has been conducted through the lens of transactional cost theory - the idea that relationships are developed and maintained on the basis of what risk (cost) is associated with the potential opportunism of a potential partner (Kale et al., 2000). Senior executives are defined here as those who shape the direction of the company by virtue of their position—Director, Managing Partner, Vice President, Geography General Manager, government equivalent, or higher—and associated ability to influence the direction of the firm. Given their influence, why do these leaders travel? Why bother to take the time, incur the expense, and endure the emotional and physical strain of business travel? Why not take advantage of technology to provide strategic direction remotely?

The aforementioned questions look to relational capital for answers. Relational capital, a subset of social capital, is the product of individual investments through prior interaction building mutual trust and goodwill, resulting in preferential access to resources through these connections (Byun, et al., 2018). Trust is established through these works not as a final product but as a facilitator, moderator or contributor to end results (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001).

Contrary to intuition, very close relationships may inhibit the exchange of knowledge, as parties limit information from sources outside the relationship consistent with Bourdieu (1983) and Coleman's (1990) research in social capital (Lin, 2001). This suggests that a better understanding of how the balance between investment in relationships and the impact of that investment is necessary given firms' interest in protecting their intellectual property, such as strategic plans and patents, from the opportunistic behavior of business partners (Kale, et al., 2000).

In understanding the purpose for business travel, it is also important to consider trust creation beyond business partners in buyer-supplier relationships for example, and recognize differences in how trust is built, or repaired once it has been violated, outside the traveler's industry, geographic area or host country. Notably, the host country environment specifically, has great influence on the establishment of trust and is reflected in how business partners interact and communicate with each other. Moreover, inter-firm trust is based on organizational structure and culture, which varies from firm-to-firm, and established across cultures and countries through the display of fairness and transparency (Zaheer & Kamal, 2010).

### Trust

The study of relationships, as a construct, is a gap in the area of business travel research identified not only by initial research but, the researchers practical experience as well. Relationships, the ability to observe others' body language and movement as well as proximity are thought to be essential ingredients to establishing trust (Wilson et al., 2005). Business travel for the purpose of meeting is an activity which facilitates the

ability to interact personally, providing for the observation of subtle cues associated with communication in person. However, travel has costs to include time and money as well as personal expenditure of mental and physical energy. Some research has indicated that while interaction through computer mediated communication takes more time to develop trust among dislocated teams, trust can be built to levels similar-to-that of co-located teams (Wilson et al., 2005). However, existing research has not focused on senior executives and the purpose of communication directly associated with travel conducted by this group of experienced travelers.

Dirks and Ferrin (2001) identify a second area of interest for further research regarding business travel; the idea that trust is necessary as it creates the conditions under which desirable outcomes such as cooperation is affected. According to these two researchers, there is cross-disciplinary agreement that trust, or lack thereof, affects the attitude, perception and performance of people and organizations (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001). “Higher levels of trust are expected to result in more positive attitudes, higher levels of cooperation and other forms of workplace behavior and superior levels of performance” (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001, p. 451). Trust, according to Dirks and Ferrin (2001), leads to cooperation and subsequent outcomes such as positive perceptions. However, they also identify that while trust may enhance the expectation of positive outcomes it can also have a negative effect hindering desired outcomes and accomplishment of established goals. This hindrance may present itself in circumstances where a high level of trust is demonstrated but may not always be warranted.

Alternatively, the establishment of a high level of trust created over time, referencing past performance and experience, provides an opportunity to exploit trust in-

order-to take advantage of another party in the future. When a high level of trust exists between partners, researchers found that high trust participants were taken advantage of 25% of the time (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001) and despite being taken advantage of, high trust partners continued to trust their partner which risked further wrongdoing. In this case, trust was a hindrance to desired outcomes.

Additional research has focused on strategic leadership behavior and relational trust in the buyer-supplier relationship (Birasnav et al., 2019). While Birasnav et al.'s research is limited to purchasing managers in the manufacturing space, the researchers found a positive relationship between certain behaviors and trusting relationships and improved relationships reduced purchasing cycle time. Success of the integrated nature of buyers and suppliers in the manufacturing supply chain is dependent on collaborative relationships based on trust. Birasnav et al. (2019) highlighted shared values and sustained high-quality communication improved trust and opportunistic behavior, taking advantage of a partner, undercut the building of trust. Additionally, adapting a partner's product and frequent sharing of information are strategic behaviors contributing to buyer-supplier trust.

Expanding beyond the buyer-supplier relationship with his white paper on trust and global collaboration, Child (2001) reinforced the idea that collaborative behavior is a requirement in building trust. He posits through the lens of project teams, which collectively create a pool of knowledge, the role of trust. Child (2001) determined the successful outcome of projects is dependent on mutual trust, built on collaboration, leading to a partnership relationship and subsequent reinforcement of trust. In defining trust itself, Child indicated two bases for trust. The first is traditional (the strongest basis),

which is based on family, community, shared education, or history of working together. The second is institutional, which is based on contracts, competence, and quality as demonstrated by certifications and qualifications. The institutional basis is a foundational source of trust in business. The establishment of traditional trust, effected by face-to-face and computer mediated communication, connects people creating the opportunity to grow business through a series of successful projects.

Furthering the research of previous work (McGrath, 1993; Walther, 1995) in the area of trust, computer mediated communication and face-to-face communication, Wilson, et al. (2006) evaluated the establishment of trust through the use of teams. Previous work focused on the distinction between task performance and interaction with computer mediated communication. Wilson et al. (2006) focused on team member interaction with each other using face-to-face and CMC. Research participants who had not previously been identified to each other were randomly assigned to one of four teams that conducted three meetings; all face-to-face (FFF), all through CMC (EEE) or a combination in which the first meeting in the series was either face-to-face (FEE) or through CMC (EEF). Wilson et al. (2006) recognized the interdependence of teams but found that trust could be developed through CMC similar to that which develops through face-to-face communication albeit on a longer timeline as brevity, style and tone are factors for breakdowns in trust.

While research regarding trust, face-to-face communication and computer mediated communication has expanded to include specific relationships, organizational and cultural influences as well as the negative impact of trust, limitations exist which include the environment in which research is conducted. Research has focused on

specific groups assembled in the environment of a laboratory working together for the purpose of conducting an experiment as opposed to those groups established in a firm for the purpose of completing a project (Wilson et al., 2005). This highlights the need to look at individuals who make up a select group, in this case elites (Harvey, 2011), and the development of trust amongst them, in their natural working environment.

### Computer Mediated Communication Based Research

Computer mediated communication has become the primary means for communicating between business partners during the COVID-19 outbreak. Current affairs notwithstanding, the ability to forge new relationships, support existing relationships, and create new opportunities by exploring potential partnerships, may be limited should restrictions (whether regulatory or voluntary) on travel in general, and business travel in particular, remain. However, while the manner in which current global business affairs is conducted provided some reference, this was not the focus of this research as it is one relative point in time (albeit unknown how long this point will last).

Research in computer mediated communication (CMC) has primarily been focused on two things: how a firm can save money by employing computer mediated communication techniques, and how a firm can save time with CMC tools. According to Zimmer et al. (2015), “prior literature has reliably demonstrated that the choice to use a particular source [for interpersonal information] is predominantly determined via cost-benefit analysis.” The opportunity for more research is around the sociological and psychological effects of face-to-face communication yielding answers to the question; Why do senior executives travel for the purpose of conducting business?

This research will contribute to prior research on business travel, computer mediated communication, and face-to-face communication has focused on the economics of travel and subsequent impact on the firm. What has not been widely studied is the sociological impact on firms and individual travelers. As more companies commit to extended periods of work from home, delaying the return-to-work, campuses, buildings, and spaces it is important to understand the aspect associated with effect on employees, leadership decisions, and longer-term strategic planning.

In an article for the New York Times, David Streitfeld (2020) reported how companies are extending their work-from-home (WFH) policies. While this move is driven by the current COVID-19 pandemic, Streitfeld emphasized that it also provides companies an opportunity to re-think office and infrastructure strategies. These new strategies simultaneously provide employees who can work from home a sense of safety from returning to a work structure that cannot ensure proper social distancing. In other words, returning to work introduces challenges such as commuting, working in close proximity with others, and limiting employees' ability to secure childcare. Is it that strategies such as travel for the purpose of conducting business will subsequently be pushed to the sidelines in the interest of attempting to further business interests without ever meeting in person? Will there be a shift in cultural norms from insistence that conducting business face-to-face was the only accepted practice? Is business travel essential to business, and relationships, or is it a matter of personal preference, interest, or perquisite?

Bathelt and Turi (2011), in their work on computer mediated communication and face-to-face contact, found that there is a continuous stream of information shared

between people engaged in conversation. They found that face-to-face communication, even with improvement in the media richness of computer mediated communication tools, afforded the transfer of complex messages that CMC did not, as indicated by the increased failure rate of remote collaborations (Bathelt & Turi, 2011). Spatial proximity remained key to knowledge sharing and problem solving when economic impact is the focus of the communication. They noted further difficulty in establishing trust when communicating through CMC. However, their research did not identify precise circumstances in which the advantages of face-to-face communication may be recognized.

Denstadli et al. (2012), while limited to a geographic region (Norway), sought to identify the circumstances under which computer mediated communication may be viewed as a substitute for business travel by air. Their research focused on travel for business exploring the relationship between videoconferencing and business travel for the purpose of meeting face-to-face. Participants in this research were recruited at the Oslo Gardermoen Airport and asked to participate in an internet-based survey in exchange for which they could participate in a raffle as incentive to participate. Approximately 10% of travelers responded to the invitation. To protect against sample bias, Denstadli et al. (2012) used tools such as weighting and cross-comparison against the Norwegian Air Transportation survey in the categories of age and gender. These researchers identified certain conditions, such as ease of access to CMC and the economic contraction in a business cycle, under which CMC may substitute for business travel. However, they also discovered that replacement is temporary. Modern work life is structured around networks, and it is therefore important to understand the social basis for travel; face-to-

face contact is interwoven in business operations and CMC cannot replace the genuine aspect of meeting face-to-face.

<b>Table 1.</b> <i>Summary of Literature Reviewed</i>						
<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Theory</u>	<u>Methodology</u>	<u>Key Findings</u>	<u>Limitations</u>
Bathelt, H. & Turi, P. (2011)	Local, Global and Virtual Buzz: The Importance of Face-to-Face Contact in Economic Interaction	GeoForum	Social Information Processing and Equilibrium Theories	Literature Review	Firms that make an integrative use of both CMC and Face-to-Face will have a competitive advantage in “the knowledge economy”	Insufficient understanding of the exact circumstances where face-to-face is most valuable
Birasnav, M., Mittal, R. & Dalpati, A. (2019)	Integrating Theories of Strategic, Social Exchange and Structural Capital	Global Journal of Flexible Systems Management	Strategic Leadership, Social Exchange, and Social Capital Theories	Random Sampling of Manager Interviews	Strategic leadership behaviors are positively related to trust in the buyer-supplier relationship	Focused on specific (purchasing) managers in the manufacturing space
Byun, H., Frake, J. & Agarwal, R. (2018)	Leveraging Who You Know by What You Know: Specialization and Returns to Relational Capital	Strategic Management Journal	Human Capital, Structural Capital, and Relational Capital Theories	Data sampling from public federal databases	Specialization and Relational Capital contribute to both individual and firm outcomes	Focused on professional services (lobbyists)

**Table 1.***(Continued)*

Chen, C. & Petrick, J. (2016)	Roles of Perceived Travel Benefits, Importance and Constraints in Predicting Travel Behavior	Journal of Travel Research	Model of Attitude Importance	Random Sample Survey drawing from an existing database	Individual travel behavior positively correlated to perceived benefits of travel and travel constraints positively correlated to decreased travel	Study drew from an existing data base of a survey company with a wide range of demographics challenging generalizability
Chen, W. & Wellman, B. (2009)	Net and Jet – The Internet Use, Travel and Social Networks of Chinese Canadian Entrepreneurs	Information, Communication and Society	Social Exchange and Social Network Theory	Participant observation , interviews, and random sample survey	The use of the internet and airplane travel are positively related to network creation and maintenance and online interaction cannot replace face-to-face interaction	Focused on Chinese Canadian Entrepreneurial business between China and Canada

<b>Table 1.</b>						
<i>(Continued)</i>						
Child, J. (2001)	Trust – The Fundamental Bond in Global Collaboration	Organizational Dynamics	White Paper	Interviews & industry supplied data	Trust is Vital in establishing and maintaining any collaborative relationship	White Paper providing a broad (but fundamental) understanding of trust
Cousins, P., Handfield, R., Lawson, B., Petersen, K. (2006)	Creating Supply Chain Relational Capital: The Impact of Formal and Informal Socialization Processes	Journal of Operations Management	Group and Social Capital Theory	Survey of Manufacturing Firms	Relational Capital positively impacts firm performance as it facilitates the ability to share information	Focuses on firm level (vs. individual) buyer – supplier organizational structure
Cummings, J. & Dennis, A. (2018)	Virtual First Impressions Matter: The Effect of Enterprise Social Networking Sites on Impression Formation in Virtual Teams	MIS Quarterly	Social Capital Theory	Heuristic-Systematic Model and Elaboration Likelihood Model	How information is generated (by a network of connections vs. self-generated) and processed (systematically or heuristically) influences impression/attitude formation	Evaluates first impressions from Enterprise Social Networking Sites (ESNS) but does not assess changes to social capital overtime

**Table 1.***(Continued)*

Denstadli, J., Gripsrud, M. Hjorthol, R. & Julsrud, T. (2012)	Business Meetings: Do New Video-conferencing Technologies Change Communication Patterns?	Journal of Transport Geography	Social Affordances	Survey of Norwegian Business Travelers	Differences between types of CMC result in different outcomes	Geographically limited
Dirks, K. & Ferrin, D. (2001)	The Role of Trust in Organiza- tional Settings	Organizational Science	Grounded Theory on the Main Effect and/or Moderation effect of Trust	Review of Previous Studies	Trust Influences the relationship between partners at individual, dyadic and group levels	Opportunity to study how the construct of trust (moderator or main effect) applies in negotiations or virtual interaction between partners
Kale, P., Singh, H. & Perlmutter, H. (2000)	Learning and Protection of Proprietary Assets in Strategic Alliances: Building Relational Capital	Strategic management Journal	Transactional Cost Theory and Relational Exchange Theory	Survey	Relational Capital based on mutual trust creates a basis for learning and know-how transfer	Evaluates relational capital through the lens of conflict management between firms with established alliances

