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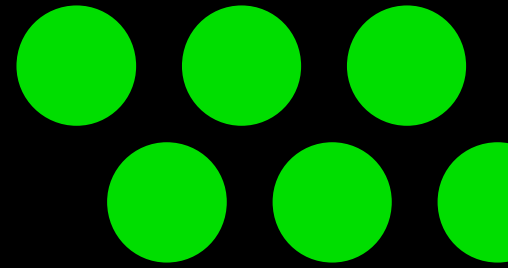
What can you do with all that data?

FCM

Why look at data?

The business travel industry has a problem. No, this time it's not wellbeing or sustainability or a certain pesky pandemic. This time we're talking about data.

Data has become a hot topic, but also a taboo one. It is a loaded subject and yet another area where you now have to become an overnight expert. We all know there's a goldmine of data out there, but what are the TMCs doing with it all, and how can you harness its power to pave the way to a high performing travel program?

Through listening exercises, Propathons, and thought disruption from the FCM Th!nk event in Athens, you've been telling us your struggles, issues, and concerns. You want to turn your reporting and analytics into action, but don't know where to begin. Big Data feels like it sounds – BIG.

DID YOU KNOW?

A Propathon is like a hackathon, but for propositions, a design-focused thinking exercise essentially, developed by FESTIVE ROAD.

So we're here to break down the data taboo. This isn't another white paper. You spoke, and we listened. And now we are giving you a playbook with tangible takeaways and actionable advice for you to implement, wherever you are on your data journey.

Think of this document like a blueprint for success. Building a travel program today is like building a skyscraper: You need a good architect, and we've just handed you the plans.

- **The journey so far:** What has been seen, said, and heard. We reveal all from our Propathon and speak to industry experts.

- **Fixing the basics:** We take you back to basics, talking hygiene, data frequency, and booking in program.

- **Finding what works for you:** Get your data (ware)house in order and find out how to progress your data journey, whatever stage you're at.

- **Realms of possibility:** Hear from data experts on their predictions for the future and see how data can provide answers for today, tomorrow, and beyond. No crystal ball required.

Journey so far

All journeys have a start and an end. But not everyone's departure or arrival points are the same. Wherever you are on your data journey, we want to help and support you toward the next steps.

We've taken the time to include the feedback we have heard over the past year. There's the new, the bad, and the ugly. But we haven't shied away from it. Our aim is to uncover and tackle travel taboos – so we're laying the biggest data ones out for you in all their glory.

What we've heard

The pressure on travel managers at present is huge. Alongside a myriad of new focus areas, there is data – a highly complex, highly skilled discipline, when used correctly can open up insights and advantages which will revolutionize your travel programs. But where on earth do you start?

You know there's a whole world of possibility out there, but many travel managers and teams simply do not know how to take advantage. There is confusion around who takes the first step: Is it you or your TMC? Then there's the skills needed to fully execute a data strategy on the scale you're hearing about. And finally, you need the fundamentals of what do you do with all that data to make it make sense?

In short, it's a lot. There's a lot of talk, but little information. And you want guidance from the people at the heart of the collection process – your TMC.

What the industry is saying

The wider travel industry is mirroring these sentiments. Data has always been crucial to travel, underpinning decisions surrounding policy, suppliers, budget, and risk management. But that was then. Now more and more companies are recognizing the potential for taking historic data and turning it into insightful, predictive solutions. And this trend is going to increase.

We know the profile of travel has increased exponentially in the past two years; and now we're getting a seat at the table in boardrooms across the country. We need to continue to show value in the insights, stories, and actions we can deliver.

"We've entered the era of the analyst as lockpicker, the storyteller through the numbers.

MIKE ORCHARD
CONSULTANT, FESTIVE ROAD

Fixing the basics

Everything we've heard pointed to one key thing: You need to fix the basics.

There is simply no point in discussing AI, predictive modeling and data mining, if you haven't got the foundations correct. Remember the building analogy from earlier? Trying to push ahead without fixing the basics is like laying the first brick with no architectural plans. You might make some progress, but the project is ultimately doomed.

So, what are the basics and how can you fix them?

Data Hygiene

Your outputs are only as good as the data you're inputting. There's a lot of mistrust around data and data quality. Is it a true representation? Is it accurate? Can I confidently pin my next year's travel strategy on these findings?

