



SAFETY FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TRAVEL

by Russ Huxtable

RISK ASSESSMENT

As soon as an overseas trip is planned there is a requirement to conduct two separate risk assessments - one could be perceived as tactical and the other more strategic. In a tactical context, it needs to be established how safe the activity to be undertaken is, this would follow the company's normal **Health & Safety** protocols. Thinking more strategically, it also needs to be determined how safe is the location that the individual is travelling to? A number of factors will come into play here:

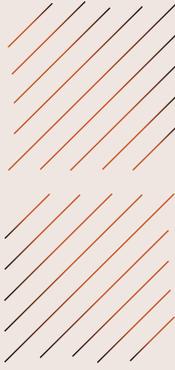
- The risk appetite of the organisation and/or individual
- The corporate "Duty of Care" responsibilities of the organisation
- The cost of mitigating the risks balanced against the value of the trip to the organisation

For the present we will ignore the tactical issue, as most organisations have this well documented in their Health & Safety Policy, but the issue of location is different. Companies will often allow staff to deploy overseas without understanding the risk inherent in the environment into which they are about to travel or alternatively curtail travel on a gut feeling without an accurate, fully informed picture of the issues. From experience there appears to be considerable institutional naivety regarding overseas travel in many sectors of business.

In order to start to accurately appreciate the risk involved in international travel an ability to draw on credible intelligence and make some meaningful analysis is required. Utilising intelligence from sources such as the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Travel Advisories (or other Govt. guidance such as the US State Department), CIA World Factbook and commercial providers, such as **ISARR** is a good starting point. Each key area can then be considered in depth, looking at the relevant critical factors and the impact they will have in relation to the planned business trip and those conducting it.

The matrix below, with one worked example, uses a type of **PESTLE** analysis to evaluate the factors and consider their impact. A **PESTLE** analysis is a strategic audit of external influences acting on an organisation: **Political; Economic; Sociological; Technological; Legal** and **Environmental**. For our purpose, the influences have been amended to suit the risk analysis for international travel (please note this is not an exhaustive list and it can be added to if deemed appropriate to the location). It is definitely worth appreciating that data gathered from more than one source and analysed by more than one person is much richer and, consequently, of more value.

PESTLE ANALYSIS

	Consideration of Factors	"So what" How does it affect the traveller?	What is the specific risk?	What is the mitigation required?	What is the residual level of risk?
P POLITICAL 	Political situation is starting to stabilise post conflict. However, there may still be demonstrations or gatherings. These are related to actions by defeated political rival factions.	Individuals may become caught up in politically motivated violence	Physical harm, injury or even death	Avoid all political rallies or organised gatherings. Do not discuss the internal politics or historical context with locals	With well maintained awareness the residual risk is considered acceptable with limited threat to the individual
Security					
Environment					
Infrastructure					
Medical					
Accommodation					
Local laws/ customs					
Miscellaneous					

Time is a key component of this assessment, on two counts. Firstly, the analysis must be conducted in sufficient time to enable the mitigation to be put in place. An example of this could be your analysis of the accommodation, highlighting that it was so remote that additional first aid training is required given the proximity of the nearest medical facility; it is therefore unquestionable that sufficient time will be required to conduct this training. The corollary of this is that a risk assessment is only a snapshot in time and needs to be revisited to ensure none of the factors have significantly changed. An example of this would be the terrorist attack in Sri Lanka during Easter of 2019. Hitherto Sri Lanka would have been considered relatively safe in relation to this type of terrorism, but that changed overnight.

ANALYSIS TO REALITY



The most common issue in relation to this type of risk assessment is that a well conducted analysis is undertaken but remains just a piece of paper. At this point the job is not finished; on the contrary this is the starting point. It is vital that the follow up work is conducted in a timely manner, with the appropriate level of mitigation for each factor being considered, costed and the mitigation strategy physically implemented on the ground. This requires considerable effort in terms of rapid planning, execution and release of resources or funding. For example, if it is deemed appropriate to have an armed escort from the airport to the hotel then the appropriate security company needs to be found and contracted. The arrangements will all need to be put in place prior to the traveller arriving and you may need to be cognisant of your company's procurement methodology, which may further add to the timeline.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

It is key that completion of the risk assessment and company sign off or approval takes place at the appropriate level. Too often the individual traveller has a vested interest that will bias their go/no go decision. The understanding and acceptance of the corporate risk needs to be at the appropriate level to validate the benefit versus mitigation cost, and ensure the residual risk is acceptable from a corporate perspective. I have often seen departments question the cost and necessity of the mitigation. This risk versus cost benefit decision is a key one for the establishment. If it is felt that the cost of mitigation is too high then the value of the trip to the organisation clearly doesn't justify the spend. The logic here is that the risk should not be ignored or down-played, but the trip should not take place as its value to the organisation doesn't justify the cost of risk mitigation. This balanced decision must be set at the appropriate level so that the person signing off the assessment is cognisant of the duty of care perspective and the accrued benefit in validating the travel.

