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# ACADEMIC WEEKLY DIGEST

School of Hospitality & Tourism Management  
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## WILL BUSINESS TOURISM COME BACK?

COVID-19 has put a sudden halt to most travel, including business-related air travel. This meant that companies had to rapidly shift to an online and conduct business via virtual meeting platforms. For the carbon footprint of organisations this has been good news. But how do staff feel about their productivity and wellbeing? **Prof Susanne Becken** investigates the changes in 'business meetings practices' in a government agency in New Zealand. Whilst major changes occurred, the question is whether or how long they will last.



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# IMPACTS OF CHANGES TO BUSINESS TRAVEL PRACTICES IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN IN NEW ZEALAND

**PROF SUSANNE BECKEN**

This research used Social Practice Theory to examine changes in staff air travel behaviour observed in a New Zealand government agency, following the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown in April-May 2020. The research reveals fundamental differences in the meaning of face-to-face versus online meetings, the inseparable nature of productivity and personal wellbeing, and the change processes that staff noted when faced with a (temporary) new reality of restricted mobility.

The results reveal that, going forward, most staff propose a combination of both types of meeting formats, whereby the choice of meeting style depends on purpose and circumstances. These, in turn, are influenced by the role of staff (seniority), their team situation (e.g. dispersed), geography, and personality type. Interview participants agreed that 'habit' and a 'culture of travel' should not determine a default decision to travel when an online meeting might deliver the same or even better outcomes.



## FURTHER READING:

Becken, S. & Hughey, K. F. (2021). Impacts of changes to business travel practices in response to the COVID-19 lockdown in New Zealand. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*.

Link: [bit.ly/3evpB1U](https://bit.ly/3evpB1U)

Whether modified routines remain or not will not only be influenced by the New Zealand government's imposed carbon budgets, but also will be a question of organisational leadership, politics, and ultimately the ethics of trading off environmental impacts with other perceived needs.

## QUOTES:

"[The pandemic was an] eyeopener that life did not stop when our travel went down by a huge amount" - Senior Leader  
"I don't think it just doesn't seem socially acceptable to travel like we did [before Covid]" - Manager