Without good data hygiene, the answer is likely to be no. To move toward the good stuff – analytics that drive your travel program forward – you need to be confident that your data is telling you the whole story. And to do that, you need to address these common data hygiene issues.

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know approximately 60% of "dirty data" is attributed to human error?

What's the issue?	What does that look like?	What does that mean?
Data Errors	Completeness	There should be no gaps or missing information for your data to be truly complete. Using data with missing information can lead to costly mistakes and false conclusions.
	Outliers	Consider what constraints can be established to guard against "dirty data." Setting a range constraint on hotel spend, for example, will flag up that $25,000 room and ensure that the data entered is consistent and correct.
Inconsistent Trends	Formatting	With data coming in across the globe different regions may have different formatting trends. For example, 03/04/2022 is 3rd April in the UK, but is read as March 4th in the US. Consistent formatting helps eradicate these errors.
	Data Relationships	Those in the data business refer to these as "black swan events." The pandemic, for example has made trending and predictability forecasting very, very difficult, as the past two year's data is a complete anomaly and unlikely to provide true insight.
Source Nuance	Fake Data	When testing a new system or running checks, the people involved can often enter in "test transactions." These are often bookings which are canceled immediately, but they will still be captured in the reporting. Identifying that these are not customer bookings, and therefore do not need to be reported on, is one area of nuance.
	Immaterial Data	Consolidating global data means understanding that not all back office systems work in the same way. This leads to different processes, producing different data. For example, one system may process a refund and rebook. Another system may just add on the additional cost of rebooking, and not report the initial refund. The outcome is the same, but the process and the data will look very different. Spotting anomalies and applying manual intervention where needed is crucial.

This may feel daunting. But it's important to know that you don't have to do this by yourself. Your organization will likely have a data team who can provide internal support, and FCM has a team of Account Managers and Data Scientists to help bridge that gap and deliver the data you need.

> Data shouldn't be about damage control and spending hours manipulating the data to get it into a usable state. If you are so far removed that you can't have a conversation, you are decreasing efficiency. Communicate with teams and get the right data from the start.

