

Blacklane



Finding flow:

How executives excel on the move

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Focus in motion

While travel managers appreciate how the benefits of business travel stretch beyond financial and professional success into wellbeing and personal development, new research from Blacklane highlights how business travel can unlock further advantages.

In the first study of its kind, **Finding Flow: How Executives Excel on the Move** explores how a carefully curated, friction-free travel experience allows executives to achieve “flow state” while on the move, and the benefits that brings.

Flow state, a term credited to Hungarian-American psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihályi to describe deep focus, can lead to a 400% to 500% increase in productivity. That is according to a range of studies, including **a landmark 10-year study by McKinsey**, as well as research by Advanced Brain Monitoring & Darpa, and The University of Sydney.

Nine in ten executives claim that travel unlocks some of their most valuable thinking, yet 86% struggle to achieve the deep focus that facilitates it.

However, this whitepaper, which draws on a commissioned survey of 2,000 business leaders and high-net-worth individuals across the UK and US, reveals a paradox: **nine in ten executives claim that travel unlocks some of their most valuable thinking, yet 86% struggle to achieve the deep focus that facilitates it.**

For business travel professionals, journey design directly shapes whether a traveler arrives sharp and ready, or depleted and drained.

When trips run seamlessly, 93% of respondents report feeling more productive. This whitepaper translates that evidence into practical guidance: how a smarter travel policy protects thinking time, supports performance, and turns every business trip into a competitive advantage.

The survey was commissioned by Blacklane and conducted by Censuswide to explore the business travel habits of 2,000 executives in both the UK and US. The poll was carried out between March 20, 2026 and April 2, 2026.



34%

of business leaders and HNWI's who travel for work say "during the journey itself" is one of their top two moments for reflection and focus.

“ I developed a theory of optimal experience based on the concept of flow — the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter. ”

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi
"Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience"



48%

UK

53%

US

respondents stated it's "very easy" to achieve deep focus.

UK-based business leaders find it harder to "experience deep focus or high-level strategic thinking" than their transatlantic counterparts when traveling for business, with **48% of UK** respondents stating it's "very easy" to achieve, compared to **53% of US** respondents. Variations like these highlight cultural attitudes and the need for travel managers to think locally when designing policies.

Finding flow:

Opportunities for optimum performance

Previous Blacklane research has explored how stressful journeys impact productivity — with 45% of C-level executives losing four to eight hours of productive time during a business trip if their journey was stressful. However, this new survey highlights how seamless business travel acts as a performance enabler, and reveals the conditions employees require to achieve flow state..

Beyond raw productivity, seamless travel directly fuels the creativity and mental clarity required to perform at a peak level.



Why it matters

93% of HNWIs and business leaders say seamless travel makes them more productive.

A smooth business trip makes all the difference. Based on the poll results, **93% of HNWIs and business leaders say seamless travel makes them more productive**, with 44% saying they are significantly more productive on the move.

The survey quizzed respondents on the areas they felt benefitted the most:

How does smooth travel affect your work performance?

Making clearer decisions

(37%)

Feeling more professionally energised

(36%)

Feeling calmer and more focused

(34%)

Thinking more strategically

(32%)

Being more creative

(31%)

Source

Question: How, if in any particular ways, does smooth travel affect your work performance?
Data: All respondents.

The benefits span cognitive, emotional and strategic performance almost equally. This suggests that frictionless travel doesn't improve one aspect of work, it elevates overall executive functioning.



Journey as thinking space

While research shows seamless journeys improve productivity and decision-making, business trips are formed of many components. As a result, HNWIs and business leaders were asked which moments in a travel journey are most associated with focus and reflection. 34% of those who travel for work say “during the journey itself” is one of their top two moments for reflection and focus when traveling for business.

Source

Question: Where, if at all, in your business travel journey do you find the best space for reflection and focus?

Data: All respondents.

A question of timing

Not only did the survey of 2,000 executives map out where moments of inspiration can arrive, it explored when executives are most likely to experience the deep focus that supports clearer thinking and stronger performance.

What time of travel, if any, do you mostly prefer in order to achieve high focus?

