



Exploring the Impact of Business Travel on Employee Well-Being: A Focus on Leisure Opportunities

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Abstract: For the modern business traveler, the idea of working most of the time and not having fun is changing and more emphasis is given to the balance between business and leisure. Companies are recognizing the importance of relaxation during working trips, whereas technology is helping travelers find leisure opportunities easily. The theme in travel and tourism research has been largely focused on leisure tourism, neglecting the changing landscape of business travel. The aim of this research is to explore the relationship between business trips and leisure activities while explaining the role of travel satisfaction on well-being. The term 'bleisure' is frequently used these days to describe professionals traveling domestically and internationally for work while taking time to enjoy leisure activities. Motivated by the desire to maximize travel opportunities and enhance work-life balance, bleisure travelers seamlessly integrate leisure activities into their business trips. The findings of the study highlight that 68% of domestic business travelers on their business trips incorporate some leisure activities, while 83% of international business travelers add leisure activities to their business trips. This hybrid, new form of travel, where travelers integrate work-related activities with leisure pursuits offers the opportunity to achieve higher levels of satisfaction. Travel satisfaction and well-being intertwine as individuals embark on journeys to new destinations, seeking new experiences and a chance for personal growth. This study highlights how integrating leisure activities into business travel aligns with sustainable tourism practices by fostering cultural exchange, boosting local economies, and reducing travel redundancy. By recognizing the value of travel satisfaction and well-being, businesses can enhance employee satisfaction while contributing to sustainable tourism and promoting long-term success and growth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Business tourism is the type of tourism that is concerned with people whose travelling purposes are related to their work (Davidson, 1994). As such, business tourism represents one of the oldest forms of tourism, where people have travelled to trade goods since ancient times.

International business tourism in particular involves individuals travelling abroad for work-related purposes. As companies increasingly expand across borders to explore new opportunities, international business and tourism are becoming key issues for most of them, where network facilitating, market expansion and fostering collaborations globally are crucial components for achieving long-term success in the global marketplace (Lichy & McLeay, 2018).

Therefore, it is important to distinguish between business travel and business tourism concepts. Business travel focuses particularly on the movement of individuals from place A to place B for work purposes. In that case, they are not true tourists in the conventional meaning of the term,

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while business tourism is the broader term that encompasses all aspects of the experience of the business traveler (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001).

Business travel, once primarily seen as a tool to meet organizational goals, is now experiencing a significant shift. It is increasingly recognized as an opportunity for travelers to combine work with personal leisure, allowing them to spend part of their trip on business activities and part on recreational pursuits like sightseeing, shopping, or relaxation (Çulfaqi et al., 2024; Leiper et al., 2008). This evolving trend has led to the emergence of “bleisure” travel, where travelers balance business commitments with the exploration of the destination they visit (Bhudke & Athnikar, 2024).

Bleisure travel can be considered as a sustainable activity as well, since bleisure travelers can be transformational knowledge transmitters by sharing their knowledge with others (Hovhannisyan & Keller, 2015). Despite several disadvantages like the absence from home, unstable sleeping and eating habits, and emotional problems from cultural differences (Espino et al., 2002; Unger et al., 2016), bleisure travel offers several advantages such as career promotion, higher cross-cultural understanding, promotes an open-minded approach and enhances professional status (Cohen & Gössling, 2015; Gustafson, 2014).

Despite the growing size of bleisure travel market, academic research has been largely focused on leisure tourism failing to address the changing nature of business travel (Lichy & McLeay, 2018). With this in mind, this study aims to explore the relationship between travel satisfaction and overall well-being among individuals engaging in bleisure travel and to examine how this relationship impacts their overall life satisfaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Business Travel vs. Leisure Travel

The business traveler usually becomes a leisure traveler once the working day is over (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). There are several differences between business travel and leisure travel. The main difference is the purpose of the travel. Business travel is a trip related to work (Davidson, 1994), whereas leisure travel is a trip related to pleasure, with the motivation to rest and relax, spend time with friends and family, shopping, attending sports events, visiting historical and cultural sites, sightseeing, etc. (Murphy et al., 2007; Radojevic et al., 2018). Other important differences are travel destination and who pays for the travel. In leisure travel, the tourist is typically responsible for both paying for the trip and choosing the destination. However, in the context of business travel, the employer generally covers the costs, while a third party or event organizers determine the travel destination (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). Another important difference, according to Leiper et al. (2008) is the focus of the experience, in which the experiences of business travelers are focused on the agenda of the meetings they have travelled to attend or the business-related phenomena they have travelled to observe or interact with, while the experiences of leisure travelers are tourists' attractions of the city.