**Table 1.***(Continued)*

Khazanchi, S., Sprinkle, T., Masterson, S. & Tong, N. (2018)	A Spatial Model of Work Relationships: The Relationship Building and Relationship Straining Effects of Workplace Design	Academy of Management Review	Integrated Theories including Social Capital, Environmental Psychology & Ergonomics	Literature Review	Creating space with constant connectivity & proximity enhances face-to-face communication but also has negative relational impact limiting privacy and opportunity for confidential interactions	Focused on the construct of workplace design
Moran, P. (2005)	Structural vs Relational Embeddedness: Social Capital and Managerial Performance	Strategic Management Journal	Grounded Theory on Embeddedness, Social Capital and Relational Trust	Survey	Relational Embeddedness enhances managerial performance	Microsociology – what face-to-face interactions lead to the foundational aspects of specific relationships
Nahapiet, J. & Ghosal, S. (1998)	Social Capital, Intellectual Capital and the Organizational Advantage	Academy of Management Review	Resource based theory, Organizational Advantage (Structure), Social Capital & Intellectual Capital	Literature Review	Foundational support for building networks and social capital	Focus on creation of intellectual capital vs how or what is subsequently done with it

**Table 1.***(Continued)*

Sheller, M. & Urry, J. (2006)	The New Mobilities Paradigm	Environment and Planning	Nomadic Theory and Sedentarist theories	Literature Review	Existing social theories don't adequately consider the dynamics associated with evolving methods of communication	Vague description of limitations
Storper, M. & Venables, A. (2004)	Buzz: Face-to-Face Contact and the Urban Economy	Journal of Economic Geography	Sociological Theory	Game Theoretic Analysis	Face-to-Face communication is directly related to innovation	Focus on groups and large cities (economic centers)
J., Strauss, S., McEvily, B. (2006)	All in Due Time: The Development of Trust in Computer-Mediated and Face-to-Face	Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes	Cues Filtered Out Theory	Controlled Setting Experiment using a Johnson-George Specific Interpersonal Trust Scale	Over time, communication patterns in technology mediated teams approach those of face-to-face teams	The experiment was limited to team tasks
Zimmer, J. & Henry, R. (2015)	The Role of Social Capital in Selecting Interpersonal Information Sources	Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology	Social Capital Theory	Survey	The social setting in which individuals exist impacts quality and accessibility of interpersonal sources	Early career stage MBA students with less than 5- years-experience employed by small or medium-sized firms

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **STUDY ONE (PILOT STUDY)**

#### Conceptual Foundation

The literature review (Table 1) outlines core work focused on social capital, relational capital, and computer mediated communication. It highlights the focus on specific areas that have been studied such as buyer-supplier relationships and how individuals or groups communicate through computer mediated communication versus face-to-face communication. It also highlights the role of travel in the establishment of social networks and how business relationships are formed through the establishment of trust.

The literature review (Table 1) also yields information highlighting a gap in the exploration of relational capital as it applies to senior executives and the purpose of business travel. This gap includes questions such as; what are the reasons for a senior leader to forego the timeliness and expedience of connecting with those with whom that leader does business, whether internal or external to the firm, via readily available tools that afford the opportunity to connect virtually with little effort? It could be to build trust, project a sense of power, take advantage of company provided benefits, or get out of the office and away from the associated day-to-day obligations, commitments, and noise. Cousins et al. (2006) argued that the development of relationships through the establishment of communication leads to strategic advantage as a high level of trust contributes to the smooth running of the relationship. While focused on supply chain, specifically purchasing managers and suppliers, Cousins et al. (2006) found however, that

there is a limit to the positive contribution which presents an opportunity for further research.

This research sought to explore the reason senior business executives choose to travel for the purpose of conducting business. Social capital theory and its subset, relational capital, are foundational to the idea that business travel is conducted primarily for the purpose of building networks (social capital) and leveraging the individual relationships (relational capital) to achieve goals such as establishing partnerships, building alliances, or reinforcing certain control or authority over people, processes, or facilities. The associated communication, done largely through face-to-face communication, is facilitated by business travel. Face-to-face communication thereby contributes directly to the development of trust, a key component of social capital (Putnam, 2000) between business partners and the influence the traveler has with whom it is he or she meets and/or the process overseen. The literature review revealed that business travel had been researched largely with consideration to building networks (Nahapiet & Ghosal, 1998), return on investment in business travel (Collins & Tisdell, 2004), managing traveler behavior against cost (Gustafson, 2012), and the potential to use computer mediated communication as a substitute for business travel in-order-to save money (Denstadli, et al., 2012). Additionally, previous research conducted in the controlled environment of a university study, indicated that over time there may be little or no difference in the development of trust relationship(s) between team members when using computer mediated communication (Wilson, et al., 2006). However, none of this research has studied senior business executive travel and their purpose for travel in particular.

To fill this gap, the researcher conducted a series of semi-structured interviews of senior business executives specifically. To better understand the purpose for their business travel, the following propositions formed the basis for this study's interview questions and constructs identified to develop the research and interview questions are outlined in Table 2.

*Proposition 1:* The purpose of senior executive travel is to build trust with both internal and external business partners.

Senior executives are aware of the benefits of face-to-face communication and choose, when able, to travel to gain the sociological benefits of face-to-face communication, such as the ability to assess body language, tone, and culture – both geographic and organizational – to inform their decision making. This advantage may also include the identification of a person, or persons, motivated by the opportunity to take advantage of trust for self-serving reasons (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001) thereby eroding trust. Mutual trust gained by face-to-face communication can lead to mutual knowledge gain and enhanced revenue generation (Byun et al., 2018). However, executives may also attempt to take advantage of this trust for self-serving reasons. In summary, the cognitive contribution of face-to-face communication to inform through complex signals reduces uncertainty and aides in the building of trust (Bathelt & Turi, 2011).

*Proposition 2:* Senior executives travel for business to proactively mitigate the risk of internal or external business partner malfeasance.

Dirks and Ferrin (2001) indicated that while proactively working to build high levels of trust can engender greater cooperation, it may also put the trusting partner at

risk of exploitation. They highlight that a high level of trust will result in being taken advantage of 25% of the time. Wilson et al. (2005) further indicate that in-order-to engage in cooperative activity, a fundamental element of group work is trust and members of a group must be able to either monitor each other or trust each other. Birasnav et al. (2019) additionally highlight the enduring nature of collaborative relationships that are dependent on the continuing commitment of both parties to maintain a level of trust. That commitment is demonstrated through the mutual fulfilment of needs required to accomplish their respective goals and lack of trust counters that by having adverse consequences for both parties.

*Proposition 3:* Familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the senior executive is meeting, is associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through face-to-face communication.

Prior research (Wilson et al., 2005) suggested that familiarity is a determinant in the investment of time necessary to develop trust. “Both what you know and who you know impacts performance” (Byun et al., 2018, p. 1803). If executives have an established relationship with a person or group, perhaps travel for the purpose of meeting face-to-face can be reduced or replaced by computer mediated communication. However, if, as Wilson et al. (2005) suggest in their research on the development of trust through computer mediated communication, trust development takes more time when compared to face-to-face communication then an executive may opt to meet face-to-face. Therefore, senior executives will choose to travel for the purpose of conducting business, gaining familiarity in a more expeditious manner

rather than expend an inordinate amount of time on computer mediated communication.

*Proposition 4:* Familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the executive is meeting is associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through computer mediated communication.

Byun et al. (2018) found that the investment an individual makes in building trust resulted in improved access to resources controlled by the other party. Additionally, according to Dirks and Ferrin (2005), managers who seek to build high levels of trust, or protect against the perils associated with low levels of trust, must work to establish the desired level of trust. If executives do not have an established relationship with a person or group, travel for the purpose of meeting face-to-face may be necessary to establish familiarity and build trust.

Social capital and its subset, relational capital, are the product of an individual's network of relationships. The value of that network is determined by how well the individual can leverage the trust, mutual commitment, and cooperation to meet specific goals (Cummings & Dennis, 2018). However, familiarity can be gained through means other than face-to-face communication such as social media, to inform potential partners. In further support of their research, and this question, Cummings and Dennis (2018) found that trust was granted presumptively in a virtual team environment dependent upon how information about others was presented.

*Proposition 5:* Trust rooted in the institution with which the senior executive interacts determines whether a senior executive chooses to travel for the purpose of conducting business.

According to Child (2001), institutional trust is the second basis (family being first) upon which collaborative relationships are built. However, according to Dirks and Ferrin (2001), there are varying levels in which trust has an effect. Some organizational structures enable cooperation and collaborative decision making to achieve desirable outcomes while others introduce ambiguity and difficulty in assessing the behavior of others to determine trustworthiness. If executives have an established relationship with an institution, travel for the purpose of meeting face-to-face could be reduced or otherwise replaced by computer mediated communication, with senior executives representing that institution.

*Proposition 6:* Senior executives travel as an escape.

The demands on a senior executive's time can be incessant. Their schedules are managed very precisely and often provide little personal time away from "the noise" associated with their role and physical office space. When a senior executive is traveling, whether by airplane, train, or car, away from their office they may be free of the distractions inherent with their office. When free from distractions such as phones, drop-in ad-hoc meetings, and duties associated with their role, they gain sanctuary. Hence, travel could constitute a way to rest, reflect, contemplate next steps, or otherwise be free of real or perceived obligations.

*Proposition 7:* Senior executives view travel as a form of compensation.

Senior executives may feel that, regardless of their salary, bonus, and other benefits provided (formally or informally), travel benefits are part of their compensation package.

Aside from compensation, senior executives may be formally entitled, or feel informally entitled due to their position, title, and/or seniority, to certain perquisites in addition to their compensation package. They may travel for the purpose of taking advantage of these benefits, whether real or perceived, and adopt business travel as part of their identity and lifestyle (Gustafson, 2012). This benefit may be in the form of formal agreements such as timeshares on the company owned airplane, or the affordance of access to a fractional share of an airplane managed and maintained by a service provider such as FlexJet, NetJets, or Wheels-Up (Sweeney, 2006). They may also have access to charter aircraft services or exclusive privileges associated with commercial airlines such as airline sponsored airport lounges, express check-in, free baggage allowances, and expedited security screening, which they view as part of their compensation which they intend to take advantage of.

*Proposition 8:* Senior executives travel as a form of pleasure.

The search for pleasure is a powerful motivator, and certain types of pleasure can be attained through status and power projection (Storper & Venebles, 2004). Senior executives that value the projection of power as a part of their leadership style engage in business travel for the purpose of reinforcing their sense of self-worth, position, prestige and/or rank within the organization they represent. While it may be pernicious, a sign of a weak leader, and counter to modern leadership, a core reason for such an executive to travel may be to instill a certain fear factor on the party with whom they interact and the travel itself aides in advancing the goal of intimidation.

Countering the negative aspect in what may be a more traditional or intuitive assessment of travel as a form of pleasure includes a personal evaluation of the

benefits of travel. Chen and Petrick (2016) indicate that there are three main benefits of travel; experiential - includes the exposure to new things, relaxation – a release from work and family obligations, and health - includes mental and physical improvements. While their research was focused on a group of survey participants who represented a wide-range of ages (18 – 70 years of age) and were drawn from a survey company database, it is possible that senior executives associate business travel with these same benefits.

**Table 2.***Summary Table of Constructs in Research Questions*

<u>Construct</u>	<u>Conceptual Definition</u>	<u>Reference</u>
Business Partners	Individuals, internal or external to the firm, with whom the traveler meets for the purpose of communication, building familiarity and problem solving	Cousins, P., Handfield, R., Lawson, B. & Petersen, K. (2006)
Compensation	Salary and other benefits provided by an employer to an employee or other beneficiary	Alverson, W. (1972)
Computer Mediated Communication	Systems used to structure and process information using telecommunications networks and related media	Rice, R.E. (1987)
Escape	The unburdening of administrative, managerial, personal, or other duties associated with a senior executive	Urry, J. (2004)
Face-to-Face Communication	A performance. A means to information production where proximity affords near instant processing of physical, visual, and aural cues raising the quantity and quality of information being transmitted and received	Storper & Venables (2004)
Familiarity	Level of closeness – personal and authentic with a person or group	Denstadli, J., Gripsud, M., Hjorthol, R. & Julsrud, T. et al. (2012) and Nahapiet, J. & Ghosal, S. (1998)
Malfeasance	Opportunistic, exploitive behavior taken by a business partner(s)	Dirks, K. & Ferrin, D. (2001)
Institution	Entity which makes up a community such as a firm that exists for the purpose of production and exchange of goods, services, or knowledge	Nahapiet, J. & Ghosal, S. (1998)
Perquisite	Nonpecuniary benefit	Hersch, P. & McDougall, G. (1992)
Pleasure	Bio-physical reaction stimulated by an action	Storper and Venables (2004)
Proactively Mitigate	The management of activities so-as-to create barriers against undesirable outcomes	Saunders, M., Dietz, G. & Thornhill, A. (2014)
Senior Executives	Top managers in positions which impact organizational processes and outcomes	Birasnav, M., Mittal, R. & Dalpati, A. (2019)
Travel	Travel sponsored by an employer	Corporate travel data
Trust	The willingness to believe that one's (person or group) behavior will be beneficial rather than detrimental to the other	Child, J. (2001) and Dirks, K. & Ferrin, D. (2001)

## Methodology

This research utilized qualitative methods using an interpretive, inductive, and flexible pattern mapping approach (Bouncken, et al., 2021) through a series of semi-structured interviews of senior executives (Pearse, 2019). Qualitative methods focus on words, processes, and meanings to understand a phenomenon, and qualitative research is interested in answering the why question (Gephart, 2004; Pearse, 2019). Interpretive research specifically examines the phenomena being studied in context with the goal of understanding through the subjects' perspective, language, and words. Flexible pattern matching is a process that is reliant on comparing empirical data while referencing theory (Bouncken, et al., 2021). In the case of this research, social capital theory.