SOLAYR LAYTON-THOMAS
SENIOR PAYROLL BENEFITS AND TAX
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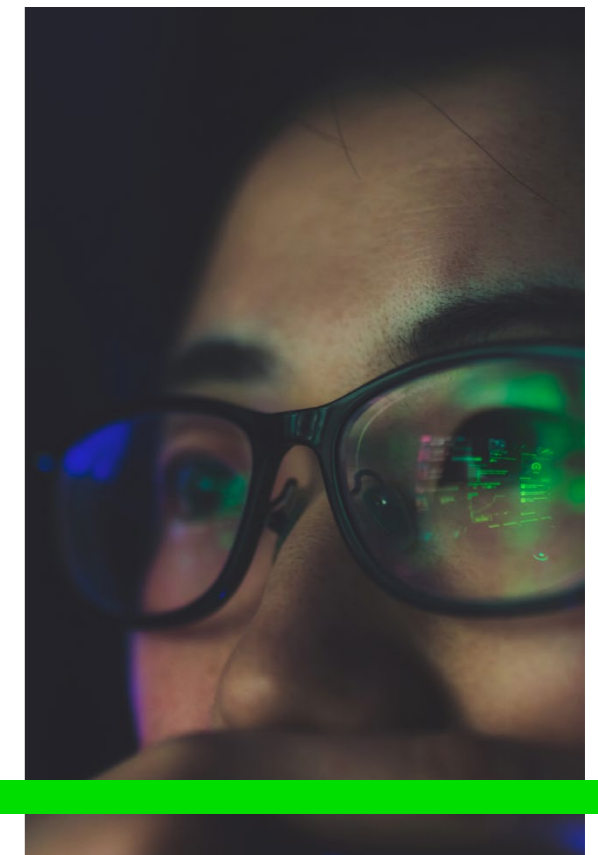
Data Frequency
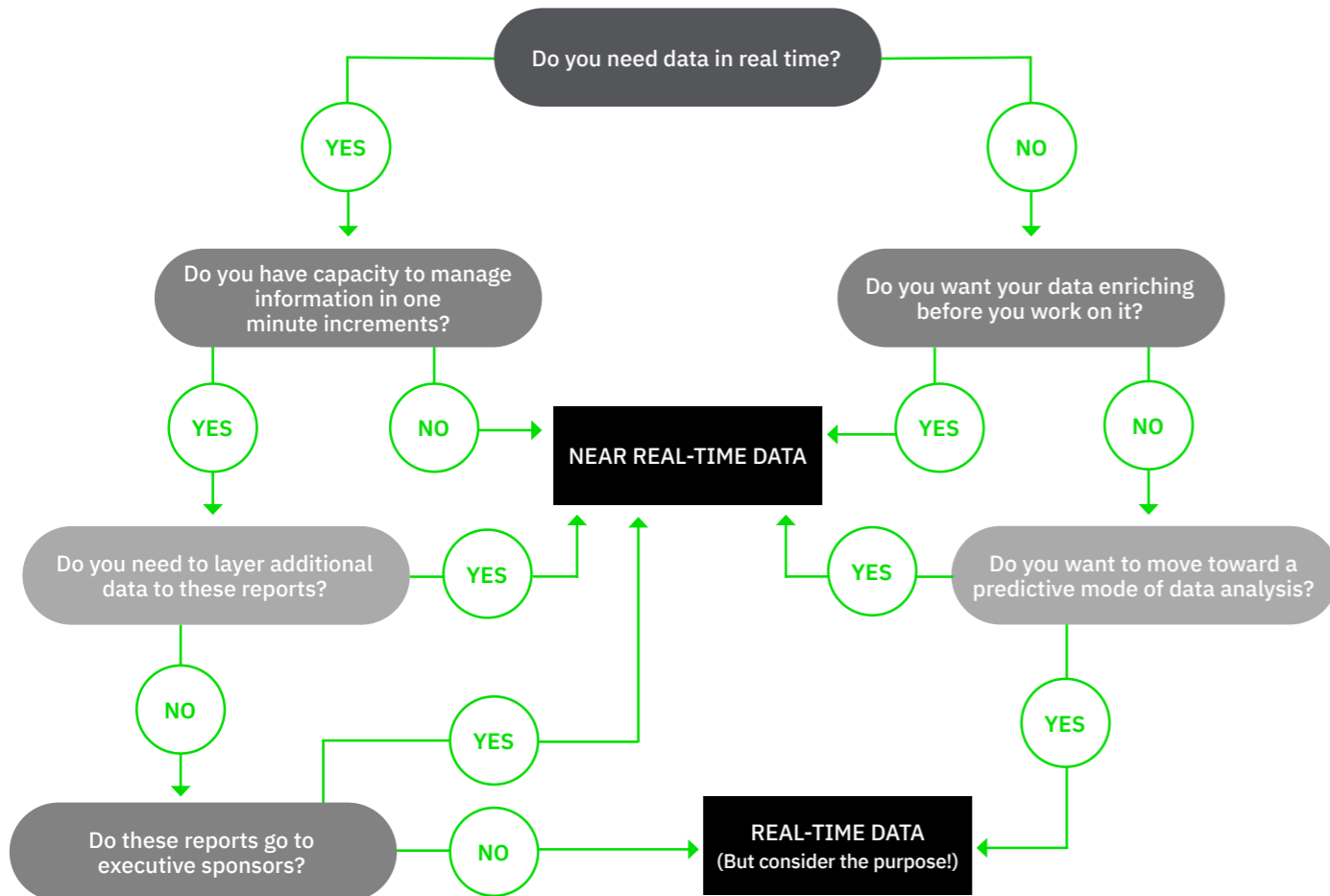
"We need real-time data."

OK. Let's just take a pause and assess the situation. There is much discussion around "real time data" and the assumed benefits. But what does it really mean? And do you need it? Or do you just need data within a reasonable time frame?

Real-time data: The second a booking runs through the system it's automatically added to your data through a reporting link.

Near real-time data: Data that is quality checked, enhanced and takes 15 minutes to be available via your reporting tool.

Still think you need real time data? If you want minute-by-minute data, challenge yourself and your stakeholders – what will you be doing with it?

Finding the answers to these questions can be challenging. Use the decision tree below to help you navigate these questions and find out your real time requirements.

> **Near real-time data is looking at data in 15 minute increments. I'd rather deliver great data in 15 minutes, than good data in one minute increments.**
>
> STEPHEN PITCHER
> CHIEF DATA SCIENCE OFFICER AT
> FLIGHT CENTRE TRAVEL GROUP

Complete Data

Booking in program is a struggle as old as time. And the challenges really manifest when it comes to getting a complete overview of your travel data. You can only report on what you know, but what about the activity you just don't know about?