Leisure trips take place during holidays or weekends and are planned in advance, while business trips take place all year round and are planned at very short notice. The latter are also known differences (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001) among leisure travel and business travel. Furthermore, leisure and business guests perceive value for money and service quality differently (Rajaguru & Hassanli, 2018). For leisure travelers value for money is a priority, while business travelers value service quality more, since their company covers their holiday expenses (Batala & Slevitch, 2024).

Several studies have discussed the differences between these two tourism forms, but only a few studies have discussed the mixture of work and travel as a new tourism trend (Lichy & McLeay, 2018; Voll et al., 2023).

2.2. Bleisure Travel Experience

Bleisure travel has gained momentum due to the flexibility of the modern workplace and the desire for work-life balance (Bhudke & Athnikar, 2024; Park et al., 2024). Bleisure can be considered as the freedom of time and space to perform your work-related duties and also indulging in relaxing and exploring related activities (Walia et al., 2023). Bleisure travelers are working vacationers who actively seek to take advantage of the opportunity to combine work and pleasure, while still respecting their professional obligations (Lichy & McLeay, 2018).

The key feature of bleisure travel is the opportunity to take some personal time to relax while working abroad. For the modern business traveler, the idea of working all day is no longer optional. These travelers are seeking destinations that can help them achieve personal growth and relaxation. Companies are recognizing the necessity to adapt some relaxation and some fun time during their employee working trips, while technology is helping these travelers find leisure opportunities faster. Respondents of the study agree (80%) that they are more productive when they incorporate leisure activities into their business trips (The Economist, 2019). In addition, in a study conducted by Expedia Group, 60% of respondents revealed that they turned their business trips in America into bleisure trips (Expedia, 2018).

The experiences of travelers who move for meetings, conferences and other work-related trips explained that leisure can be a part of business travel, particularly when people travel with their co-workers or partners to enhance the quality of travel (Shaheer et al., 2021). While business trips are often conducted solo, family members may occasionally accompany travelers, especially if the destination is attractive or the stay is extended. On the other hand, bleisure tourists who travel alone can interact with both colleagues and residents, enriching their experience. This interaction prevents loneliness and offers a chance to immerse in different cultures. By combining professional responsibilities with personal exploration, bleisure travelers gain both business insights and valuable leisure experiences, turning their trips into enjoyable, educational journeys (Ünal & Özgürel, 2021).

Hybrid travel modes, such as bleisure, not only enhance individual well-being but also contribute to sustainable tourism by providing benefits to local economies (Gustafson, 2014; Wang, 2017). By integrating work and leisure, travelers are more likely to extend their stays and engage deeply with the host communities. This approach reduces the environmental impact associated with multiple separate trips while contributing to the socio-economic development of destinations. Hovhannisyan and Keller (2015) highlight that business travelers often serve as knowledge transmitters, spreading innovative ideas and fostering cultural exchange within host communities. Similarly, Cohen and Gössling (2015) emphasize how combining work and leisure fosters more meaningful and responsible interactions with local cultures and economies.

2.3. Travel Satisfaction, Well-Being and Life Satisfaction

Satisfaction is defined as a state of contentment that arises when an individual's desires or needs are fulfilled, reflecting the degree to which experiences or products meet or exceed expectations (Oliver, 2014). Satisfaction in regards to expectations is the comparison between an individual's

expectations and their experience. Expectations are individuals' beliefs about what will happen during an experience, and these expectations can be influenced by several factors such as previous experience, word-of-mouth, and marketing messages. According to the expectation-disconfirmation model, when the experience meets or surpasses its expectations, the individual feels satisfied (Oliver, 1980). On the other hand, if the experience falls short of expectations, dissatisfaction occurs. The same is true with travel satisfaction, if individuals' travel experience surpasses their expectations individuals feel satisfied.