This approach is best suited to examine why business executives travel because interpretive research is most appropriate when trying to understand a phenomenon through the meanings individuals assign to them (Myers, 2020). Business executives are decision makers. While firms may have a travel policy, and individual executives may have some self-imposed guidelines, they are not known to be universal. The approach to interpretive research is taking an inside look from the subjects', in this case interviewees, perspective affording business executives who make decisions about their travel to express the reason(s) they travel in their own words.

This study used a series of semi-structured interviews affording interviewees the opportunity to answer a set of pre-determined questions facilitating a free-flowing discussion about their reason(s) for engaging in business travel. The study conducted the interviews with senior executives using convenience sampling (Myers, 2020) representing a variety of companies using the interview protocol refinement (IRP)

process. This process ensured the interview phase was congruous with the research contributing to the reliability of the interview data and rigor of the research (Milagros Castillo-Montoya, 2016). This approach enabled open, free-flowing conversation allowing the interviewer to gain an understanding of people's view on business travel through their own narrative. The senior executives interviewed are at the managing director, senior vice president, president, chief executive officer and senior government employee level. This study did not seek to interview those who travel for the purpose of conducting manual labor at their destination such as maintenance technicians or oil field workers nor did it seek to explore the effect of business travel on the respondent firms' revenue stream.

The number of interviews was guided by the pursuit of information from executives who represent several industries. Interviews were conducted in an environment conducive to conversation through computer mediated communication (Zoom Video Communications, Inc., 2020). Every attempt was made to reduce external factors that introduce distractions, such as noise, telephones, televisions, and unscheduled interruptions. Interviewees were asked for specific time commitments well in advance of their interviews. This assisted in the ability to schedule a mutually agreeable time. Furthermore, it supported the goal of effective and efficient management of the interview and was respectful of interviewees time in the furtherance of this research.

The study worked to accommodate the interviewees' schedule in an effort to be supportive, flexible, and accommodating in this first step to gain the trust and confidence of the interviewee. Gaining the trust and confidence of the interviewee is a vital part of presenting oneself as a researcher when there is an expectation of gaining rich, insightful,

and in-depth knowledge which is the desired outcome of open conversation and unencumbered dialogue (Harvey, 2011).

The study used computer mediated communication, incorporating Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, Inc., 2020). This approach allowed for the capture of information such as hand gestures, body language, and facial expressions. The interviewer provided a brief overview of what to expect in terms of time commitment and structure at the beginning of each interview. The interviewer also read the statement of purpose (Appendix C) and allowed the interviewee to ask any questions prior to commencing the interview. The interviewer subsequently asked permission to record the interview, disclosed the purpose of the interview, and offered the opportunity to end the interview at any time. The interviewer informed each interviewee that although the interviewer would not be able to offer complete anonymity, the interviewer would make every effort to de-identify the interviewee, not publish their identity or actual organization with this research, protect personal information through the use of pseudonyms, and take all reasonable steps to secure the data through available means.

Means to secure the data included keeping the recording device in a locked space when not in use, password protecting the computer used for documenting the research and password protecting any software, i.e., NVivo, used to manage the data. Additionally, when any devices were not in a secured space, they were kept in the interviewers' immediate control. When requiring a network connection, a password protected network and virtual private network (VPN) was used. Security measures on Zoom include the use of the waiting room feature embedded in Zoom and a passcode generated by Zoom that was shared only with the interviewee through the scheduling tool

also embedded in Zoom. Lastly, the information shared is only available to the researcher and approved resources for transcribing and coding the data. The interviewer did not share data without explicit permission to do so and offered to share the results of the research with the interviewee for personal use if they were interested.

At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewer had the recordings transcribed via *temi.com*, *rev.com* or *otter.ai* using the interview notes. Transcribed interviews were then migrated into Microsoft Excel for sorting and coding. The data was finally compiled and analyzed in Microsoft Word. Themes were developed from the transcribed interviews (Table 5) and codes were subsequently built (Table 6) to mark the text (Myers, 2020). This proactive approach to data collection and subsequent coding afforded the opportunity to contemplate the quality of the interview, consider the overall performance of the interviewer and the interviewee. All of this was completed in a compressed time which began with the Temple University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix C) in late February 2021. These steps reduced the risk of essential data loss. The research included coding using In Vivo coding techniques, the language, and words of the interviewee, to code the data set (Miles et al., 2020). The interviewer also considered the use of the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program NVivo to assist in the thematic analysis and pattern mapping search for themes throughout the interview process (Sinkovics, 2017). However, the interviewer experienced technical difficulties with the user interface and reverted to the Excel technique previously outlined.

Interviews were conducted with those considered elite (Harvey, 2011). In order to address concerns associated with research in this area of society, the four-phase approach

advocated by Castillo-Montoya (2016) was referenced. This approach ensured an inquiry-based conversation, that interview questions align with the study's research questions, the interviewer remained open and considerate of feedback. Piloted interviews were conducted to ensure the conversational nature of the interview and focus on the inquiry using a test bench – interviewing someone ahead of the main interviews to assess validity, structure, and responsiveness.

This research relied on the interviewees own words gathering data from respective business executives to assess their purpose for business travel. In line with social capital theory, the study explored the role of travel in establishing a relationship in which trust is a core element. This study examined executives' belief in travel as necessary for the purpose of building a relationship with potential business partner(s), traveling as a form of compensation, escape or projecting power and influence. Additionally, this study sought to gain executives' insights into perceived levels of trust established via face-to-face meetings versus computer mediated communication and why an executive may travel, referencing the perceived difference.

Table 3 provides a list of the interviewees. Interviewees were assigned a pseudonym to protect their real name. Information was gathered as to the interviewees' firm name, industry, title, size of the firm, frequency of travel and mode of travel. This information was used to gain insight into these areas assessing how they may be different with respect to firm size, industry, role, and mode of travel.

Table 4 illustrates the connection between research constructs and specific interview questions laid out in Appendix A. The semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions which facilitated open dialogue and conversation throughout the

interview yet captured information relevant to the topic at hand (Myers, 2020). The guiding questions provided boundaries to ensure efficiency and focus as well as good time management and information flow. The questions were designed to relate to the constructs as directly as possible without leading the interviewee. This ensured the data gathered was rich, considers bias, and related directly to the guiding research questions.

The purpose of pursuing this research was to gain an understanding of why executives travel for the purpose of conducting business. In an age where computer mediated communication has become a viable, and somewhat reliable, option to business travel, understanding the motivation and goals of business travel is of value to both researchers and practitioners. We must understand the motivation considering competing alternatives, i.e., face-to-face vs CMC. According to Dirks and Ferrin (2001), trust

is a psychological state that provides a representation of how individuals understand their relationship with another party in situations that involve risk or vulnerability...trust embodies the accumulated experiences with, and knowledge about, the other party in situations involving vulnerability. Trust affects how one assesses the future behavior of another party with whom one is interdependent...trust also affects how one interprets the past (or present) actions of the other party and the motives underlying the actions. (p. 456)

This research methodology considered these ideas and whether senior business executives' interest in developing or furthering relationships to build trust, enhance relationships, and or take advantage of company provided perquisites such as travel privileges and compensation factors in their decision to travel for business.

<b>Table 3.</b>					
<i>Summary Description of Study One Interviewees</i>					
<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Title/Role</u>	<u>Industry</u>	<u>Firm Size</u> (number of employees)	<u>Frequency of Travel</u> (# of trips per annum)	<u>Primary Mode(s) of Travel</u>
1	Senior Vice President, Sales & Marketing	Aviation Services	>1,000	24	Commercial Air & Regional Rail
2	President & Chief Executive Officer	Medical Services	>100	20	Commercial Air
3	Senior Vice President & G.M., North America	Aviation Services	>1,000	75 - 90	Commercial Air
4	U.S. Ambassador	Government Affairs	>10,000	12	Commercial Air & Private Aircraft
5	President	Construction Services	<100	9	Commercial Air, Private Aircraft & Personal Vehicle
6	Managing Director	Global Insurance	>1,000	100	Commercial Air, Regional Rail & Personal Vehicle

**Table 4.***Summary Table of Constructs in Research Interview Questions*

<u>Construct</u>	<u>Question</u>	<u>Interview Guide Question #</u>
Business Partners	Can you describe the business partners, both internal and external to your organization, with whom you meet?	Question 9
Compensation	Do you view travel as a form of compensation?	Question 26
Computer Mediated Communication	Do you think there are suitable alternatives to travel? What might those alternatives be? Under what circumstances do you use them?	Questions 18,19 & 20
Escape	Do you view travel as an escape or form of release? Please describe.	Question 27
Face-to-Face Communication	Can you describe what you think about face- to-face communication?	Question 21
Familiarity	Can you describe the business partners, both internal and external to your organization, with whom you meet?	Question 9
Malfeasance	Please describe how you view business relationships, the <i>people</i> you meet and their connection to business travel.  What are your core reasons to meet with people?	Question 10
Institution	Please describe how you view business relationships with the <i>organizations</i> you meet and their connection to business travel.  What are your core reasons to meet with organizations?	Question 11

<b>Table 4.</b>		
<i>(Continued)</i>		
Perquisite	Do you view travel as a form of compensation?	Question 2
Proactively Mitigate	Does trust in the person or organization with whom you meet factor into your decision to travel?	Questions 10 & 13
Senior Executives	What is your title and how would you describe your current role?	Interview Form Heading Information & Question 1
Travel	<p>Would you describe travel for the purpose of conducting business part of your role?</p> <p>Please describe how you view business relationships and their connection to business travel.</p> <p>Does trust in the person or organization with whom you meet factor into your decision to travel?</p>	Question 2
Pleasure	<p>Can you tell me why you travel for business?</p> <p>What are some other reasons you might travel for business?</p>	Questions 3 & 17

<b>Table 5.</b>	
<i>Study One Themes</i>	
Theme	Description
Analyzing	Examining the person, organization, facility, or experience with whom the Senior Executive is meeting
Benefitting	That which is gained from business travel in the form of social capital, formal or informal compensation, experience, perquisite or pleasure
Facilitating	The means by which a senior executive is communicating – face-to-face or via computer mediated communication to achieve desired outcomes
Marketing	The promotion of self, organization or product
Social Capitalizing	One of three primary components of social capital – structural, relational, or cognitive

**Table 6.***Study One Themes to Interpretive Code*

Theme	Interpretive Code	Code Definition
Analyzing	Budgeting & Considering	Contemplating the monetary cost of travel or return on investment
Analyzing	Evaluating	Performance of people, processes, or organizations
Analyzing	Sensing	Non-verbal cues
Analyzing	Strategizing	Determining the path forward
Benefitting	Formal Compensating	Monetary reward
Benefitting	Informal Compensating	Perquisite, Escape, Experiencing
Facilitating	Face-to-Facing	Interacting in-person
Facilitating	Computer Mediated Communicating (CMC)	Interacting through means other than in-person
Facilitating	Replacing	Moving from face-to-face communication to CMC or vice versa
Facilitating	Replacing	Interchanging meeting face-to-face for meeting via computer mediated communication
Familiarizing	Informing	Learning from, presenting, or projecting information to, a person or organization
Familiarizing	Inspecting	Interacting with, observing, or reviewing a person(s) or organization
Marketing	Promoting	Advancing something or someone for a specific goal
Social Capitalizing	Cognitive	Understanding, and interpreting shared messages including expectations and cultural norms
Social Capitalizing	Structuring	Networking
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Relationship building including socializing
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Relationship maintenance
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Personalizing, projecting power, influencing, and signaling
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Trusting
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Engaging and interacting for the purpose of learning or informing

## Study One Results

Results of the pilot study show support for some, but not all propositions, summarized in Table 5. Support for the propositions is offered with some limitations associated with language primarily in propositions 3 and 4. Proposition 1; “The purpose of senior executive travel to build trust with both internal and external business partners,” is supported. While interviewees identified an interest in traveling for the purpose of building trust, respondents further indicate that the decision to travel is finalized through analysis of the purpose for travel with consideration given to more than one factor such as trust. Additional areas of consideration for the purpose of business travel are organizational expectations of the respondent to travel for business, culture -whether there is an expectation to meet face-to-face as a sign of respect, and prior experience with the people with whom the respondent will meet. Financial impact was also identified as a consideration, yet it was not emphasized. The financial analysis was summarized by one respondent, “I will gain a reduction in travel expense but it is a bit of a double negative. I will reduce our travel expense by pushing an alternative instrument (CMC) a little but I have to ask, can we really get this done virtually?” Another respondent analyzes the purpose for travel based on trust, or lack thereof, as well as cost and the goal to be achieved. This idea was captured by the response, “It is easier to trust people you’ve met and it’s easier to understand things you’ve seen.” Trust is at the core of assessing travel for the purpose of conducting business.

Proposition 2; “Senior executives travel for business to proactively mitigate the risk of internal or external business partner malfeasance,” was also supported. This

was highlighted by a respondent indicating business travel “is about respect and enjoyment.” Interviewees provided responses that described traveling for the purpose of conducting business as a show of respect demonstrating a commitment to the person with whom the respondent meets and a positive shared experience works to ensure mutual goals remain in focus. The respondent went on to say, “In a negative aspect, it’s about trust and making sure the body language matches the intent.” A second respondent indicated a willingness to travel to test the business relationship. This respondent would make arrangements to meet face-to-face and then, upon arrival, assess whether or not the business partner is committed to doing business. If the respondent is told upon arrival, “You’re not on his calendar” or, “He’s left for the day,” he determines that the partner is no longer acting in good faith, cannot be trusted, and the partnership should no longer be pursued. Response in support of propositions 1 and 2 indicate these senior executives engage in a thoughtful, perpetual evaluation of the purpose for business travel. The evaluation includes the value of meeting face-to-face against suitable alternatives to travel such as communicating via computer mediated communication tools which include a mobile phone, Zoom (Zoom Communications, Inc., 2020) or electronic mail (e-mail). One respondent indicated, “The need for a relationship is not necessarily strong.” For example, “...after some due diligence questioning the CFO via videoconference, I didn’t have to fly just for another meeting in an office to get more questions answered only to then leave.” Another respondent indicated, “You may not be familiar in an interpersonal way but you respect what they do and trust they’re serious about something you care about. I

don't always need interpersonal familiarity but, I always need that sense of trust in what somebody's doing.”