Early in the morning when my mind is fresh

(34%)



Before meetings while preparing mentally

(33%)



Overnight when I'm uninterrupted

(31%)



During the day when I can stay responsive

(31%)



Immediately after meetings while ideas are fresh

(29%)



Late evening when it's quieter

(29%)



Source

Question: What time of travel, if any, do you mostly prefer in order to achieve high focus?
Data: Business Leaders in the UK and USA.

Transatlantic split

Looking further at the survey results, more transatlantic differences appear. When HNWIs were asked what time of travel they mostly prefer to achieve high focus, the top two answers for UK respondents were “Immediately after meetings while ideas are fresh” (33%) and “Before meetings while preparing mentally” (32%).

But for US-based HNWIs, the top two responses were “Early in the morning when my mind is fresh” (35%) and “Before meetings while preparing mentally” (28%).

Therefore, UK business travelers peak in focus after meetings, meaning they want to process, synthesise, and capture ideas while momentum is still running.

US business travelers peak before, meaning they want a clear head and uninterrupted preparation time before the day’s commitments begin, aligning with the **“5-to-9” business traveler** profile identified by Hilton. Cultural variations like these have direct implications for how travel is scheduled and structured in each market.

Key takeaways

- 01** The journey itself is prime thinking time, **with 34% of executives rating it their top moment for reflection.**
- 02** Travel, when seamless, sharpens decisions, fuels creativity and raises strategic thinking.
- 03** **Nine in ten executives say travel unlocks their best thinking, but most never achieve it.**

“ Any frequent traveler knows that finding focus within a packed itinerary is hard to achieve. This new report highlights the stark impact of friction and frustration when on the move; when travel is not calm and controlled leaders simply cannot function at their optimum during the trip and often beyond. Travel schedules need to include the experiences that empower quality thinking, wellbeing and recovery. This includes adequate consideration for every aspect of the journey and not leaving elements such as ground transport to chance. Blacklane’s chauffeur service takes care of every detail to ensure the highly valuable thinking time that powers success is protected. ”

Dr. Jens Wohltorf
Founder and CEO, Blacklane

Calculating impact:

The cost of lost flow

Travel has the potential to be highly beneficial for achieving deep flow, however unless all conditions – from comfort to journey disruption – are working at their optimum then the opportunity is lost.

This whitepaper identifies the conditions that can facilitate the right environment for deeper focus. The survey reveals that 59% of HNWIs who travel for work and business leaders who travel for business say that no more than half of a typical trip offers high-value thinking time.

The consequences can be far reaching. When disruption does occur, travelers lose the productivity opportunity, which in turn impacts business performance. Yet it also impacts traveler wellbeing and performance after the trip, rather than just during.

The survey has identified which types of disruption are harmful to achieving flow state, with crowds and noise emerging as the top threat to clarity on the move.

When business leaders and HNWIs were asked about the obstacles for finding clarity on the move, crowded or noisy environments, with a lack of personal space, was the top response at 31%.

A lack of technology, such as access to a laptop or other devices, was second at 29%, followed by delays or uncertainty around timing (28%) and sensory overload or stimulation (28%). Poor or unreliable connections in their journey, such as logistical connections, was also a common answer at 28%.

The negative impacts

The cost of lost flow extends far beyond the individual trip.. Business leaders and HNWI's were quizzed on what happens if they cannot reach a flow state in transit.

What are the impacts when you are unable to focus while traveling for work?

It forces them to do additional catch-up work when they return

(81%)

It increases a feeling of mental fatigue

(80%)

It reduces the quality of their thinking or decision-making

(79%)

It reduces their ability to perform their role

(79%)

It makes it harder to prepare effectively for the meetings they've traveled to attend

(79%)

It disrupts their overall productivity for the entire work trip

(77%)

Source

Question: When you are unable to focus or enter a 'flow state' while traveling for work, to what extent do you agree or disagree that it has the following impacts on you?

Data: all respondents.

When flow and thinking time are not achieved, the impact is far more than an individual business trip. It disrupts after a trip, impacts both productivity and performance during the trip, and reduces the quality of decision making.

Overall, all aspects of noise, connectivity, delays and fragmented journeys have a roughly equal impact. The margin for error is high, and disrupts focus for those on the go.

Key takeaways

- 01 Lost flow is not just about the journey, as it follows executives home as fatigue, catch-up work and poor decisions.
- 02 Noise and crowds are the number one barrier executives cite to achieving focus in transit.
- 03 **Half of every trip is wasted**, as most executives say fewer than half their travel hours deliver genuine thinking time.