Research indicates that there is a strong relationship between travel satisfaction and an individual's well-being, as positive travel experiences significantly impact mental and emotional health. Dhanabhakyaam and Sarath (2023) explain that well-being encompasses emotional health and overall functioning, suggesting that satisfying travel experiences can enhance these aspects of a person's life. Engaging in travel can provide a break from daily stressors, offering a chance for relaxation and rejuvenation which can be the case in bleisure travel too. Business trips offer the opportunity for personal growth (Cohen & Gössling, 2015; Gustafson, 2014) which can enrich individuals' well-being. Business travelers who blend work with leisure during business trips tend to achieve a better work-life balance, leading to improved job performance, reduced stress, and greater life satisfaction (Bhudke & Athnikar, 2024; Ramgade, 2023). Their satisfaction is further enhanced by the fact that their organization covers travel expenses, and by the opportunity to immerse themselves in different cultural and institutional settings (Çulfaqi et al., 2024; Ünal & Özgürel, 2021). Additionally, bleisure travel, especially for young professionals, offers the chance to expand both professional and personal networks, benefiting both the individual and their company (Lichy & McLeay, 2018; Ramgade, 2023). Several research studies highlight the positive relationship between travel satisfaction and individuals' well-being (De Vos et al., 2013; Ettema et al., 2011; Friman et al., 2017; Y. Wang & Gao, 2022; Zins & Ponocny, 2022).

As awareness of the importance of quality of life grows, academic research on life satisfaction has increased as well. Diener (1984) defines life satisfaction as “an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one's life at a particular point in time ranging from negative to positive”, while Wang (2017) defines it as “the extent to which individuals assess the overall quality of their lives”. The latter also emphasizes that leisure travel plays a significant role in enhancing life satisfaction by offering opportunities for relaxation, cultural enrichment, and social interaction. These travel experiences contribute to both immediate and long-term well-being, supporting personal development and creating meaningful memories that further improve life satisfaction. In a study conducted in China, with 509 elderly tourists, respondents revealed that travel satisfaction positively influences overall life satisfaction (Pan et al., 2020). Other research studies have revealed similar results (Wang, 2017; Zarabi et al., 2019).

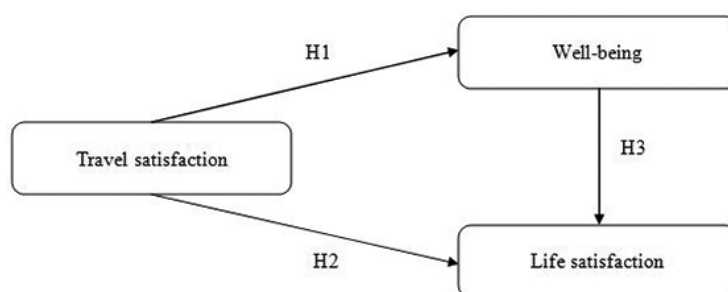


Figure 1. Proposed research model

Source: Own processing

Research also confirms a positive relationship between an individual's well-being and his/her life satisfaction (Dhanabhakyaam & Sarath, 2023; Diener et al., 2023; Huppert, 2023; Maddux, 2017; Martyr et al., 2018; Ryff & Keyes, 2023). These works explore how psychological well-being, including emotional and mental health, influences in enhancement of life satisfaction. The authors emphasize that individuals with higher levels of psychological well-being are more likely to experience greater life satisfaction and overall happiness, therefore attempts to improve emotional health can lead to sustained improvements in overall life satisfaction.