Propositions 3 and 4 were assessed similarly by the respondents, effectively answered together and supported. Separately they introduced confusion as respondents, initially, associated the idea of business travel to mean traveling as an activity to meet with specific people rather than the more strategic idea of meeting with a person or organization for cause. However, if there was a need to ask for clarity, they took time to contemplate the difference and responded accordingly. Proposition 3; “Familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the senior executive is meeting associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through face-to-face communication.” Proposition 4; “Familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the executive is meeting associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through computer mediated communication.” The answer to these questions focused on established relationships versus emerging ones as well as culture and respect for the other party supporting both propositions. The support for these two propositions is indicated by one respondent referencing computer mediated communication, “I think it can be maintained for a while. I struggle with really having great...with thinking you're going to have great success initiating a good relationship, which you will be able to build upon, doing it via CMC.” Additionally, respondents indicated there is a relationship maintenance aspect. For example, one respondent stated, “I think you can reduce the role of business travel but I do not think you can eliminate it. That said, I'll become more sensitive to travel to the same place again and

again. That's the maintenance piece. The finished work that can be done on a computer interface."

Proposition 5, "Trust in the institution with which the senior executive is interacting influence whether a senior executive chooses to travel for the purpose of conducting business," was supported with emphasis on analysis respondents conduct when assessing the purpose for business travel. Whether working to establish, maintain or assess the business relationship, an acceptable level of trust in the interest of conducting business is at the root of the purpose for business travel. This analysis was captured by one respondent stating, "I think trust is obviously one of many but trust is, for me, one of the basics of a relationship and being able to be with someone in person enables you to build that trust but also gauge the trust." The emphasis here, however, is on individual relationships representing both the individual and the organization the individual represents.

Proposition 6: "Senior executives travel as an escape," is supported as well. Again though, with conditions summarized by one respondent, "I think it is a little bit of a release as well. It does give you that opportunity to shake your head out of the space you're in and move but, it kind of depends on what [the trip] is."

Proposition 7: "Senior executives view travel as a form of compensation." Senior executives may feel that, regardless of their salary, bonus, and other benefits they are provided (formally or informally), travel benefits are part of their compensation package. With respect to travel benefits as a formal part of their compensation package, this proposition was supported specifically only by one of the respondents who indicated travel benefits as part of their formal compensation

package. However, all respondents mentioned both positive benefits of travel, in addition to travel for the purpose of conducting business, as well as negative aspects. Respondents indicated they view travel as providing some benefit, in addition to facilitating business goal achievement, to them personally. This was captured in a quote, “I don’t look at it as compensation, but it can be rewarding.” Another respondent summarized, “I talk about this very often. Sometimes it is so brutal, I think, this isn’t fun. But then there are times when you go to New York and you can tag on a weekend and catch up with friends and then you’re like; How good is this?”

The final proposition, Proposition 8: “Senior executives travel as a form of pleasure,” was supported as all respondents alluded to the personal benefits, despite the drawbacks, in some positive manner. They did so communicating through statements such as, “It’s an escape from reality, I just think it’s so enriching” and, “If you know you’re going someplace, it’s a great destination you’ve got to be at, either having leisure time, golf, or a nice dinner, and with people that you consider friends. Yeah, it can be. Definitely, can be.”

The results of study one demonstrated support for the propositions. However, limitations of this research include the COVID-19 pandemic related restrictions which hampered interviewee availability and extended the IRB review process. In short, the IRB review process took an extended amount of time due to efficiencies lost while reviewers worked from decentralized locations. Additionally, the planning of interviews and coordination of mutually agreeable time slots also took longer, as interviewees as anecdotally told, to coordinate their own calendars in the chaotic atmosphere of the pandemic. Also, while the pilot study intended to test the propositions, the total number

of interviews (N = 6), was a small sample. While senior executives are considered an elite group, further research is necessary to reach saturation. Lastly, consistent with the small sample size, the research was inclusive of more than one organization yet additional industry representation is necessary in further research. Senior executives in this pilot research represented a variety of industries and specialties including business aviation, medical service providers, construction management, government affairs, sales and marketing, as well as global insurance. The interest in further research is gaining insight from additional executives representing a variety of these industries.

The research was proposed to more fully understand why business executives travel in the digital age. As a leader in the private travel and transportation business, specifically corporate ground and air travel, the researcher explored the gap in research between the economic reasons for business travel, such as increasing sales (Alverson, 1972), improved productivity (noplanenogain.org, 2020) or assessment of managerial perquisites (Hersch, et al., 1992), and the development of relationships through direct communication.

The researcher was particularly focused on social capital and relational capital, a subset of social capital; that which considers the quality of relationships within a social network (Moran, 2005, p. 1129). This focus of interest will contribute to the fields of business knowledge and practice where this information will be of particular use in an area such as strategic management where, according to Moran (2005), “studies of social capital are especially exciting for the field of strategic management.” It will also contribute to the field of human resources, travel industry leadership, information technology professionals responsible for computer mediated communication as well as

business executives themselves. This research will additionally be of value to those studying organizational structure, management information systems, leadership in a virtual world and sociology. At the core of this research is the importance of focusing on existing problems such as cost control, building of trusting relationships and ultimately organizational performance utilizing theory to address those problems (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001).

<b>Table 7.</b>			
<i>Study One Proposition Summary Results</i>			
	Proposition	# of Respondents	# of Respondents in Support
1	Is the purpose of senior executive travel to build trust with both internal and external business partners?	6	6
2	Do senior executives travel for business to proactively mitigate the risk of internal or external business partner malfeasance?	6	4
3	Is familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the senior executive is meeting associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through face-to-face communication?	6	6
4	Is familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the executive is meeting associated with whether or not that executive chooses to engage a business partner through computer mediated communication?	6	5
5	Is trust in the institution with which the senior executive interacting influence whether a senior executive chooses to travel for the purpose of conducting business?	6	4
6	Do senior executives travel as an escape?	6	5
7	Do senior executives view travel as a form of compensation?	6	1
8	Do senior executives travel as a form of pleasure?	6	6

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **STUDY TWO**

#### Introduction

Business executives may question whether money or time should be spent on computer mediated communication as well as their presumption of savings of time versus physical travel. While much of the research in the area of business travel and CMC has focused on economic impacts, few studies have explored their sociological impact with specific reference to social and relational capital. Current global affairs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, typified by forced closure of businesses, schools and borders, have been cause for a shift in the way people communicate and the tools they use to communicate with. The use of CMC became, for those not co-located, the only way to communicate during quarantine as commercial travel had all but stopped with year over year air travel down 89% ([www.bts.gov](http://www.bts.gov), 2020), for example, in May of 2020 alone. Following study one, this research provided a more thorough understanding of what medium people chose to utilize for the purpose of conducting business, why they chose that medium, and the impact that choice may have on business relationships but does not focus on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whether executive business travelers hearken back to pre-pandemic levels or adjust travel having recognized that travel for the purpose of conducting business has a suitable alternative, or something in between, is yet to be determined. This research is positioned to contribute to the understanding of business executive travel, the purpose of it and how the business executive views both travel for the purpose of conducting

business as well as computer mediated communication for the purpose of conducting business. Bathelt and Turi (2011) found that while there is no replacement for face-to-face interaction, increasingly, computer mediated communication can be advantageous in support of establishing networks over geo-spatially separated locations. While the requirement for clear communication to support an ongoing business concern remains, perhaps the need for business travel for the purpose of meeting face-to-face has changed.

Results of study one demonstrated support for the propositions and the continuation to this research in study two. Although proposition 7 regarding compensation was supported by only one interviewee the remaining propositions were supported by 4 or more of the 6 interviewees. Additionally, the support for proposition 7 came with the qualification that it was only viewed as compensation for a limited time under specific circumstances that no other respondent identified. While the question of compensation was supported by only one interviewee, the theme of benefits associated with business travel such as perquisites, social experiences, and escape emerged. As a result, the researcher was able to develop study two based on the findings of the pilot study, to further explore these areas enhancing the richness of the data by making small changes to the interview questions using the mirroring technique which uses language the interviewees use themselves (Myers, 2020). The researcher also adjusted the propositions associated with familiarity and trust. The changes eliminated confusion associated with proposition 5 in the pilot study regarding institutional trust by focusing the question of business travels' relationship with trust on proposition 1 (Table 12).

Limitations of the pilot study included small sample size (N=6), COVID-19 pandemic related restrictions which hampered interviewee availability, and an extended IRB review process due to efficiencies lost while reviewers worked from decentralized locations. Additionally, the planning of interviews and coordination of mutually agreeable time slots also took longer in the pilot study as interviewees worked to coordinate their own calendars in the chaotic atmosphere of the pandemic. This process was not hampered for study two as both the researcher and interviewees became more adept at coordinating schedules, handling necessary adjustments to respective calendars, and scheduling interviews utilizing the tools associated with computer mediated communication. Although pandemic related challenges such as remote work remained, it ultimately did not affect the response rate of interviewees to the researchers request for an interview for either study. Lastly, consistent with the sample size, the research was inclusive of more than one organization yet additional industry representation is necessary in further research (Myers, 2020).

Senior executives in the pilot research represented a variety of industries and specialties including business aviation, medical service providers, construction management, government affairs, sales and marketing, as well as global insurance. The additional interest in further research is gaining insight from additional executives representing a variety of these industries. The gap in research regarding senior executive travel for the purpose of conducting business offers an opportunity to better understand how senior executives analyze business travel for themselves and subsequently their organization. Previous research regarding business travel has mainly focused on the financial implications of business travel and research regarding social capital has

focused on individuals with respect to career path development or, organizations in terms of human resources and firm performance (Byun, et al., 2018) as outlined in Table 1. Previous research regarding alternatives to business travel (Bathelt & Turi, 2011) focus on firm performance further highlighting the gap which offers an opportunity to focus on social capital with specific respect to senior executives to fill that gap.

The results of the researchers' pilot study required further exploration into the core areas of interest to senior executives' purpose of travel and while senior executives are considered an elite group, those that hold senior management positions within an organization (Harvey, 2011), further research was deemed necessary to reach saturation. Study Two also used an interpretive, flexible pattern matching approach (Bouncken, et al., 2021). The main areas of interest for the second study were; relationship building, relationship maintenance, senior executive travel for the purpose of analysis, and the social capital associated with these core tenets including networking, cognitive understanding and trust. The second research study was used to evaluate consistency from pilot study to the full research study.

### Methodology

The pilot study evaluated the question; why do senior executives travel for the purpose of conducting business? While the results of that pilot study demonstrate a focus on trust, relationships, relationship maintenance, traveling for the purpose of analyzing circumstances, situations, and people as well as relationship building, the second research study progressed to further explore these areas more in-depth. Some of what was gained from the pilot study is some diffusion of the idea that senior

executives travel is viewed as compensation. Only one of the executives in the pilot study (N=6) indicated that travel was a formal part of their compensation package and that package was for a specific assignment which, once completed, ended the additional compensation for travel. None of the executives in the second study (N=29) indicated that travel was a formal part of their compensation package.

The second research study utilized qualitative methods using an interpretive, flexible pattern mapping approach (Bouncken, et al., 2021) through an additional series of semi-structured interviews of senior executives (Pearse, 2019). Senior executives are defined here as a Director, Vice President, geography General Manager, government equivalent (e.g., GS-15) or higher. Senior executive interviewees represented a variety of industries and roles sourced using convenience sampling (N=19), a sampling strategy that utilizes interviewees that are readily accessible and available (Myers, 2020) and, subsequently, snow-ball sampling (N=10), a strategy that builds on the depth and breadth of interviewees using interviewees referred to the researcher by other interviewees (Small, 2009). The researcher mitigated the risk of bias associated with interviewees being part of one social network by selecting interviewees with varying roles and responsibilities from a variety of industries including consulting, manufacturing, cloud computing, telecommunications, business support services, customer service, construction, health care, pharmaceuticals, retail, data management, design, higher education, software management and travel management (N=22) (Myers, 2020). Interviewee roles included; Chief Executive Officer (C.E.O.) (N=5), President (N=4), Managing Partner (N=2), Chief Financial Officer (C.F.O.)(N=2), Chief Marketing

Officer (C.M.O.)(N=2), Chief Operating Officer (C.O.O)(N=2), Senior Vice President (S.V.P.)(N=3), Vice President (V.P.)(N=7) and General Manager (N=2).

Interview questions were standardized, open-ended questions, as outlined in the interview guide (Appendix B), that afforded the researcher the opportunity to ensure consistency by using the guide with each interviewee while encouraging the interviewee to provide answers based on their own experience (Turner, 2010). This revised interview guide which eliminated questions that introduced confusion also served to aide in providing clarity regarding questions associated with propositions 3 and 4 in the pilot study specifically around the construct of familiarity.

This methodology afforded the opportunity to explore why senior executives travel for the purpose of conducting business in their own words. The focus of this continuation was on social and relational capital. Propositions and interview questions (Appendix B) have been further developed to address that purpose with respect to relationship building, trust, networking, relationship maintenance, the analysis of business partners and organizations, and how the purpose of travel is evaluated. Moreover, flexible pattern matching is an evolving, qualitative method designed to reference theory with experience and insight from gathered data (Bouncken, et al., 2021). Flexible pattern matching additionally, provides a logic to understand social research referencing prior theory with observations and comparing prior knowledge. Flexible pattern matching, “allows the interaction of deductive and inductive components thus combining rigor with a high level of flexibility” (Bouncken, et al., 2021, p. 252) beyond that of partial pattern mapping associated with Grounded Theory (Myers, 2020). Flexible pattern mapping incorporates an inductive element drawing on the researchers experience

in addition to the deductive reasoning associated with reference to prior theory, accumulated data and the subsequent building of patterns.

The second study also implemented techniques to mitigate confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is the interpretation of information that reinforces prior beliefs (Nickerson, 1998). Villarroel, et al. (2016) further explain that confirmation bias is a risk to researchers conducting inductive research as it is a collection of biases based on how individuals look to confirm their own beliefs and neglect evidence that contradicts those beliefs. The researcher, to mitigate the tendency to interpret evidence in a way that reinforces pre-conceived beliefs, included interview questions that sought to elicit disconfirming views of social capital and the value of travel for the purpose of conducting business.