It sounds, simple, but in-program booking (booking via the correct channels) is one of the biggest wins you can make when looking at the issue of complete data. The more data you can have inside your systems, the better.

Having said this, we know that there is more to travel data than just number of bookings and cost. This is where knowing what you're looking for is essential.

> **Know what the question is you're trying to answer. Otherwise, you will go down a data rabbit hole.**
>
> JO LLOYD
> HEAD OF GLOBAL ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT
> AND CONSULTING, FCM

> **We need to accept that travelers are not considerate of your data collection methods. There will always be people you can't get to book in the way that you want them to. You need to figure out how they operate and work out how to incorporate this into your data.**
>
> SOPHIE KIM
> SENIOR PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, SLALOM.

To truly gain value and actionable insights, you will need to look wider than just your travel program data. How can you encourage people to book in program? And if they don't, where is the info stored? Because it will be stored *somewhere*, you may just need to employ a little "data wrangling" - looking at general log data or expense tool data - to find it.

The value of data is diluted when you have bookings out of program.

DID YOU KNOW?

The FCM Extension can influence booking behavior in browser to encourage compliance.

Decision tree:

Do you need data in real time?
- YES → Do you have capacity to manage information in one minute increments?
  - YES → Do you need to layer additional data to these reports?
    - NO → Do these reports go to executive sponsors?
      - YES → NEAR REAL-TIME DATA
      - NO → REAL-TIME DATA (But consider the purpose!)
    - YES → NEAR REAL-TIME DATA
  - NO → NEAR REAL-TIME DATA
- NO → Do you want your data enriching before you work on it?
  - YES → NEAR REAL-TIME DATA
  - NO → Do you want to move toward a predictive mode of data analysis?
    - YES → REAL-TIME DATA (But consider the purpose!)
    - YES → NEAR REAL-TIME DATA

Finding what works for you

You *can't* know what you *don't* know. So how can you ask for an improved data provision if you don't know what to ask for?

You have two options here: approach, or wait to be approached. If you have buy in from your internal stakeholders and the resources to embark on a data journey, start knocking on the door now. Your Account Manager will be waiting on the other side, ready to swing it wide open and usher you in with open arms.

If you're not quite at that level yet, you can start by getting your internal pieces in place, and may well find your TMC already on your door, ready to help you on your way.

Either way, your first stop is your Account Manager. They are your gateway into the world of TMC data. As your day-to-day consultant, they understand your goals and objectives better than anyone else. They will provide guidance and access to the specialists you need to get your data journey off the ground.