59%

of those who travel for business say that no more than half of a typical trip is high-value thinking time.

Source

Question: On a typical business trip, what percentage of your total travel time (including transit and downtime) would you consider 'high-value thinking time'?
Data: all respondents.



“ Research shows that after a single interruption, it can take more than 23 minutes to regain deep focus. For high-performing individuals and frequent travelers, these constant disruptions — whether from travel, environmental stressors or fragmented schedules — can significantly impact flow state. ”

Timna Rose
Founder, Studio Atara

The space to create

Seamless business travel gives executives the chance to find inspiration, and take productivity to a new level. But what does success look like, besides a disruption-free journey?

Based on the survey, there are many elements that help to enable flow, with sensory and psychological conditions high on the agenda.

Feeling calm (cited by 86%), feeling in control (84%) and traveling with a trusted provider (83%) are also highly important.

How important are the following elements to help you think at your best?

Touch (what you can feel around you – clothes, the environment you're sitting in, use of pressure, etc)



Sound (listening to specific music or sounds to help you focus)



Taste (particular foods or drinks that help you focus, e.g. supplements, tinctures, etc.)



Scent (either scents in your environment or scents you take with you to promote focus)



Sight (visually what is around you)



Source

Question: How important or unimportant, if at all, are each of the following elements to help you to achieve flow/think at your best?

Data: 1,000 Consumers with £1m+ in investable assets across the UK and USA.

Looking at the responses, it appears that all senses impact achieving flow, with no one element outperforming another. This highlights the need for optimum conditions across all faculties.

Organisations cannot explicitly manufacture a flow state, but they can create an atmosphere that encourages it. Feeling calm and in control during a journey is a non-negotiable. This reinforces the need for travel managers to embrace a multi-sensory approach.

The hotel's role

“The environments we move through play a far greater role in maintaining this state than many realise,” according to Timna Rose, founder of interior design practice **Studio Atara**, which uses the **WELL Building Standard** as an evidence-based framework to create environments that actively support human health, wellbeing and performance.

For hotels, among other hospitality spaces, Rose advocates optimising factors such as air quality, lighting, acoustics, thermal comfort, movement and nourishment. This shifts the focus beyond comfort alone towards supporting guests at their highest cognitive and physical potential.

Yet as the survey shows, for globally mobile leaders and entrepreneurs on the move, wellbeing extends far beyond the hotel room. Every stage of the journey can either support or disrupt circadian (the body's internal clock) alignment and cognitive performance.

“Through the integration of biophilic design, neuroaesthetic principles and carefully considered sensory experiences, transitional environments can reduce cognitive load, lower stress responses and accelerate recovery from travel fatigue, creating the optimal conditions for sustained focus, cognitive clarity and flow throughout the journey and beyond,” Rose adds.



Creating flow state in the air

Meanwhile, airlines are increasingly designing for flow state, across all stages of the journey. Lounges, for example, are helping executives get into the right headspace before boarding.

New concepts combine private workspaces, showers, relaxation rooms, and curated food and beverage. For example, Qatar Airways' lounge in Doha, The Garden, has multiple wings and clearly defined zones to prevent crowding and maintain a calm atmosphere.

Airlines are developing cabins that take into account the full spectrum of traveler needs, such as Cathay Pacific's Aria Suite, Alaska Airlines' new International Business Class suites, and American Airlines' Flagship Suite, which include features like suite doors, sliding partitions and personalised lighting, making the experience feeling more like a hotel room than a flight.

Gulf carriers are equally responding. Emirates' First Class product draws directly from Mercedes-Benz, ticking plenty of sensory boxes. Beyond floor-to-ceiling sliding doors, there are soft leather seats and mood lighting, plus up to 40 square feet of personal space, providing a barrier to crowded, noisy environments.

Etihad's onboard Quiet Cabins and Business Studios, as their names suggest, also set up the right conditions for deeper focus. The Business Studio has large work surfaces, inward-facing seat layouts and generous personal space; Quiet Cabins come with instructions for minimal distractions.

Riyadh Air, meanwhile, has a PriestmanGoode colour palette in place, designed to reduce cognitive load.