The literature review (Table 1) included areas of associated previous research which focused on areas widely considered when evaluating travel for the purpose of conducting business. Specifically, these areas included economics and the value of suitable alternatives to business travel such as computer mediated communication (Zimmer & Henry, 2015). Trust, a key component of relational capital (Kale, et al., 2000), was also reviewed along with computer mediated communication as an alternative to business travel. Authors such as Picolli & Ives (2005) provide good reference associated with the economics of suitable alternatives to business travel having emphasized efficiencies gained when firms implement technological solutions which gain employees time and subsequently save employers money. This research was limited in that it did not sufficiently consider the benefits of travel such as networking as did Chen, et al (2009). These areas provide the foundation to my propositions, reiterated below, for

the second research study regarding the question of why senior executives travel for the purpose of conducting business.

*Proposition 1:* The purpose of senior executive travel is to build trust with both internal and external business partners.

Senior executives are aware of the benefits of face-to-face communication and choose, when able, to travel in-order-to gain the sociological benefits of face-to-face communication including, ability to assess body language, tone, and culture – both geographic and organizational, in-order-to inform decision making. This advantage may also include the identification of a person, or persons, motivated by the opportunity to exploit trust – take advantage of trust for self-serving reasons (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001), thereby eroding trust, as mutual trust leads to the benefits of access to knowledge held by others which then contributes to enhanced revenue generation (Byun et al., 2018). In summary, the cognitive contribution of face-to-face communication to inform through complex signals reduces uncertainty and aides in the building of trust (Bathelt & Turi, 2011).

*Proposition 2:* Senior executives travel for business to proactively mitigate the risk of internal or external business partner malfeasance.

Dirks and Ferrin (2001) indicated that while proactively working to build high levels of trust can lead to greater cooperation, it may also put the trusting partner at risk of exploitation. They highlight that a high level of trust will result in being taken advantage of 25% of the time. Wilson, et al. (2005) further indicate that in-order-to engage in cooperative activity, a fundamental element of group work is trust and members of a group must be able to either monitor each other or trust each other.

Birasnav, et al. (2019) additionally highlight the enduring nature of collaborative relationships that are dependent on the continuing commitment of both parties to maintain a level of trust. That commitment is demonstrated through the mutual fulfilment of needs required to accomplish their respective goals and lack of trust counters that by having adverse consequences for both parties.

*Proposition 3:* Familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the senior executive is meeting, is associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through face-to-face communication.

Prior research (Wilson et al., 2005) suggested that familiarity is a determinant in the investment of time necessary to develop trust. “Both what you know and who you know impacts performance” (Byun, et al., 2018, p. 1803). If executives have an established relationship with a person or group, perhaps travel for the purpose of meeting face-to-face can be reduced or replaced by computer mediated communication. However, if, as Wilson, et al. (2005) suggest in their research on the development of trust through computer mediated communication, trust development takes more time when compared to face-to-face communication then an executive may opt to meet face-to-face. Therefore, senior executives will choose to travel for the purpose of conducting business, gaining familiarity in a more expeditious manner rather than expend an inordinate amount of time on computer mediated communication.

*Proposition 4:* Familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the executive is meeting is associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through computer mediated communication.

Byun et al. (2018) found that the investment an individual makes in building trust resulted in improved access to resources controlled by the other party. Additionally, according to Dirks and Ferrin (2005), managers who seek to build high levels of trust, or protect against the perils associated with low levels of trust, must work to establish the desired level of trust. If executives do not have an established relationship with a person or group, travel for the purpose of meeting face-to-face may be necessary to establish familiarity and build trust. Social capital and its subset, relational capital, are the product of an individual's network of relationships. The value of that network is determined by how well the individual can leverage the trust, mutual commitment, and cooperation to meet specific goals (Cummings & Dennis, 2018). However, familiarity can be gained through means other than face-to-face communication such as social media to inform potential partners. In further support of their research, and this question, Cummings and Dennis (2018) found that trust was granted presumptively in a virtual team environment dependent upon how information about others was presented.

*Proposition 5: Senior executives travel as an escape.*

The demands on a senior executive's time can be incessant. Their schedules are managed quite precisely and often provide little personal time away from "the noise" associated with their role and physical office space. When a senior executive is traveling, whether by airplane, train, or car, away from their office they may be free of the distractions inherent with their office. When free from distractions such as phones, drop-in ad-hoc meetings, and duties associated with their role, they gain sanctuary. In

this vein, travel could constitute a way to rest, reflect, contemplate and prepare for next steps, or otherwise be free of real or perceived obligations.

*Proposition 6:* Senior executives view travel as a form of compensation.

Senior executives may feel that, regardless of their salary, bonus, and other benefits provided (formally or informally), travel benefits are part of their compensation package.

Aside from compensation, senior executives may be formally entitled, or feel informally entitled due to their position, title, and/or seniority, to certain perquisites in addition to their compensation package. They may travel for the purpose of taking advantage of these benefits, whether real or perceived, and adopt business travel as part of their identity and lifestyle (Gustafson, 2012). This benefit may be in the form of formal agreements such as timeshares on the company owned airplane, or the affordance of access to a fractional share of an airplane managed and maintained by a service provider such as FlexJet, NetJets, or Wheels-Up (Sweeney, 2006). They may also have access to charter aircraft services or exclusive privileges associated with commercial airlines such as airline sponsored airport lounges, express check-in, free baggage allowances, and expedited security screening, which they view as part of their compensation and which they intend to take advantage of.

*Proposition 7:* Senior executives travel as a form of pleasure.

Psychologists have demonstrated that the search for pleasure is a powerful motivator and certain types of pleasure are attained through status and the projection of power (Storper & Venebles, 2004). Senior executives that value the projection of power as a part of their leadership style engage in business travel for the purpose of

reinforcing their sense of self-worth, position, prestige and/or rank within the organization they represent. While it may be pernicious, a sign of a weak leader, and counter to modern leadership, a core reason for such an executive to travel may be to instill a certain fear factor on the party with whom they interact and the travel itself aides in advancing the goal of intimidation.

Countering the negative aspect in what may be a more traditional or intuitive assessment of travel as a form of pleasure includes a personal evaluation of the benefits of travel. Chen and Petrick (2016) indicate that there are three main benefits of travel; experiential - includes the exposure to new things, relaxation – a release from work and family obligations, and health - includes mental and physical improvements. While their research was focused on a group of survey participants who represented a wide-range of ages (18 – 70 years of age) and were drawn from a survey company database, it is possible that senior executives associate business travel with these same benefits.

The second research study utilized qualitative methods using an interpretive, flexible pattern mapping approach (Bouncken, et al., 2021) through an additional series of semi-structured interviews of senior executives (Pearse, 2019). Qualitative methods focus on words, processes, and meanings to understand a phenomenon, and qualitative research is interested in answering the why question (Gephart, 2004; Pearse, 2019). Interpretive research specifically examines the phenomena being studied in context with the goal of understanding through the subject's perspective, language, and words. This approach is best suited to examine why senior executives travel for business because interpretive research is most appropriate when trying to understand a phenomenon

through the meanings individuals assign to them (Myers, 2020). Business executives are decision makers. While firms may have a travel policy, and individual executives may have some self-imposed guidelines, they are not known to be universal. The approach to interpretive research is taking an inside look from the subject, in this case interviewees, perspective affording business executives who make decisions about their travel to express the reason(s) they travel in their own words.

The researcher utilized a series of semi-structured interviews affording interviewees the opportunity to answer a set of pre-determined questions facilitating a free-flowing discussion about their reason(s) for engaging in business travel. The researcher conducted the interviews with senior executives representing a variety of companies using the interview protocol refinement (IRP) process. This ensured the interview phase was congruous with the research contributing to the reliability of interview data and rigor of the research (Milagros Castillo-Montoya, 2016). This approach enabled open, free-flowing conversation allowing the researcher to gain an understanding of people's view on business travel through their own narrative. The senior executives were at the managing partner, vice president, geography general manager or government equivalent (GS-15) position or higher. The researcher did not seek to interview those that travel for the purpose of conducting manual labor at their destination such as maintenance technicians or oil field workers.

The number of interviews was guided by the pursuit of information from executives that represent several industries. Interviews were conducted either in-person (N=3) or via computer mediated communication (N=26) in an environment conducive to conversation. If the COVID-19 pandemic prevented in-person interviews, the interviews

were conducted through other means such as telephone or computer mediated communication such as Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, Inc., 2020). Every attempt was made to reduce external factors that introduce distractions, such as noise, telephones, televisions and unscheduled interruptions. The researcher asked the interviewees to silence their phone, assistants to avoid interruption and commitment to the time required well in advance. This assisted in the ability to schedule a mutually agreeable time. Furthermore, this approach supported the goal to be an effective and efficient manager of the interview and respectful of interviewees commitment of time in the furtherance of this research.

The researcher worked to accommodate the interviewees' schedule ahead of his own. Efforts to be supportive, flexible, and accommodating were the first step toward gaining the trust and confidence of the interviewee. Gaining the trust and confidence of the interviewee is a vital part of presenting oneself as a researcher when there is an expectation of gaining rich, insightful, and in-depth knowledge. That, of course, is the desired outcome of open conversation and unencumbered dialogue (Harvey, 2011). In the circumstance where in-person face-to-face interviews were not possible, which the researcher deemed likely as the COVID-19 pandemic showed no sign of retreat, the researcher used computer mediated communication, incorporating tools such as Zoom Video Communications (Zoom Video Communications, Inc., 2020). Ultimately, nearly 90% of the interviews (26 of 29) were conducted via computer mediated communication which itself provided the opportunity to explore proposition 4 regarding familiarity. Highlighting the point, one respondent indicated, "The demands on my time are high. If I

didn't get to meet you previously and, didn't find this research interesting, I would not have made the time.”

The approach to this research allowed for the capture of as much information, including hand gestures, body language and facial expressions, as possible. The researcher found the interviewees, regardless of how the interview was conducted, to be focused and engaged. None presented themselves as distracted and the researcher found no need to ask interviewees to turn off their phone or otherwise establish an environment which minimized distraction once the interviews began. The researcher facilitated this environment ahead of commencing the interview, in part, by reading the statement of purpose (Appendix C) and interview guide (Appendix B). The statement of purpose and interview guide worked to focus both the researcher and interviewee on the interview. The researcher also emphasized his own commitment to the interview by informing the interviewee that prior to the interview, the researcher had worked to block the time and minimize distractions. Additionally, the initial request for the interview was sent weeks in advance of the proposed interview date and included the researcher's interest in accommodating the interviewee at a mutually agreeable time most convenient for the interviewee.

Whether live on-camera or in-person, permission was received to record the interview, the purpose of the interview was disclosed, and the opportunity to end the interview at any time was offered. Moreover, the researcher informed interviewees that although an offer of complete anonymity was not possible, the researcher would make every reasonable effort to de-identify the interviewee, avoid publication of their identity or organization, and protect personal information through the use of assigning each

interviewee a unique number. All reasonable steps to secure the data through available means were used. Means to secure the data included keeping the recording device in a locked space when not in use, password protecting the computer used for documenting the research and password protecting any software i.e., Nvivo used to manage the data. Additionally, when any devices were not in a secured space, the researcher kept them under immediate control. The researcher also, when a network connection was required, used a password protected network and maintained a virtual private network (VPN) on the computer. Lastly, information shared was only available to the researcher and approved resources for transcribing and coding the data. Subsequent to the research, limited, edited data was available to the researchers committee members. Data that did not have permission to be shared was not included in the research. Lastly, the researcher offered to share final results of the research with individual interviewees for personal use if they were interested.

At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher had the recordings transcribed via rev.com, or similar service, used any interview notes, and took steps to code the interviews as soon as practical following the interview. This proactive approach to data collection and subsequent coding afforded the opportunity to contemplate the quality of the interview, consider the overall performance of the researcher and the interviewee, and ensure time from actual interview to capturing the essence in search of themes was minimized (Myers, 2020). These steps reduced the risk of losing essential data to the ravages of time. The researcher used In Vivo coding techniques, the language and words of the interviewee, to code the data set (Miles et al., 2020) with conceptual codes using gerunds (Chametzky, 2016) and subsequently interpretive or selective codes when

applicable (Myers, 2020). The researcher made use of the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program NVIVO to assist in the thematic analysis and pattern mapping search for themes throughout the interview process (Sinkovics, 2017).

Contributing factors in selection of interviewees and total number of interviews included ensuring the research was inclusive of a variety of industries, organizations, roles, and both male and female senior executives with varied backgrounds. The research concluded with eight interviews in study one and twenty-nine in study two and it was determined that saturation had been reached as no new information was being gained from additional interviews (Lin, et al., 2001). Additionally, representation included senior executives from the retail, design, manufacturing, higher education, telecommunications, global information technology, construction, data management, marketing, healthcare, pharmaceutical, professional services, staffing, and government affairs.

Interviews were conducted with those considered elite (Harvey, 2011). In order to address the concerns associated with research in this area of society, the researcher referenced the four-phase approach advocated by Castillo-Montoya (2016). This approach ensured an inquiry-based conversation, that interview questions aligned with research questions, and remained open and considerate of feedback. The researcher piloted the interviews meaning, the researcher ensured the conversational nature of the interview and maintained focus on the inquiry using the pilot study as a test bench – interviewing executives ahead of the second study interviews to assess validity, structure and responsiveness (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

This research relied on the interviewees own words gathering data from respective senior business executives to assess their purpose for business travel. In line

with social capital theory, the researcher explored the role of travel in establishing a relationship in which trust is a core element. The researcher examined the executive's belief in travel as necessary for the purpose of building a relationship with potential business partner(s), maintenance of relationships, business analysis, business travel as a form of compensation, escape or projecting power, and influence. Additionally, the researcher sought to gain executives insight into perceived levels of trust established via face-to-face meetings versus computer mediated communication and why an executive may travel referencing the perceived difference.

Table 8 provides a list of interviewees, their respective title and frequency of trips conducted per year. The researcher submitted a request to schedule an interview by electronic mail to a total of forty (40) senior executives and interviewed a total of thirty-seven (37) senior executives including twenty-nine (29) in study number two resulting in an overall response rate of nearly ninety-three percent (92.5%). The mean length of the interviews was forty-seven (47) minutes. Three executives did not respond to the interview request and two in the pilot study were considered practice interviews therefore, their data was not included. These senior executives represented twenty-six different companies ranging in size from less than 100 employees to over 100,000 employees with a mean of 22,007 employees. This is an experienced cohort of business travelers with a mean age of fifty-four (54) and mean number of trips per year of forty-three (43). These are individuals who have reached practical mastery – they are at the top of their game (Bourdeau, 1990).