> Who should be making the approach? Do I need to ask my Account Manager about data or should they be approaching me?
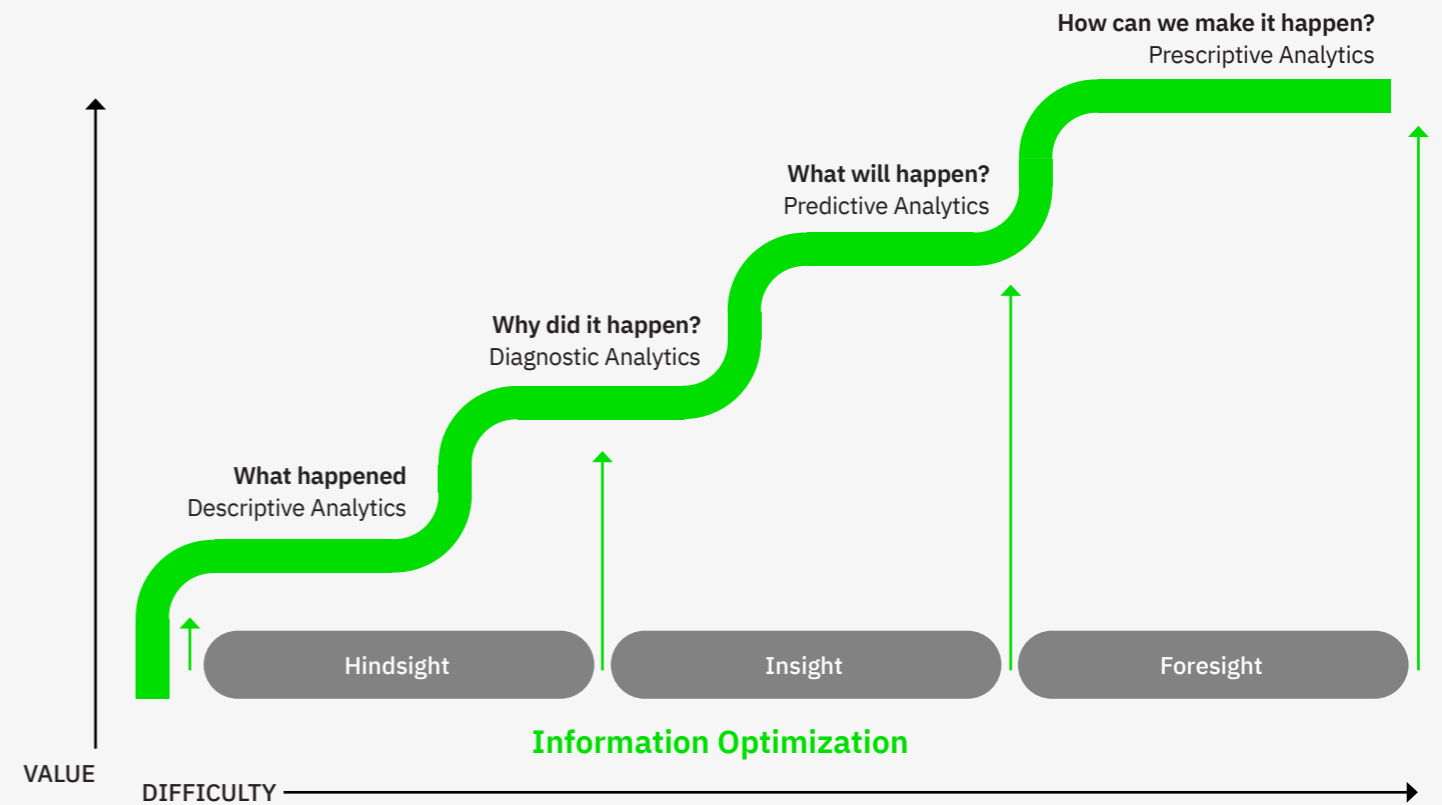>
> TRAVEL BUYER

> Communication is the quickest and easiest way to affect change and improve systems and processes.
>
> SOLAYR LAYTON-THOMAS
> SENIOR PAYROLL BENEFITS AND TAX
> MOBILITY SPECIALIST AT IMPROBABLE

The Analytics Ascendancy Model

Where do you think you are on your data journey right now? This model shows the progression from Descriptive analytics – looking back at what happened and when – through to Prescriptive analytics – how we can make changes to allow something happen.

How can we make it happen?
Prescriptive Analytics

What will happen?
Predictive Analytics

Why did it happen?
Diagnostic Analytics

What happened
Descriptive Analytics

Hindsight   Insight   Foresight

Information Optimization

VALUE

DIFFICULTY

Don't worry if you're still in the early stages - you're in good company! We asked the same question to the audience at Th!nk back in May 2022. This is what they said:

Descriptive 56%

Diagnostic 31%

Predictive 10%

Prescriptive 3%

The majority of people are still using data to reflect on what has already happened. So how do you start to climb that graph and join the illustrious 3% in the lofty heights of prescriptive data? By following a simple, step by step plan.

Getting your data (ware) house in order

- 🟢 TMC actions
- ⚫ Travel manager actions
- 🟡 Joint actions

Kick-off meeting

It's a meeting of minds. Like any great working relationship, both sides need to brainstorm, understand the goals on either side and establish a way to work together.

In the first instance, reach out to the person in your organization who is responsible for data and speak to them. And don't worry if there is a lack of travel knowledge – your TMC can talk to them directly and fill in the blanks.

TMC extracts data

After your kick-off meeting, your TMC will know what data you require and how you require it. Your exact requirements will be worked on by a team of data experts to seamlessly deliver what you need, when you need it.

Your data team builds a pipeline

Now it's over to you. Your data team will need to build a system that can accept the data your TMC has prepared. You will have experts on call to assist, making sure the transition goes as smoothly as possible.

TMC and your analytics team need to meet

Congratulations! You're on your way! Now you're receiving data, you need to look toward the next step: how will you draw meaningful narrative and insight from it? Luckily your TMC's data team is on hand to meet with your Business Intelligence and Data Analysts to establish where your data journey is taking you next.