Based on the above-mentioned arguments, we propose the following research model (Figure 1) and develop the following hypotheses:

- H1.** There is a significant influence of travel satisfaction on individuals' well-being.
- H2.** There is a significant influence of travel satisfaction on individuals' life satisfaction.
- H3.** There is a positive relationship between individuals' well being and life satisfaction.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

This empirical study was conducted in 2024 using the data collected from Montenegrin respondents by self-administered questionnaires. The target population consists of Montenegrin employees engaged in bleisure travel in the last three years. Each respondent prior to fulfilling the questionnaire was asked if they had engaged on a business trip in the last three years and if at the same travel have taken some personal time for fun, relaxation or rejuvenation. Only those who have taken part in bleisure travel received the questionnaire. If participants had more than one occasion of bleisure travel, they were asked to refer to their most recent experience. The purpose of the study was kindly explained to each participant and we explained that the data will be used for statistical purposes only.

Data were collected from the authors with the help of two assistants throughout January, February, and March 2024. Potential respondents were approached at the entrance of their work and were asked whether they would be willing to participate in a survey dealing with bleisure travel. In total, 150 questionnaires were distributed. Eight incomplete questionnaires were eliminated from the analysis, leaving 142 valid questionnaires for further analysis.

3.2. Demographic Profile

The characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1. A majority of the respondents (56.3 percent) were male. In terms of age, 12.0 percent are in the age group 18-27, 27.5 percent in the group 28-37, the majority of the respondents (33.10 percent) are in the group 38-47, 11.9 percent are in the age group 48-57 and 15.5 percent are in the age group 58-67. In terms of education, the majority of respondents report having a high level of education, (40.8 percent have a bachelor's degree, 40.1 percent report having a master's degree, 1.4 percent report having a doctorate or a higher level of education), 2.1 percent have a professional degree, 6.3 percent have a high school diploma or equivalent, 9.2 percent report that they attended college/university but not finished. As per their job title or rank, 3.5 percent declare they are CEOs/Entrepreneurs/Owners or Presidents,

9.2 percent are executive managers, 9.9 percent belong to the middle level of management, 9.9 percent to the low level, 5.6 percent are professors/academics/researchers, 4.9 percent are technical staff, 22.5 percent are professional workers, 16.9 percent are administrative staff, and 17.6 percent have other profession. More than 66 percent of the respondents report traveling for work more than once a year. The data were coded and processed using SPSS.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents (n = 142)

| Variable | Frequency (n = 142) | (%) |
|--|---------------------|------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 80 | 56.3 |
| Female | 62 | 43.7 |
| Age | | |
| 18-27 | 17 | 12.0 |
| 28-37 | 39 | 27.5 |
| 38-47 | 47 | 33.1 |
| 48-57 | 17 | 11.9 |
| 58-67 | 22 | 15.5 |
| Educational background | | |
| High school or equivalent | 9 | 6.3 |
| Attended College/University | 13 | 9.2 |
| Bachelor's degree | 58 | 40.8 |
| Master's degree | 57 | 40.1 |
| Doctorate or higher degree | 2 | 1.4 |
| Professional degree | 3 | 2.1 |
| Job title | | |
| CEO/Entrepreneur/Owner/President | 5 | 3.5 |
| Executive management (eg, CFO, CIO, CMO) | 13 | 9.2 |
| Middle management (eg, group director, department manager, supervisor) | 14 | 9.9 |
| Lower management | 14 | 9.9 |
| Professor/Academic/Researcher | 8 | 5.6 |
| Technical staff (eg, non-manager, IT, scientific, engineering) | 7 | 4.9 |
| Professional (eg, accountant, architect, lawyer) | 32 | 22.5 |
| Administrative staff | 24 | 16.9 |
| Other | 25 | 17.6 |
| Travel for work | | |
| Less than once a year | 14 | 9.9 |
| Once a year | 33 | 23.2 |
| Two, three times a year | 48 | 33.8 |
| Four, five times a year | 22 | 15.5 |
| Six or more times a year | 25 | 17.6 |

Source: Own calculations

3.3. Measures

Travel satisfaction. Travel satisfaction was operationalized as a multidimensional construct using a modified version of the scale developed by Kwon and Lee (2020). Items used to measure this dimension are as follows: Overall, I am satisfied with this trip, I am more satisfied than I expected to be with this trip, I am satisfied with my decision, I am satisfied with the experiences of the trip, and this trip fully met my expectations. A five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”; 5 = “strongly agree”) was used to measure all these five items.