The researcher identified the interviewee by assigning a unique number to protect their real name for the sake of documenting each interviewee however, the number is not

material to the research. The researcher also gathered the firm name, industry, title, size of the firm, frequency of travel and mode of travel of each interviewee. This demographic information may be used to gain insight into these areas assessing how they may be different with primary interest on firm size, industry, role, and mode of travel which are areas for future research.

**Table 8.***Summary List of Study Two Interviewees*

<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Sample Type</u>	<u>Title/Role</u>	<u>Industry</u>	<u>Size of Firm (number of employees)</u>	<u>Frequency of Travel (# of trips per annum)</u>	<u>Primary Mode(s) of Travel</u>
1	Convenience	President & Managing Partner	Professional Services	<100	50	Commercial Air, Company Owned Aircraft
2	Snowball	C.E.O.	Professional Services	<100	12	Commercial Air, Regional Rail
3	Convenience	Senior Vice President, Sales	Manufacturing	>10,000	40	Commercial Air, Company Owned Aircraft
4	Convenience	President & C.E.O.	Government Affairs	<100	50	Commercial Air
5	Convenience	Vice President	Retail	>50,000	35 - 40	Commercial Air
6	Convenience	Chief Marketing Officer	Manufacturing	>10,000	20	Commercial Air, Company Owned Aircraft

**Table 8***(Continued)*

7	Snowball	G.M., North America	Global IT & Telecommunications	>10,000	40 - 50	Commercial Air & Automobile
8	Convenience	Senior Vice President, Sales	Manufacturing	>10,000	40	Commercial Air, Company Owned Aircraft
9	Convenience	Vice President, Marketing	Pharmaceuticals	>100,000	15	Commercial Air
10	Convenience	Vice President, G.M.	Retail	>50,000	12	Commercial Air
11	Convenience	President	Commercial Construction	>100	80	Commercial Air, Company Owned Aircraft
12	Convenience	Senior Vice President, Sales	Manufacturing	>10,000	25 - 30	Commercial Air, Company Owned Aircraft
13	Convenience	President, Customer Support	Manufacturing	>10,000	40	Commercial Air, Company Owned Aircraft

**Table 8.***(Continued)*

14	Snowball	President & C.E.O.	Healthcare	>1,000	30	Commercial Air, Automobile
15	Convenience	C.F.O.	Retail	>50,000	15	Commercial Air, Company Owned Aircraft
16	Convenience	President & C.E.O.	Specialized Product Design	<100	NA	Commercial Air
17	Snowball	Vice President	Communications and Data Management	>1,000	150 - 200	Automobile
18	Convenience	President	Data Management	<100	24	Commercial Air
19	Snowball	Vice President, Strategy	Digital Operations Management	>100	100	Commercial Air
20	Snowball	Vice President, Strategic Alliances	Higher Education	>10,000	NA	Automobile

**Table 8.***(Continued)*

21	Snowball	President, Managing Partner	Professional Services	<100	40 - 50	Commercial Air
22	Convenience	C.F.O.	Pharmaceuticals	>100,000	24	Commercial Air
23	Snowball	Vice President, Sales	Digital Intelligence	>100	25 - 35	Commercial Air, Automobile
24	Convenience	C.O.O.	Transportation Management and Maintenance	>100	30 - 40	Commercial Air
25	Convenience	C.O.O.	Software Management	<100	35	Commercial Air
26	Convenience	C.E.O.	Construction Management	<100	50	Commercial Air
27	Convenience	President	Transportation Support Services	>1,000	20 - 30	Commercial Air
28	Snowball	G.M.	Cloud Computing	>10,000	50	Commercial Air
29	Snowball	Chief Marketing Officer	Travel & Expense Management	>1,000	25 -30	Commercial Air

Table 9 illustrates the connection between research constructs and specific interview questions laid out in Appendix B. Table 10 provides the themes for study two derived from both the pilot study and the researchers thirty years of business travel experience which served as a starting point in study two (Myers, 2020). These themes were further developed through the use of the mind map function embedded in the Nvivo computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. Subsequently, interpretive (Myers, 2020) or conceptual (Chametzky, 2016) codes depicted in Table 9 were developed to mark the interviews utilizing the transcribed interviews uploaded to Nvivo.

The interviews were semi-structured consisting of open-ended questions to facilitate open dialogue and conversation through the interview yet capturing information relevant to the topic at hand (Myers, 2020). The guiding questions provided boundaries to ensure efficiency and focus as well as good time management and information flow. The questions were designed to relate to the constructs as directly as possible without leading the interviewee. This ensured the data gathered was rich, considered bias and related directly to the guiding research questions.

**Table 9.***Summary Table of Constructs in Study Two Interview Questions*

<u>Construct</u>	<u>Question</u>	<u>Interview Guide Question #</u>
Business Partners	<p>Does familiarity, or lack of, with the institution or person(s) with whom you are doing business influence your decision to travel?</p> <p>What do you think about building Social Capital?</p> <p>Do you think traveling to meet face-to-face to build social capital is over-hyped?</p>	Questions 15 & 16
Compensation	Do you view travel as a form of compensation?	Question 25
Computer Mediated Communication	<p>Do you think there are suitable alternatives for travel? Under what circumstances do you use them?</p> <p>What do you get out of business travel that you can't get out of alternatives such as Zoom?</p>	Questions 20 & 21
Escape	Do you view travel as an escape or form of release? Please provide examples.	Question 26
Face-to-Face Communication	<p>What is most valuable to you about business travel?</p> <p>Do you ever find business travel to be a waste of time?</p> <p>Do you ever find meeting face-to-face to be intrusive?</p>	Questions 7 & 28
Familiarity	Does familiarity, or lack of, with the institution or person(s) with whom you are doing business influence your decision to travel?	Question 15

**Table 9***(Continued)*

Malfeasance	<p>What are your core reasons to meet with people?</p> <p>Does trust in the person(s) or organization with whom you meet factor into your decision to travel?</p>	Questions 14 & 17
Institution	<p>What are your core reasons to meet with people?</p> <p>Does familiarity, or lack of, with the institution or person(s) with whom you are doing business influence your decision travel?</p>	Questions 14 & 15
Perquisite	<p>Do you view travel as a form of compensation?</p>	Question 25
Pleasure	<p>Do you have a favorite way to travel?</p> <p>Do you view travel as an escape or release?</p> <p>What are some other reasons you might travel for business?</p>	Questions 11 & 26

<b>Table 10.</b>	
<i>Study Two Themes</i>	
Theme	Description
Analyzing	Examining the person, organization, or facility with whom the Senior Executive is meeting
Benefitting	That which is gained from business travel in the form of social capital, formal or informal compensation, experience, perquisite or pleasure
Facilitating	The means by which a senior executive is communicating – face-to-face or via computer mediated communication to achieve desired outcomes
Investing	The expenditure of money, time, or other resources for the purpose of meeting
Social Capitalizing	One of three primary components of social capital – structural, relational, or cognitive

<b>Table 11.</b>		
<i>Themes to Interpretive Code</i>		
Theme	Interpretive Code	Code Definition
Analyzing	Budgeting & Considering	Contemplating the monetary cost of travel or return on investment
Analyzing	Evaluating	Performance of people, processes, or organizations
Analyzing	Sensing	Non-verbal cues
Analyzing	Strategizing	Determining the path forward
Benefitting	Formal Compensating	Monetary reward
Benefitting	Informal Compensating	Perquisite, Escape, Experiencing
Facilitating	Face-to-Facing	Interacting in-person
Facilitating	Computer Mediated Communicating (CMC)	Interacting through means other than in-person
Facilitating	Replacing	Moving from face-to-face communication to CMC or vice versa
Facilitating	Replacing	Interchanging meeting face-to-face for meeting via computer mediated communication
Familiarizing	Informing	Learning from, presenting, or projecting information to, a person or organization
Familiarizing	Inspecting	Interacting with, observing, or reviewing a person(s) or organization
Investing	Committing	Deciding to take a course or action
Social Capitalizing	Cognitive	Understanding, and interpreting shared messages including expectations and cultural norms
Social Capitalizing	Structuring	Networking
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Relationship building including socializing
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Relationship maintenance
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Personalizing, projecting power, influencing, and signaling
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Trusting
Social Capitalizing	Relational	Engaging and interacting for the purpose of learning or informing

## Study Two Results

Results of study two, similar to the pilot study, show support for some, but not all, propositions summarized in Table 12.

Proposition 1; “The purpose of senior executive travel to build trust with both internal and external business partners,” is supported. As was the case with the pilot study, interviewees identified an interest in traveling for the purpose of building trust, and evaluating trustworthiness, with comments such as, “So, it starts with that initial discussion. If you’re going to build a successful long-term, trustful relationship with someone, it needs to, I think, start with a direct physical interaction. It’s very hard to do it remotely.” Another response in support of proposition 1 was, “if you have an opportunity to meet with someone physically, I think you have a better way to assess the caliber of the person as opposed to other means, other electronic means.” Other respondents captured the essence of proposition 1 with comments such as, “When you go see them you get to understand whether their words and their actions match. Are they going to do what they say they’re going to do.” And, “There’s just something about being in the same room. I think it’s harder to look someone in the eye virtually and have the same impact as it is to look somebody in the eye face-to-face. The physical handshake on a deal or the desire to really solve someone’s problem comes through more.”

Respondents further indicate that the decision to travel is finalized through analysis of the purpose for travel with consideration given to more than one factor such as trust. Additional areas of consideration for the purpose of business travel are organizational expectations of the respondent to travel for business, culture -whether

there is an expectation to meet face-to-face as a sign of respect or prerequisite to conducting business, and prior experience with the people with whom the respondent will meet as indicated by, "...to build a relationship with them they expect, and culturally almost demand, you to be there in person and be present."

Financial impact was also identified as a consideration yet was not emphasized. While the senior executives acknowledged consideration of the expenditure with comments such as, "We saved a hundred million dollars on travel and I'd like to see something like that continue." However, the overarching view of it as a value proposition was represented by comments such as, "It's a value proposition. We would not chose to not take a trip based on cost. We chose to take a trip at a reasonable cost [whatever that cost might be] because we know there is a return on investment" and, "If we're not in the room, our competition will be."

There was also an emphasis on business travel becoming more focused and purposeful reflected in comments such as, "I'm not saying it's not relevant or valuable. I'm saying, it takes people away from their families, from their jobs, and it's exhausting. Get it down to what you actually need to do." Additionally, there is a clear belief in social capital as indicated by comments such as, "...fundamentally senior executives are traveling to build social capital, to build relational capital, to build trust. It's about the relationship." Lastly, in terms of building trust, one respondent summarized the view with, "It's much more effective when you're standing looking somebody or many people eye-to-eye, and you're saying, this will happen. I am promising you this. I am putting myself on the line. This is what we do. And I've come here to tell you that."

Proposition 2; “Senior executives travel for business to proactively mitigate the risk of internal or external business partner malfeasance,” was also supported. This was highlighted by a respondent in the pilot study indicating business travel “is about respect and enjoyment” for both parties. Interviewees in study two provided responses that described traveling for the purpose of conducting business as a show of respect demonstrating a commitment to the person with whom the respondent meets and a positive shared experience works to ensure mutual goals remain in focus. One respondent went on to say, “In a negative aspect, it’s about trust and making sure the body language matches the intent.” This was reinforced with comments such as, “...you gain confidence by understanding or watching and listening and hearing people do what they say they’re going to do which therefore builds trust and, “Character is probably what I’m referring to more.” Response in support of propositions 1 and 2 in both the pilot study and study two indicate these senior executives engage in a thoughtful, perpetual evaluation of the purpose for business travel. The evaluation includes the value of meeting face-to-face against suitable alternatives to travel such as communicating via computer mediated communication tools which include a mobile phone, Zoom (Zoom Communications, Inc., 2020) or electronic mail (e-mail) as indicated by, “if you’re going to look at a new factory, or talk to a selling team about an acquisition, that’s something you’re going to want to see some facial expressions on. If you want to establish a good rapport, a productive, trusting relationship, I think travel is a big help.”

Propositions 3 and 4 were, as in the case of the pilot study, assessed similarly as respondents, effectively answered together, and supported. Proposition 3;

“Familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the senior executive is meeting associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through face-to-face communication” and Proposition 4; “Familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the executive is meeting associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through computer mediated communication” were supported yet there is some variation with these propositions. For example, familiarity compels respondents to forgo meeting face-to-face to conduct “maintenance meetings” via CMC as indicated by remarks such as, “back to doing business at the speed of trust, if there’s a pre-established relationship there, you may not need to go and meet with them to get to a decision or to further the project along.”

Alternatively, others in the cohort suggested that meeting via CMC to establish familiarity is more efficient and meeting face-to-face is subsequent to further the relationship represented by, “The more familiar you are, the more likely you are to go meet face-to-face. [What] I find most valuable is the fact that there’s that ability that the person you were talking to through video or through phone, seeing them face-to-face and seeing the excitement when they get to [actually] see you. And then to be able to share a meal, I find that very valuable.” The support for these two propositions is consistent with the pilot study respondent referencing computer mediated communication stating, “I think it can be maintained for a while. I struggle with really having great...with thinking you’re going to have great success initiating a good relationship, which you will be able to build upon, doing it via CMC.”

Proposition 5, “Do senior executives view business travel as an escape,” was supported. The majority of senior executives (93%) see business travel as some form

of escape whether it be from the day-to-day “just getting away from the noise of the office” or seeking time to rest, reflect and re-charge in that, “It is a form of rejuvenation because I find that travel, stepping out of your day-to-day and changing your environment, gives you an opportunity to change your perspective and to look at things from a different angle.” It provides some separation, “sanctuary, a nice respite,” or “...a nice change up to life...” It can also be viewed however, as one respondent iterated while acknowledging the occasional opportunity to “get out of the house” as, “...it’s probably nicer more days than not to be able to go home and see your family and be able to sleep in your own bed and be able to do the things you want to do.”

Proposition 6: “Senior executives view travel as a form of compensation.”