TMC data analytics training

How do we take our data from reactive to proactive?
From Descriptive to Prescriptive analytics, you will be taken through the whole myriad of possibilities and trained in the possible options for your data analysis, all in line with your business objectives. Your TMC won't just data dump and run – they'll ensure you have all the skills you need to be able to transform your data analysis.
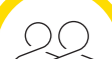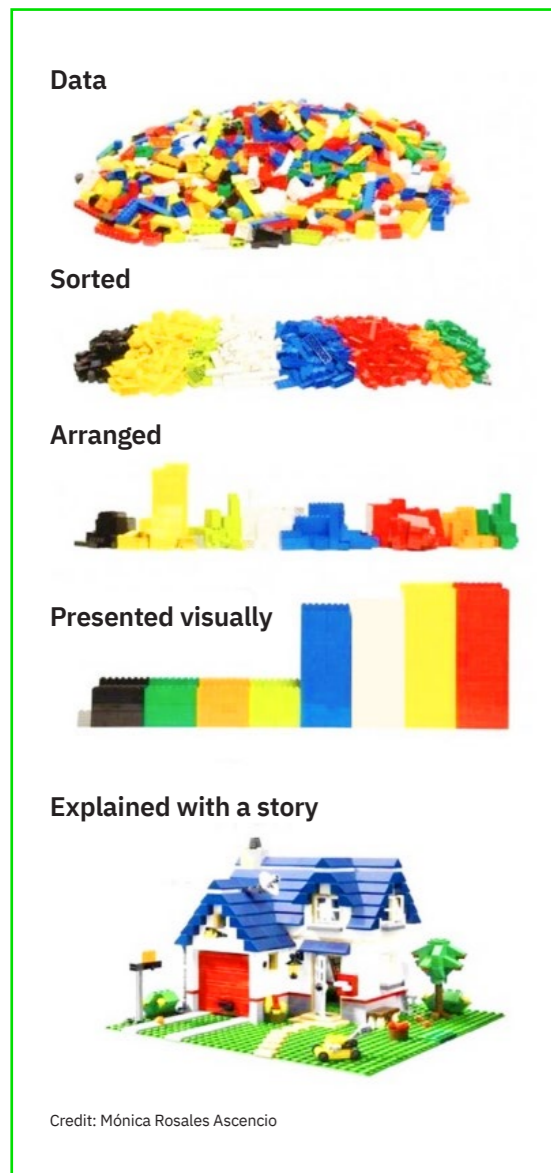
Continued consulting

You've been through the hard part. So now is the time to take advantage and stay ahead of the curve. The world of data is ever-changing and you don't want to get left behind. Through continued consulting, you can ensure your data program is adaptable, flexible, and iterative.

YOU SPOKE, WE LISTENED

Trends and insights are what a TMC can provide. Buyers need actionable insights to drive positive change.

Realms of possibility

You've fixed the basics. You've decided on the right path for your organization. Now's the part where you go next-level and turn your analytics from a heap of data into a fully-fledged narrative.

Data

Sorted

Arranged

Presented visually

Explained with a story

Credit: Mónica Rosales Ascencio

Things to look out for

Narrative and correlation are just two of the ways you could be enhancing your data. This is no longer operational, business-as-usual data. This is what's new to the scene. This is using the past to predict the future, staying one step ahead and following emerging trends.

Correlation

To do this successfully, you need to be looking at data beyond the operational. You need to be blending and overlaying rich data from HR, Sales, and Operations to paint a full picture.

- Are sales up? Look at travel too. Were business trips up in the same time? What does that correlation suggest?

- Is there an increase in staff turnover? What were their travel habits? Is there a trend there that could explain why employees are voting with their feet?

- What's the prototype of the perfect sale? Do you have the same retention meeting once a year versus four times a year? What is the best way to conduct those meetings?

AI

No longer a "thing of the future", AI is here and it's becoming more and more mainstream. Data science, AI, and machine learning are all separate disciplines; however harnessing their power to work together has become remarkably useful. Whilst AI hasn't yet reached the stage of full cognitive and intellectual capabilities, there is a range of key AI tasks that can prove invaluable for your business:

- accurately recognize images, objects, and other elements in unstructured data (as described by Tech Target);

- use derived insights to run predictive analytics applications; spot patterns and anomalies in large data sets;

- create detailed profiles of individuals for hyper-personalized uses;

- drive autonomous systems with minimal or no human involvement; and

- solve scenario simulations and other challenging goal-driven problems.