Well-being. Well-being was operationalized as a multidimensional construct using a modified version of the scale developed by Kang (2020). Items used to measure this dimension are as follows: this trip played a very important role in my social well-being, this trip played an important

role in my travel well-being, and this trip played an important role in enhancing my quality of life. A five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”; 5 = “strongly agree”) was used to measure all these three items.

Life satisfaction. Life satisfaction was operationalized as a multidimensional construct using the satisfaction with life scale developed by Diener et al. (1985). Items used to measure this dimension are as follows: In most ways my life is close to my ideal, the conditions of my life are excellent, I am satisfied with my life, so far I have gotten the important things I want in life, if I could live life over, I would change almost nothing. A five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”; 5 = “strongly agree”) was used to measure all these five items (Pavot & Diener, 1993, 2008).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Factor Analysis & Reliability

Factor analysis is a statistical technique used to identify underlying relationships between measured variables by grouping them into latent constructs or factors (Meyers et al., 2013). This method provides a means to consolidate scattered information from multiple variables into a smaller, more manageable number of factors. This study used factor analysis with Varimax rotation. When performing such an analysis, importance should be paid to the factorial weights of each item. Each item had a factor loading higher than 0.70.

Table 2. Summary of measurement scales

| Constructs | Items | α | Factor loading |
|----------------------------|---|----------|----------------|
| Travel satisfaction | TS1. Overall, I am satisfied with this trip | 0.786 | 0.722 |
| | TS2. I am more satisfied than I expected to be with this trip | | 0.702 |
| | TS3. I am satisfied with my decision | | 0.751 |
| | TS4. I am satisfied with the experience of the trip | | 0.731 |
| | TS5. This trip fully met my expectation | | 0.771 |
| Well-being | WB1. This trip played a very important role in my social well-being | 0.710 | 0.782 |
| | WB2. This trip played an important role in my travel well-being | | 0.823 |
| | WB3. This trip played an important role in enhancing my quality of life | | 0.782 |
| Life satisfaction | LS1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal | 0.768 | 0.714 |
| | LS2. The conditions of my life are excellent | | 0.715 |
| | LS3. I am satisfied with my life | | 0.713 |
| | LS4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life | | 0.707 |
| | LS5. If I could live life over, I would change almost nothing | | 0.765 |

Source: Own processing

In order to measure reliability we used the coefficient Cronbach Alpha. The measure “Travel satisfaction” reported the highest level of Cronbach alpha (0.786). On the other hand Cronbach’s alpha for the measure “well-being” was 0.710, and for the measure “life satisfaction” was 0.768. All of these levels indicate adequate reliability (Hair et al., 2010).

4.2. Regression Analysis

To test whether or not there is a significant relationship between travel satisfaction and well-being, we performed a simple regression analysis, using *travel satisfaction* as the independent variable and *well-being* as the dependent variable. The results of the simple regression analysis indicated

that there was a significant relationship between travel satisfaction and well-being ($F(1, 140) = 247.526, p = 0.000$). Furthermore, the regression slope coefficient was positive and highly significant ($b = +0.942$). Lastly, the coefficient of correlation was 0.799, indicating a relatively strong correlation between the two variables. Consequently, hypothesis H1 was supported. There is a significant influence of travel satisfaction on individuals' well-being.

To test whether or not there is a significant relationship between travel satisfaction and life satisfaction, we performed a simple regression analysis, using *travel satisfaction* as the independent variable and *life satisfaction* as the dependent variable. The results of the simple regression analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between travel satisfaction and life satisfaction ($F(1, 140) = 241.498, p = 0.000$). Furthermore, the regression slope coefficient was positive and highly significant ($b = +0.730$). Lastly, the coefficient of correlation was 0.796, indicating a relatively strong correlation between the two variables. Consequently, hypothesis H2 was supported. There is a significant influence of travel satisfaction on individuals' life satisfaction.