Senior executives may feel that, regardless of their salary, bonus, and other benefits they are provided (formally or informally), travel benefits are part of their compensation package. With respect to travel benefits as a formal part of their compensation package, this proposition was not supported as indicated by comments such as simply, “no” to “I’m not uniquely compensated for the travel vis-à-vis my overall role. For me, it’s a component of the work I do.” In other words, while travel for the purpose of conducting business is viewed as essential to senior executives, it is not viewed as compensation. It is part of the job. That is not to say, however, that respondents did not indicate they view travel as providing some benefit, in addition to facilitating business goal achievement. To them personally, as was the case in the pilot study, this is captured in the quote, “I don’t look at it as compensation, but it can be rewarding” which leads to proposition 7.

The final proposition in Study Two, Proposition 7: “Senior executives travel as a form of pleasure,” was supported by 66% of study two respondents who alluded to the personal benefits, despite the drawbacks, in some positive manner. They did so communicating through statements such as, “It’s an escape from reality, I just think it’s so enriching” and, “If you know you’re going someplace, it’s a great destination you’ve got to be at, either having leisure time, golf, or a nice dinner, and with people that you consider friends. Yeah, it can be. Definitely, can be.”

The results of the study demonstrated majority support for the propositions with the exception of proposition 6 regarding compensation. Table 11 provides additional quotes along with the role and industry of the interviewee quoted. However, limitations of this research included the COVID-19 pandemic related restrictions which hampered interviewee availability, extended the IRB review process and potentially biased responses based on being subject to the quarantine and isolation associated with the pandemic. Opportunities for further research include, whether senior executive views are shared by those in middle management or lower organizational levels as one respondent indicated that going forward, “a hybrid approach to business travel is likely as senior executives will still be required to travel in order to complete transactions and build relationships however, middle managers may be asked to do more using virtual technology.” However, these senior executives are practical masters (Bourdieu, 1990) that were contemplative of what the pandemic brought on and clear about their views regarding the value of business travel as well as the advantages associated with computer mediated communication to advance their respective businesses.

The research was inclusive of more than one organization yet additional industry representation is necessary in further research. Senior executives in this research represented a variety of industries and specialties including retail, information technology management, business aviation, marketing, pharmaceuticals, medical service providers, construction management, government affairs, sales, and communications. The interest in further research is gaining insight from additional executives within specific industries as well as exploring views of those other than senior executives.

**Table 12.***Study Two Proposition Summary Results*

	Proposition	# of Respondents	# of Respondents in Support
1	Is the purpose of senior executive travel to build trust with both internal and external business partners?	29	29
2	Do senior executives travel for business to proactively mitigate the risk of internal or external business partner malfeasance?	29	29
3	Is familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the senior executive is meeting associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through face-to-face communication?	29	28
4	Is familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the executive is meeting associated with whether or not that executive chooses to engage a business partner through computer mediated communication?	29	29
5	Do senior executives travel as an escape?	29	27
6	Do senior executives view travel as a form of compensation?	29	0
7	Do senior executives view travel as a form of pleasure?	29	18

**Table 13.***Study Two Propositions and Quotes*

Proposition	Quote	Executive Title [Industry]
(1) Is the purpose of senior executive travel to build trust with both internal and external business partners?	<p>“I think the real value is in meeting people face-to-face to get the feedback, to establish relationships, to build trust, and to have a long- term relationship with people.”</p> <p>"There's just something about being in the same room. I think it's harder to look someone in the eye virtually and have the same impact as it is to look somebody in the eye face-to-face.”</p> <p>“People do business with people they trust, people that they have developed a relationship with.”</p>	<p>C.E.O. [Industrial Design]</p> <p>C.M.O. [Manufacturing]</p> <p>C.E.O. [Professional Services]</p>
(2) Do senior executives travel for business to proactively mitigate the risk of internal or external business partner malfeasance?	<p>“We went to [their location] for that discussion, because we really had no sense of whether or not what they say they wanted, or were going to do was close to what would actually transpire.”</p> <p>“But at key transactional points, it's also, I think, important to be face to face. There are certainly phases, and the more critical the phase, probably the more important it is for you to be face to face with someone.”</p> <p>“Even if they videotape it, actually I work with a small startup who has a factory in [Geographic area] and they send videos and it’s just like, ‘Some of this, you don't know if it's that real.’ We have another [example in same geographic area where, ‘I've been deceived more than once. I'll put it that way.’ That's never going away until you get virtual reality.”</p>	<p>C.F.O. [Pharmaceuticals]</p> <p>President [Professional Services]</p> <p>S.V.P. [Pharmaceuticals]</p>
(3) Is familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the senior executive is meeting associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through face-to-face communication?	<p>“We learned so much about like, oh, okay, we understand now why, they throw out half of the stuff that comes out from headquarters. Like, huh, that makes sense now that I see what's going on over here.”</p> <p>“It's not like they have to get every penny out of the deal, but they want to know that they're getting a good deal. Most of our customers at least feel like that they can make that judgment in person.”</p> <p>“Whenever I've met people face to face, I've really just enjoyed the non-scripted conversations that can sometime go on happening while you're walking or when you're driving somewhere, or you're in a restaurant and you're waiting for your check, or you're waiting for your food. Those conversations that happen are ...You're not going to get those through video.”</p>	<p>S.V.P. [Pharmaceuticals]</p> <p>S.V.P. [Manufacturing]</p> <p>C.E.O. [Construction Management]</p>

**Table 13.**

(continued)

Proposition	Quote	Executive Role [Industry]
(5) Do senior executives travel as an escape?	<p>“So, getting to sit on a flight and unplug from everything else. Not get onto video calls, not answer phone calls, and so forth. Just kind of clean things out, that definitely helps.”</p> <p>“I can definitely harken times when I sat down on a plane or walked into a hotel room I'm familiar with and been relieved.”</p> <p>“But after [number of] years of working and [number of] years at an executive level or so, some of treats of travel, those have worn a little thin probably at this point, it's probably nicer more days than not to be able to go home and see your family and be able to sleep in your own bed and be able to do the things that you want to do.”</p>	<p>V.P. [Communications and Data Management]</p> <p>Geography G.M. [Telecommunications]</p> <p>President [Manufacturing]</p>
(6) Do senior executives view travel as a form of compensation?	<p>“I'm paid and compensated to do my job, and part of doing my job requires me, at times, to travel.”</p> <p>“But even flying first class was not comfortable, not easy. And I was worn out when I got to the hotel room, and I just wanted to collapse. But prior to that, I learned that even a short haul like that, you don't arrive you're freshest, and at best, if you're having to deal with all the stuff that goes into modern-day travel, being shoveled into that tube it's just part of the job, not compensation.”</p>	<p>Geography G.M. [Telecommunications]</p> <p>C.E.O. [Healthcare]</p>
(7) Do senior executives view travel as a form of pleasure?	<p>“...You enjoy spending time with them. When I say hanging out, I don't just mean purely socially. I mean, like you, you enjoy being in the same place and doing some of the stuff that you do together.”</p> <p>“When I first started traveling..., I did, but it didn't last very long. Still, now there's a perception that people, some people enjoy travel. Some people enjoy the trappings of travel, deals in restaurants and hotels. And I think, there's some truth to that, based on the expense reports I look at periodically. It's not for me, though.”</p> <p>“I like traveling. So, I remember my first flight a company paid for, I was in a middle seat and I was so excited. I was like, ‘Yes. I'm being paid to go somewhere. This is amazing. There's a TV in front of me. People bring me drinks. There's snacks. I love this. I love traveling.”</p>	<p>President [Marketing]</p> <p>C.F.O. [Pharmaceuticals]</p> <p>President [Data Management]</p>

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the question; With an ever-evolving array of options to facilitate communication, why do senior executives travel for the purpose of conducting business? Connections can be made virtually whether the traveler intends to connect across town, across the country, or across the globe.

Understanding the utility and purpose of business travel lies in recognizing its value. This research focused on business travel and its applicability in an increasingly connected world. Business executives can virtually connect with customers, clients, suppliers, employees, and even competitors through computer mediated communication tools such as Google Meet, Zoom and Webex. They also have various methods by which they can travel, such as cars, buses, rail, and aircraft.

The researcher believes it is important to understand the fundamental reasons motivating business travel as well as potential cost-efficient substitutes for that travel and look beyond the taglines of industry associations such as the General Aircraft Manufacturers Association (GAMA) and the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) in their advocacy role through campaigns such as No Plane, No Gain ([noplanenogain.org](http://noplanenogain.org)). In so doing, this research aimed to promote sound strategic investments and decisions in support of the firm for the benefit of both academics and practitioners and frames business travel as an activity for a purpose or cause - to inform and influence.

The motivation for this research was to more fully understand why business executives travel in the digital age. From the outset, the researcher was interested in studying the purpose of senior executive travel from a behavioral perspective, a unique and novel approach. Consistent with Nahapiet et al. (1998), the researcher sought to explore whether senior executives share the perspective that “organizational advantage is fundamentally a social one.” Previous research has primarily focused on the economics of business travel such a return on investment (Collins & Tisdell, 2004), increasing sales (Alverson, 1972), and how individuals communicate through CMC versus face-to-face (Wilson et al., 2006). As a leader in the private travel and transportation business, specifically corporate ground and air travel, the researcher explored the gap in research between the economic reasons for business travel, such as increasing sales (Alverson, 1972), improved productivity (noplanenogain.org, 2020) or assessment of managerial perquisites (Hersch, et al., 1992), and the development of relationships through direct communication. In so doing, this research informs strategic investments and decisions with specific respect to senior executive travel for the purpose of conducting business. This approach resulted in a material contribution to the existing research. Specifically, this research identified a gap previously unexplored.

The cumulative findings of these two studies are depicted in Table 14.

<b>Table 14.</b>				
<i>Cumulative Summary Results</i>				
	Proposition	# of Respondents	# of Respondents in Support	% in Support
1	Is the purpose of senior executive travel to build trust with both internal and external business partners?	35	35	100
2	Do senior executives travel for business to proactively mitigate the risk of internal or external business partner malfeasance?	35	33	94
3	Is familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the senior executive is meeting associated with whether that executive chooses to engage a business partner through face-to-face communication?	35	34	97
4	Is familiarity with the person, or persons, with whom the executive is meeting associated with whether or not that executive chooses to engage a business partner through computer mediated communication?	35	34	97
5	Do senior executives travel as an escape?	35	32	91
6	Do senior executives view travel as a form of compensation?	35	1	3
7	Do senior executives view travel as a form of pleasure?	35	24	69

This research has implications for a cross-section of academics, business practitioners, and executives. For example, in the case of business, the balance between cost and benefit is a perpetual struggle. Senior executives evaluate whether or not to travel, for the purpose of conducting business, much like many business decisions. They contemplate the idea that every dollar or block of time invested in support of one endeavor may be spent in support of another. In other words, they consider the return on investment when making business travel decisions using several reference points. It can be a complex and nuanced investment decision, despite prior research focus on cost, not just a decision focused on money. It includes a personal assessment of what their time and energy are worth. In the case of business travel, the investment of time, money, physical, and mental energy is expended on travel for the purpose of meeting face-to-face, building trusting relationships, enhancing partnerships, analyzing people, facilities and/or operations, and recognizing some benefits. Highlighting this point, in exploring the interviewees evaluation of the purpose of business travel, the perception of business travel being a waste of time was addressed through the disconfirming question, “Do you ever consider travel for the purpose of conducting business a waste of time?” (Appendix B). While some of the interviewees responded in the affirmative, they also suggested that there is always something to gain or learn even when a meeting did not meet expectations. Another valuable quote which summed up one respondents’ perspective on the value of travel for the purpose of conducting business was, “virtual presence = actual absence.”

Moreover, this research has contributed to understanding trust in business relationships. Trust is an important component of relational capital (Child, 2001) and

instrumental to the formation of social capital (Cummings & Dennis, 2018). These senior executives indicated that assessing trust is best done through face-to-face interaction. Traveling for the purpose of meeting face-to-face brings with it additional social elements, beyond the meeting itself, such as a dinner or golf outing, and the associated ability to gain a deeper understanding of a business partner that is beyond the camera view on a computer or voice on a mobile phone. There is also an opportunity to experience the physical surroundings of a business partner. One can evaluate facilities and people more thoroughly when meeting in person. It is more difficult to mislead a business partner by falsely portraying the capabilities of an operational facility when physically present with that business partner. Actual products cannot be misrepresented when viewed in person and the background, as opposed to the background on Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, Inc., 2020) for example, is real.

While this research was not focused on the construct of trust, during the analysis of data the researcher discovered that understanding whether, or not, an internal or external business partner can be trusted is an important element of why these senior executives travel for business consistent with proposition 1. This was captured by quotes such as, “trust is built, not in one interaction, trust is built over time. It’s earned.” And, “It’s about breathing the same air as the person that you’re meeting with. Being able to have the informal conversation that forms the bond, whether that’s someone you want to work with. And it works both ways.” This leads to another area of opportunity for future research.

Continued research will provide benefit to academics researching these respective areas and practitioners who can leverage this information to make more informed decisions regarding travel for the purpose of conducting business both for themselves and their respective organization. This research is one of, if not the only, behavioral study of business travel focused on this select group, elites (Harvey, 2011). It is, therefore, a major contribution to a literature marked by economically framed research. The opportunity for further research, referencing the previous emphasis on economic impact and challenges associated with social capital (Lin, 2000) include exploring what, and how, relationships affect the decision senior executives make relative to business travel individually as well as, policy and budget decisions organizationally, and how senior executives measure trust more precisely. For example, are female senior executives more, or less, inclined to travel to meet face-to-face with business partners that are also women? Do racial or cultural similarities influence an executives' decision to travel to meet face-to-face with a business partner? Does gender or race influence senior executives' decision to substitute business travel with meeting via CMC?

While it has been emphasized this is not a COVID-19 study, practitioners, particularly senior executives responsible for profit and loss (known colloquially as P & L) as well as strategic direction will find value in this research as they explore the question of the real purpose of travel for conducting business. Furthermore, understanding the role business travel, and the resultant acquisition (or expenditure) of social capital, plays in knowledge transfer will be of value to both academics and practitioners alike (Inkpen & Tsang, 2016). It can contribute to future research

assessing senior executive travel for the purpose of conducting business pre-pandemic, during the pandemic, and contemplate what choices senior executives may make regarding business travel post-pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a year-over-year (April 2019 – April 2020) downturn in combined overall U.S. Airline domestic and international travel of 71% ([www.transtats.bts.gov](http://www.transtats.bts.gov)) which now, after over two years, illustrates that not all business travel is essential to maintain the respondent's businesses as an ongoing concern. According to the U.S. Travel Association, it will take until 2024 for spending on business travel in the United States to recover 90% of pre-COVID (2019) levels ([ustravel.org](http://ustravel.org)). While there have been many casualties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses have survived. Some have even flourished. There are varying opinions amongst business focused academic journal articles capturing many facets of the pandemic's impact yet, understanding, and developing, the future corporate travel model remains unclear in the area of senior executive travel for the purpose of conducting business. Research focusing on the cost of business travel to firms, pre-and post-pandemic, and associated effect on business relationships, offer additional opportunity for further research.