> When you build all your data within our organization, you can create the trigger, very, very easily to say "we have a problem".
>
> **STEPHEN PITCHER**
> CHIEF DATA SCIENCE OFFICER AT FLIGHT CENTRE TRAVEL GROUP

> AI and Data experts have never been more expensive. Moving forward, AI will become more accessible through AI as a service or third parties. This is the way most businesses will implement it, rather than having in-house experts.
>
> **SOPHIE KIM**
> SENIOR PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, SLALOM
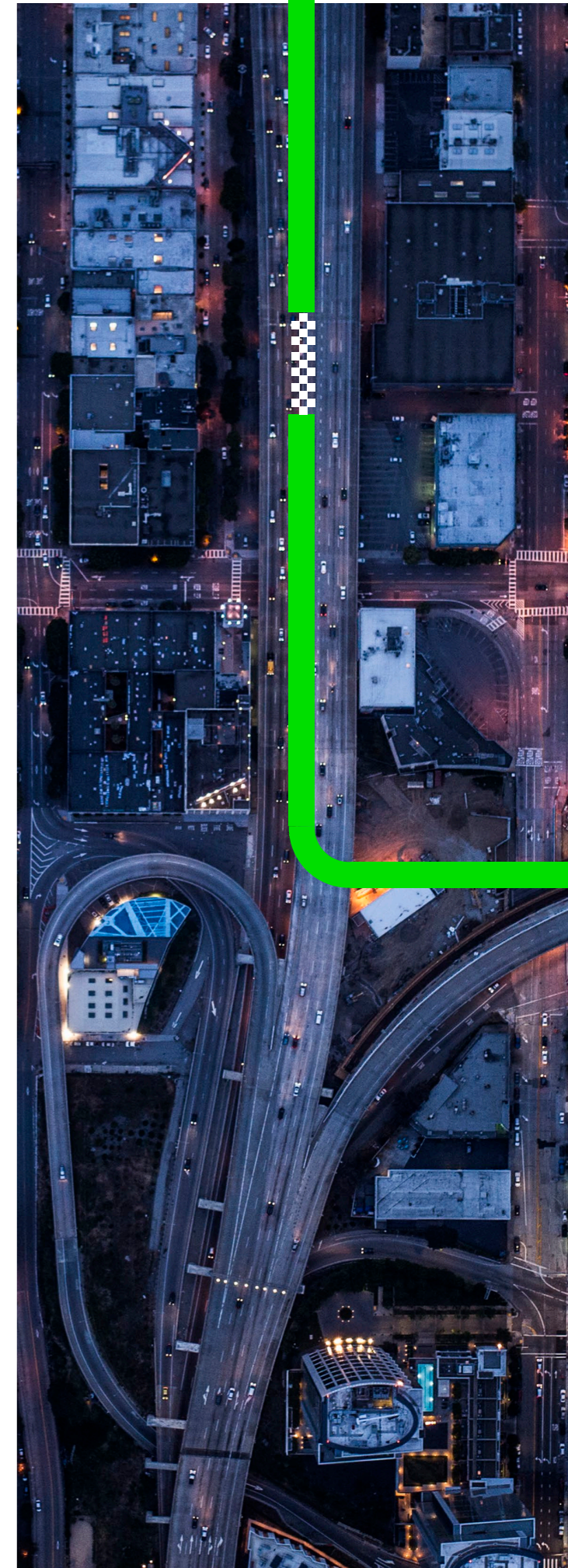
Personalization

This goes beyond NDC or knowing that a traveler prefers a window seat. This is where we start to measure return on human capital.

Travel is about connection. And at the heart of that connection is people. Hyper personalization in data allows us to start measuring human capital and social capital, giving a true figure around the value of travel – something we have been striving for, but that has so far alluded our grasp.

Beyond measurement, Personalization means delivering value to someone at just the right moment. Just consider that. Whoever is your focus, for whatever reason, you can give them what they need when they need it. That is incredibly powerful.

- Can you have a greater understanding of your employee motivations? Will this help you to retain staff through personalized travel policy?

- Does knowing when individuals in your sales team perform best increase conversion rates? Will sharing this knowledge with them allow them greater success?