To test whether or not there is a significant relationship between well-being and life satisfaction, we performed a simple regression analysis, using *well-being* as the independent variable and *life satisfaction* as the dependent variable. The results of the simple regression analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between well-being and life satisfaction ($F(1, 140) = 203.485, p = 0.000$). Furthermore, the regression slope coefficient was positive and highly significant ($b = +0.600$). Lastly, the coefficient of correlation was 0.770, indicating a relatively strong correlation between the two variables. Consequently, hypothesis H3 was supported. There is a positive relationship between individuals' well-being and life satisfaction.

The results indicate that incorporating leisure into business travel has implications beyond individual well-being, fostering sustainable tourism practices. By encouraging longer stays and deeper engagement with local communities, bleisure travel enhances cultural exchange and drives local economic growth. These findings suggest that companies have an opportunity to align their travel policies with broader sustainability goals while improving employee satisfaction.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Despite its contribution to existing literature, this study is subject to certain limitations. The sample size used is small ($n = 142$), limiting therefore the generalization of the findings. Additionally, the study offers only a snapshot of employees' perceptions from only three cities in Montenegro: Ulcinj, Bar and Budva. As a result, the findings may not accurately represent the perceptions of business travellers in other regions of Montenegro or other countries, particularly since the study is focused solely on Montenegro and does not include cross-border comparisons. Furthermore, the data collected do not reflect changes in behaviour over time. Based on these limitations, future research should extend the study to other countries and across different periods to enable valuable comparisons between countries and specific travel periods.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the relationship between business travel and/or bleisure with individuals' well-being and overall life satisfaction, serving as a foundation for more detailed research in this area. Future research could explore which specific types of leisure activities have the most significant impact on travel satisfaction and well-being. It would also be beneficial to investigate how different demographics—such as age, gender, and cultural background—experience the relationship between business travel, leisure opportunities,

and well-being. Additionally, examining the effects of business travel on well-being across various industries would provide further depth to this field of study.

6. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to test a conceptual model on the relationship among the constructs of “travel satisfaction”, individuals’ “well-being”, and their “life satisfaction”. The conceptual model proposed in the study postulated that travel satisfaction impacts both individuals’ well-being and their life satisfaction, in the case of bleisure travelers. The model also postulated that there is a positive relationship between well-being and overall life satisfaction. All of these raised hypotheses were supported. The findings of this study resulted to be quite in line with the previous studies (Bhudke & Athnikar, 2024; Cohen & Gössling, 2015; Çulfağı et al., 2024; De Vos et al., 2013; Dhanabhakyaam & Sarath, 2023; Diener et al., 2023; Ettema et al., 2011; Friman et al., 2017; Gustafson, 2014; Huppert, 2023; Maddux, 2017; Martyr et al., 2018; Pan et al., 2020; Ramgade, 2023; Ryff & Keyes, 2023; Ünal & Özgürel, 2021; Y. Wang & Gao, 2022; Zins & Ponocny, 2022) regarding the relationship among these constructs.

The findings of the study highlighted a significant positive relationship between travel satisfaction and overall well-being. Employees who reported higher satisfaction with their business travel experiences also exhibited higher levels of life satisfaction. In addition, the positive relationship between travel satisfaction and life satisfaction is mediated by well-being, implying that improved well-being due to satisfying travel experiences enhances life satisfaction. Incorporating leisure opportunities during business travel significantly boosts travel satisfaction, highlighting the need for companies to facilitate enjoyable activities for their travelling employees. Employers/managers should consider implementing policies that promote leisure and relaxation during business trips to enhance employee well-being and satisfaction, ultimately benefiting the organization through improved employee performance.

This study positions bleisure travel as a key strategy for promoting sustainable tourism, offering benefits to employees, employers, and local communities alike. The integration of leisure into business travel not only enhances employee well-being and productivity but also contributes to sustainable tourism by increasing cultural and economic engagement with local destinations. Aligning business travel policies with global sustainability objectives allows companies to foster sustainable tourism practices while gaining long-term benefits from a healthier and more satisfied workforce. These findings highlight the potential of bleisure travel to play a transformative role in the intersection of business, leisure and sustainability.

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