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During pandemic-era lockdowns, companies were forced to find virtual alternatives to once-essential business trips. As video calls became standard, technology provided a reasonable alternative to face-to-face client meetings.

When the world reopened again, many leaders realised that much of their pre-pandemic business travel was no longer necessary or financially sensible. Why pay the expense, when Zoom calls now got the job done, and in many cases were safer than in-person interaction?

The business travel industry took a big hit as a result. This year, in their earnings reports, many airlines reported steep financial losses, due in part to a decline in corporate trips. Yet some experts believe that as people settle into the practical realities of hybrid and remote work, business travel is due for a resurgence – and a makeover.

An August 2023 report from the Global Business Travel Association showed that the worldwide business-travel industry is expected to surpass its pre-pandemic spending level in 2024 – two years earlier than industry analysts originally predicted.

The reason seems to be that companies are changing *why* their workers are travelling. Instead of the pre-pandemic focus on sales-driven outings, business trips are now centred on "non-customer travel": companies are meeting up internally.

For businesses operating in a hybrid pattern or full-remote set-up, this travelling for face-to-face interaction has become vital. While virtual meetings can often suffice, data shows it can be an imperfect substitute, because a primarily remote-work model can make employees feel disconnected, and meeting in-person is critical for building positive, long-term relationships among workers.

Connections between employees are easily stretched, so bringing people together through travel regenerates bonds, strengthens culture within organisations and creates enthusiasm.

Since the pandemic, many employees have been working fully remotely, but now travel a few times a year for company-wide meetings. These off-site gatherings can have a huge impact on both business morale and team motivation. It's an opportunity to bring people together and give them a chance to bond, meaning they communicate more effectively in remote form the rest of the year.

There are other important benefits of business travel. Both workers and leaders believe it can be a key component of professional development. Through such trips, managers have seen the value of investing in their employees.

When you take away offices, there is a void and travel is a way to fill that void. With hybrid work clearly here to stay, business travel certainly has a role to play.

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