- Would trip cancelations decrease if you saw patterns and correlations in certain teams?

- How could you increase traveler wellbeing and satisfaction by knowing more about their wider performance?

- Will deeper understanding allow you to influence booker and traveler behavior, keeping bookings in program, and increasing compliance?

- Will data elevate travel's position within your business as you have a positive and measurable impact on profit, people, and planet?

Curveballs

We know nothing is ever straight forward. So, to keep you on your toes, here are a couple of curveballs if you ever want to spice up the data conversation at an event!

- "Can we even rely on predictive analytic modeling right now? Modeling the future was based on analyzing trends of the past. But our recent past is nothing like our future will be…"

- "What is the environmental impact of collecting all this data? Data warehouses take colossal amounts of energy to run. Is the concept of collect as much as you can, just in case, a sustainable one?"

> **Never has it been more difficult to forecast. Just think about how different human behavior has been in the past two years. Predicting behavior post-pandemic from data collected pre-pandemic is not going to work.**
>
> SOPHIE KIM
> SENIOR PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, SLALOM

> **Many industries have collected as much data as they can, storing it up for when they might need it – a form of future-proofing if you like. But now we're coming full circle. The environmental impact of doing this is huge. Once your data collection becomes this big, you need to consider the impact of storage.**
>
> SOPHIE KIM
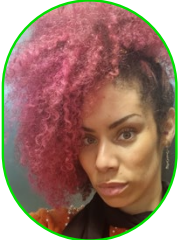> SENIOR PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, SLALOM
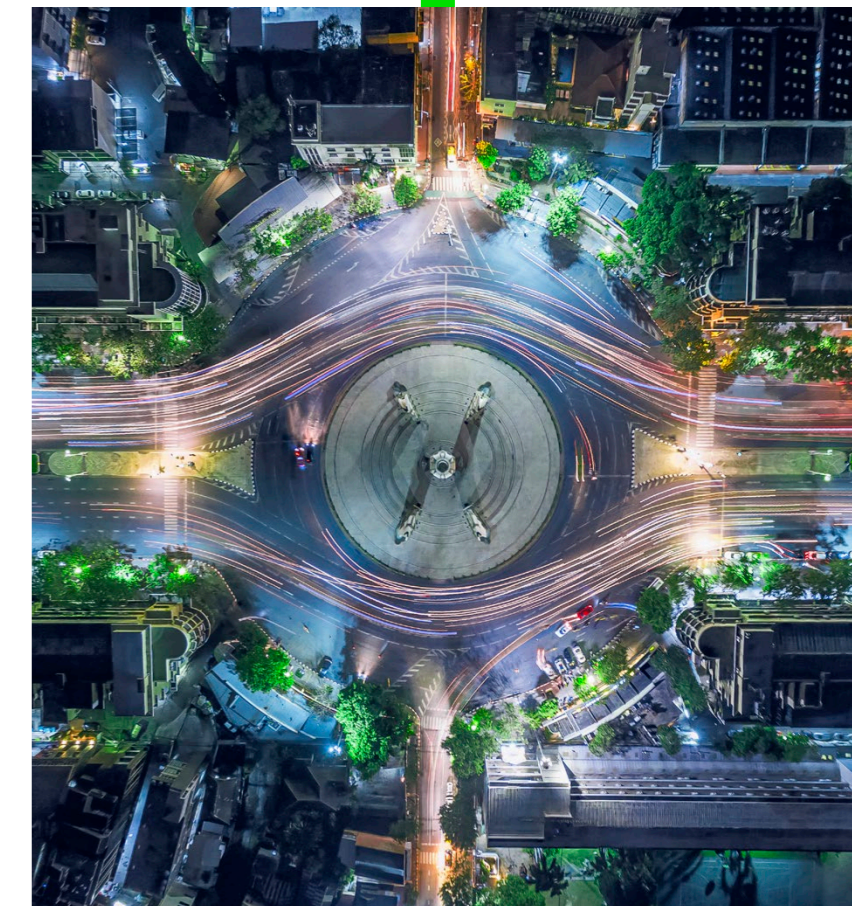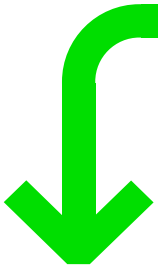
A big thank you

to all of our experts featured in this playbook. Your insights are invaluable.

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