Additionally, opportunities for further research include industry specific studies, those that focus on demographics, including age and gender, within specific industries and across a variety of industries including various levels within a specific organization of industry. For example, it may be that middle managers, or those that report to middle managers, have a different view of the purpose, and value, of business travel than senior executives. This cohort may also have a different view on the utility

of computer mediated communication for the purpose of conducting business. Opportunities for further research also include specific roles, investigating whether certain roles may have differing views. Those in roles that are considered more relationship centric such as sales, marketing, customer service and professional services such consulting and talent acquisition may have a different view than those considered more transactional such as finance, accounting, tax, contracting, insurance, strategic planning, and information technology (IT).

Limitations to this research included, focus on a specific group of subjects, specifically elites (Harvey, 2011), as well as those associated with convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling utilizes interviewees that are readily accessible and available and snowball sampling is the result of referrals from interviewees that make up the convenience sample thereby, potentially, introducing bias as the group could be familiar with each other in some way and provide responses that are not varied or diverse (Myers, 2020). The researcher mitigated this risk by including a variety of senior executives from a broad range of industries.

Expectations of this research include informing business executives, as well as researchers in the field of social capital, who question whether money or time should be spent on computer mediated communication, when those expenditures might be appropriate, and where the presumption of savings of time versus physical travel might actually take place. Thomas Sander and Robert Putnam wrote in their 2010 *Journal of Democracy* article, “Democracy’s Past and Future: Still Bowling Alone? – The Post 9/11 Split,

... 'social capital' – a term that social scientists use as shorthand for social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust to which those networks give rise. No democracy, and indeed no society, can be healthy without at least a modicum of this resource.

This research will contribute to the field of social capital in that the question Sander and Putnam present might be addressed, at least in part, to senior executives, social scientists, and those in the field of business travel considering whether the investment in travel for the purpose of conducting business is valuable. In other words, can businesses be healthy without at least some sense of community and connection generated by real, face-to-face interaction, and social interaction.

The tradeoff between time and money interests those who work or study in the fields of finance, travel, information technology, and economics. The expense associated with physical and mental energy is of interest to practitioners as well as academics in sociology, human resources, psychology, and workplace design. However, while senior executives acknowledge these tradeoffs, they ultimately make a value decision after assessing their goals against the various ways by which they can achieve those goals either choosing to travel to meet face-to-face or communicating through some other means.

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## APPENDIX A

### STUDY ONE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Senior Executive Business Travel Interview Form

Name:

Date:

Title:

Organization:

Years Employed by Current Organization:

Total Years in a Senior Executive Role (Vice President, Geography General Manager, Government Equivalent (GS-15 or Appointed Position) or Higher:

Current Home Base:

Age:

Contact Information:

Interview Start Time:

Interview End Time:

The idea is to have a conversation capturing your views, comments and ideas regarding your travel as senior executive. Each question has been developed to stimulate your thought process and are not designed to be yes or no type questions so don't hesitate to provide commentary. I will work to keep my comments, so as not to shape your response,

to a minimum and ask you to do most of the talking. However, if a question is not clear or you'd like more context please don't hesitate to ask. In some cases, I have prepared probes to aide in the dialogue and will include those as we go. Also, for context, this not a COVID study. However, reference to COVID is understandable but the questions are intended to explore your views in a non-pandemic period. I ask that you speak freely sharing your ideas and try not to answer questions based on what you think I'm looking for or want to hear. I will share more details about the foundation of my research and research goals when the interview is complete. I will work to keep us on track, be respectful of time and want to again thank you for your time. Any questions about the statement of purpose of, what I've just outlined or anything else?

1. Please describe your current role and responsibilities?
2. Would you consider travel for the purpose of conducting business part of your role?
3. Can you tell me generally why you travel for business?
4. If you were to estimate the number of trips you take per year (non-pandemic) for the purpose of conducting business how many trips, or times per year, do you travel?
5. Can you tell me about your previous 3-6 business trips?
  - Where did you go, who did you meet with and why?
6. Would you consider yourself an experienced business traveler?
  - How do you measure travel experience?

7. Is travel expected of you by your organization, your reporting senior or yourself personally?
  - If so, why and how is that expectation expressed?
8. Does your organization have an official travel policy that influences your decision(s) to travel for business?
  - Do you anticipate your travel patterns changing post-pandemic?
  - Do you anticipate your mode of travel ie private vs commercial air changing post-pandemic?
9. Can you describe the business partners, internal and external to your organization, with whom you meet?
10. Please describe how you view business relationships, the *people* you meet and their connection to business travel.
  - What are your core reasons to meet with people?
11. Please describe how you view business relationships with the *organizations* you meet and their connection to business travel.
  - What are your core reasons to meet with organizations?
12. How do you go about building social capital?
13. Does trust in the person or organization with whom you meet factor into your decision to travel?
14. How do you measure trust?
15. How do you evaluate trust?
16. Are there any cultural or geographic considerations when making

decisions about travel?

17. What are some other reasons you might travel for business?

18. Do you think there are suitable alternatives for travel?

19. If you believe there are suitable alternatives, what might they be?

20. Under what circumstances do you use them?

21. Can you describe further your thoughts about face-to-face communication?

- How do you assess F2F vs CMC?

22. Is there anything you would like to add?

23. Is there anyone you think you could refer me to that would be willing to participate in an interview?

Additional Questions:

24. Does familiarity, or lack of, with the institution or person(s) with whom you are doing business influence your decision to meet via computer mediated communication or F2F?

25. Are travel benefits part of your formal compensation package?

26. Do you view travel as a form of compensation?

27. Do you view travel as an escape or release?

- Please describe.

28. Is your evaluation of business travel as a cost or value proposition?

## APPENDIX B

### STUDY TWO SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Senior Executive Business Travel Interview Form

Name:

Date:

Title:

Organization:

Years Employed by Current Organization:

Total Years in a Senior Executive Role (Vice President, Geography General Manager, Government Equivalent (GS-15 or Appointed Position) or Higher:

Current Home Base:

Age:

Contact Information:

Interview Start Time:

Interview End Time:

The idea is to have a conversation capturing your views, comments and ideas regarding your travel as a senior executive. Each question has been developed to stimulate your thought process and are not designed to be yes or no type questions so please don't hesitate to provide commentary. Examples are especially welcome. I will work to keep

my comments, so as not to shape your response, to a minimum and ask you to do most of the talking. However, if a question is not clear or you'd like more context don't hesitate to ask. In some cases, I have prepared probes to aide in the dialogue and will include those as we go. Also, for context, this not a COVID study. However, reference to COVID is understandable but the questions are intended to explore your views in a non-pandemic period. I want to encourage you to speak freely, answer the questions in your own words, and try not to answer questions based on what you think I'm looking for or want to hear. I will share more details about the foundation of my research and research goals when the interview is complete. I will work to keep us on track, be respectful of time and want to again thank you for your time. Any questions about the statement of purpose, what I've just outlined or anything else?

1. Please describe your current role and responsibilities?
2. Would you consider travel for the purpose of conducting business part of your role?
3. If you were to estimate the number of trips you take per year (non-pandemic) for the purpose of conducting business how many trips, or times per year, do you travel?
  - Please tell me the purpose of your last 3-5 trips. For example, were they for an acquisition, facility inspection, personnel/business performance analysis, relationship building/maintenance?
4. What does business travel mean to you?
  - What is the specific value of being with people in person rather than virtually?
5. If you were to explain why you travel for business to someone; a friend, neighbor,

relative, or even a child, how would you explain it?

6. How do you see business travel going forward?

7. What is most valuable to you about business travel?

- Do you ever find business travel to be a waste of time?
- Do you ever find your interest in meeting face-to-face to be viewed as intrusive?

8. How is it that building relationships is better with F2F or CMC?

9. Can you provide an example when a F2F encounter proved decisive in making or breaking trust with a partner you traveled to meet?

- Where did you go, who did you meet with and why?

10. Do you have a favorite way to travel?

- Why?

11. Is business travel fundamentally a cost consideration, value proposition or something else for you?

12. Is travel expected of you by your organization, your reporting senior or yourself personally?

- If so, how is that expectation expressed?

13. Does your organization have an official travel policy that influences your decision(s) to travel for business?

- Do you anticipate your travel patterns changing post-pandemic?
- Do you anticipate your mode of travel ie private vs commercial air changing post-pandemic?

14. What are your core reasons to meet with people?

- Is engagement, demonstrating your engagement with the people or organization with whom you meet one of the reasons you travel?

- Does your physical presence send any kind of message or signal?
  - Why is face-to-face necessary in conflict and not virtually?
15. Does familiarity, or lack of, with the institution or person(s) with whom you are doing business influence your decision to travel?
16. What do you think about building social capital?
- There is some emphasis that travel to meet F2F is key to building social capital, do you think that is over-hyped or not?
17. Does trust in the person(s) or organization with whom you meet factor into your decision to travel?
18. How do you measure trust?
- How do you evaluate trust in a business relationship?
  - What specific things do you look for that indicate trustworthiness?
  - Do you look for facial cues, mannerisms, body language, wardrobe style?
19. Are there any cultural or geographic considerations when you make decisions about travel?
20. Do you think there are suitable alternatives for business travel?
- Under what circumstances do you use them?
21. What do you get out of business travel that you can't get out of alternatives (such as Zoom)?
- Why can't relationship management be done just as well virtually?
  - How is engaging with a team not the same virtually as in person?
22. Is there anything you would like to add?
23. Is there anyone you think you could refer me to that would be willing to participate in an interview?

Additional Questions:

24. Are travel benefits part of your formal compensation package?

25. Do you view travel as a form of compensation?

26. Would you describe business travel as an escape or release?

- Please provide examples
- Are there other reasons you might travel for business?

27. How do you judge a relationship?

28. Do you ever view the interest in meeting face-to-face as intrusive?

## APPENDIX C

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

My name is John Gale; I am a doctoral student from Temple University Fox School of Business who is working on my doctoral thesis. I am conducting a research study on senior executive travel for the purpose of conducting business.

Today, you will be participating in an interview, which should take approximately 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you may stop at any time. Your name and company will be kept confidential and will not appear anywhere in the final write-up.

A digital copy of this session is being recorded. To ensure your confidentiality, your identity will be assigned a unique number, which will be used on the transcription that is created from this interview. The digital copy of the interview that we are making today will be destroyed. There is a small risk of loss of confidentiality.

There are minimal risks associated with this interview. While there will be no direct benefit to you, my hope is that there will be a general benefit to senior leaders who can use the findings to be more successful. Taking part in this interview is your agreement to participate and allow the session to be recorded.

This research is being overseen by the Temple University Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform an independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or [irb@temple.edu](mailto:irb@temple.edu) if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the researcher

- You are not getting answers from the researcher
- You cannot reach the researcher
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

You may decide to withdraw your permission to participate in this study at any time. Just send an email to [john.gale@temple.edu](mailto:john.gale@temple.edu) or call 503-431-0668. The transcript of this interview will then be removed from the study.

## APPENDIX D

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL



Research Integrity & Compliance  
Student Faculty Center  
3340 N. Broad Street, Suite 304  
Philadelphia PA 19140

Institutional Review Board  
Phone: (215) 707-3390  
Fax: (215) 707-9100  
e-mail: [irb@temple.edu](mailto:irb@temple.edu)



Approval for a Project Involving Human Subjects Research that is Approved as Exempt

Date: 15-Feb-2021

Protocol Number: 27877  
PI: SCHMIDT, STUART  
Review Type: EXEMPT  
Approved On: 15-Feb-2021  
Risk: Minimal risk  
Committee: A1  
Sponsor: NO EXTERNAL SPONSOR  
Project Title: The Role of Executive Travel in a Virtual World

The IRB approved the protocol 27877.

The study was approved under Exempt review. The IRB determined that the research **does not require a continuing review**, consequently there is not an IRB approval period.

As this research was approved as Exempt, the IRB will not stamp the consent or assent form(s).

**Note that all applicable Institutional approvals must also be secured before study implementation.** These approvals include, but are not limited to, Medical Radiation Committee ("MRC"); Radiation Safety Committee ("RSC"); Institutional Biosafety Committee ("IBC"); and Temple University Survey Coordinating Committee ("TUSCC"). Please visit these Committees' websites for further information.

**Finally, in conducting this research, you are obligated to submit the following:**

- **Modifications** - Any changes to the research that may change the Exempt status of this study must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Examples of such changes are: including new, sensitive questions to a survey or interview, changing data collection such that de-identified data will now be identifiable, including an intervention in the methods, changing variables to be collected from medical charts, decreasing confidentiality measures, including minors or adults lacking capacity to consent as subjects when previously only adults with capacity to consent were to be enrolled, no longer collecting signed HIPAA Authorization, etc. Please reach out to the IRB Staff with any questions about if a change to the study warrants a Modification.
- **Reportable New Information** - Using the Reportable New Information e-form, report new information items such as those described in HRP-071 Policy - Prompt Reporting Requirements to the IRB **within 5 days**.
- **Closure report** - Using a closure e-form, submit when the study is permanently closed to enrollment; all subjects have completed all protocol related interventions and interactions; collection of private identifiable information is complete; and analysis of private identifiable information is complete.

**For the complete list of investigator responsibilities, please see the HRP-070 Policy – Investigator Obligations,**

**the Investigator Manual (HRP-910), and other Policies and Procedures** found on the Temple University IRB website: <https://research.temple.edu/irb-forms-standard-operating-procedures>.

Please contact the IRB at (215) 707-3390 if you have any questions.

If you would like to tell us how we are doing, please complete this 5-minute Satisfaction Survey: <https://forms.gle/9Ec9YGDEEANvMw37>