TRAINING

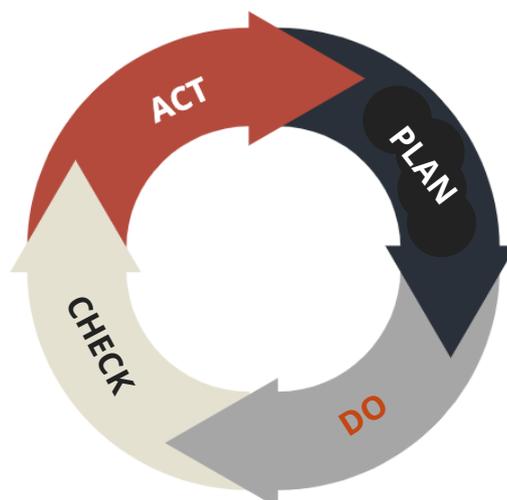
The simplest way to mitigate a large percentage of the risk related to travel is to have an in-house training package covering issues from situational awareness to simple security tips and broader considerations for different regions, such as actions to be taken in the event of an earthquake or other natural disaster. Ideally an electronic learning tool could be used as a reference source for your business travellers. This would be the most cost effective way forward in ensuring a basic level of awareness, preventing the taking of unnecessary risk through ignorance.

PREPARATION

As with most projects preparation is key, and calculating the required timeline is vital; by way of example some medical preparations can take up to 6 weeks (i.e. inoculations). The resulting mitigation strategies that emanate from the detail planning need to not only to be appropriately resourced, but have the time available to practically implement them. That said, you will need to be aware of the potential for changes to your plan brought on by changes to the environment. This process follows **John Boyd's OODA loop** described in previous ISARR papers.



Your intelligence source is your Observation, the PESTLE Risk assessment is your Orientation, the mitigation Strategies are your Decisions, and your implementation your Action; and as previously highlighted this is a continuous review process. Many of you will have come across this principle in its simpler form as the Health & Safety Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle.



Establishing a **communication plan** is a fundamental part of your preparation. Your business unit or organisation should have detailed copies of the travellers' itineraries so that their whereabouts are known, and they can be contacted in an emergency. Where the risk starts to increase, say a trip to Nigeria, then a regular process of checking-in with their company is advised. This could simply be a daily phone call; however, what is key here is that those expecting the call know what actions to take if that call is late or does not come. Speed of action through a preordained process is vital should someone require assistance in a relatively high risk country. Any changes to the itinerary once in country must be notified to the responsible body in the organisation. The business should have total clarity of the location of their travellers at all times in order to react appropriately if required.

CONCLUSION

It is surprising how many organisations take their responsibilities for employees safety when travelling internationally for granted. What makes this particularly worrying is that under Health & Safety legislation of most mature countries you have a legal "duty of care" to your employees, and in the worst case scenario could be held personally culpable for corporate manslaughter. Furthermore, this could cost the company considerably in financial terms should the individual or family seek compensation through the courts for your failure to consider their safety, not to mention potential fines imposed by the Health & Safety Executive. You should also consider the impact this lack of process may have on your hard won reputation and the impact on future competitiveness. That said, taking aside the legal obligations you have a moral duty to ensure that staff working for your company are not unnecessarily exposed to danger. On the other hand, putting these simple measures in place and ingraining them into your culture, through clear practices and processes, will ensure your corporate "duty of care" is met. Ideally this is achieved through one end to end electronic system such as the ISARR platform to ensure simplicity and efficiency at relatively low cost. Establishing these key processes can also bring real financial benefits, as you are now able to evidence your detailed risk assessment, mitigation, actions, and training. Your insurance company is likely to look favourably on the robustness of your risk reduction methodology when considering the premium of your corporate policy.