Overall, these are design elements that push further than luxury branding, addressing sensory and psychological preconditions for deep focus.



No two executives travel in exactly the same way

For some, time on the move is an opportunity for deep thinking and strategic reflection. Others prioritise staying constantly connected, recovering and recharging, or immersing themselves in new environments and experiences.

To better understand these differing approaches, the research identified four distinct business traveler personas.

Recognising these behaviours can help travel managers design journeys that better support individual needs, creating the conditions for greater focus, wellbeing and performance on the move.

27%

Deep Thinker

They use travel time for focused work, reflection, and strategic thinking away from day-to-day distractions.

25%

Sensory/Experiential Traveler

They make the most of the destination, seeking out local culture, food, and experiences around work commitments.

24%

Hyper-Connected Operator

they stay constantly connected, responding in real time and keeping everything moving while on the go.

24%

Recovery-Driven Traveler

they prioritise rest, routine, and wellbeing so they can perform at their best during meetings and events.

Source

Question: Which of the below, if any, best describes you when you travel for business?
Data: all respondents.

Recognising these behaviours can help travel managers design journeys that better support individual needs, creating the conditions for greater focus, wellbeing and performance on the move.

Key takeaways

- 01** All five senses matter equally, and there is no single shortcut. **Flow requires every condition to be right simultaneously.**
- 02** Calm and control are non-negotiable, with executives revealing they cannot think at their best if they don't feel settled and secure.
- 03** Know your traveler. Four distinct personas mean one-size-fits-all journey design will not lead to a productive journey.



Blacklane's mission to make travel seamless

Blacklane was founded to remove friction from travel so that moving around the world feels effortless. As a frequent traveler, I knew how draining and unpredictable every journey could be. We built Blacklane to change that: a consistently high-quality global chauffeur service that is enjoyable, reliable, and simple to book and manage.

Our guests travel for business and leisure to build meaningful connections. Blacklane has grown by making sure every journey is seamless, so our guests can stay focused on the real reason for their trip and create impact.

Today, chauffeur partners in more than 500 cities use the Blacklane platform. Our technology connects them with international travelers who value the personal care and attention of a professional chauffeur - someone who takes pride in their craft, their business and the city they call home. Their insight and human connection with our guests is integral to the Blacklane experience. The ecosystem we have created combines agile technology with the highest standards of hospitality in more than 60 countries worldwide. We will continue to use technology to bring the human touch to movement, to ensure every interaction feels personal. When travel is seamless and purposeful, people and businesses thrive.

Dr. Jens Wohltorf
Founder and CEO, Blacklane



Chapter 05

Summary:

Claiming the untapped cognitive advantage

Nine in ten executives say travel unlocks their most valuable thinking.

Business travel holds an untapped cognitive advantage, yet most travel managers never claim it. **Nine in ten executives say travel unlocks their most valuable thinking**, yet as this whitepaper highlights, the vast majority struggle to achieve the deep focus that actually delivers it.

This paradox sits at the heart of this report, and closing that gap is now one of the most overlooked opportunities available to travel managers.

Business travel, when designed thoughtfully, creates natural conditions for it: physical separation from the office, unstructured thinking time, and a change of environment that loosens habitual thinking.

However, noise, crowding, delays and fragmented itineraries routinely destroy it before it has a chance to form. Travel managers are better positioned than anyone to change this.

The first lever is journey architecture. Time in transit is consistently rated among executives' top windows for reflection, meaning a smooth, uninterrupted ride leads to protected thinking time. Choosing reliable, professional ground transportation is a direct investment in cognitive performance.

The second lever is sensory design. Crowded, noisy environments are the single biggest barrier executives identify to achieving focus on the move. Policies that prioritise private transfers, quieter airport lounges, and calm hotel environments remove friction before it accumulates.

The third lever is timing and personalisation. Research shows UK and US executives peak cognitively at different moments in the travel day, and individual working styles vary considerably. Schedules built around a traveler's natural focus windows, rather than the cheapest or most convenient option, consistently outperform.

Flow rarely happens by accident. But with deliberate journey design, travel managers can turn every business trip into a competitive advantage.

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To discuss these findings or make an appointment
with Blacklane regarding your corporate travel needs
please contact business@blacklane.com