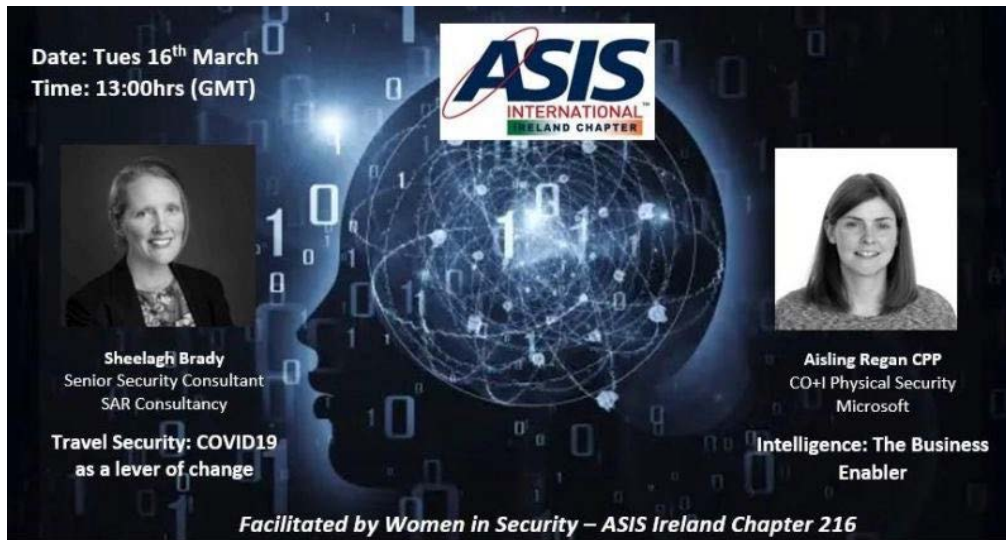




Talking points from; ASIS International Ireland Chapter Travel Security: COVID 19 as a lever of change



Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a snapshot of Sheelagh Brady's, Chief Security Analyst, SAR Consultancy talking points to ASIS International Ireland Chapter, on the 16th March 2021, on the topic *Travel Security: COVID 19 as a lever of change*. This document is not a complete assessment of the current environment, rather a high level review to support a twenty-minute presentation; thus provides a short 'snapshot' of key factors influencing the topic.

Key take-away from the discussion

The key takeaway from the presentation was that those with the Security Risk Management and Travel Risk Management (TRM) field should view COVID 19 as the catalyst that if handled correctly can move us beyond acting as mere enablers to businesses to those who directly impact the competitive advantage of that business. One industry where this has been achieved successfully prior to the pandemic is Aviation, where security and risk management is not viewed solely as an enabler, but one that drives groups; because trust in safety and security is key to people getting on planes. The pandemic provides opportunities for other industries to follow suit. Five key areas identified for potential opportunity relate to; **Business Risk Appetite**, **New Travel**, the changing nature of **Duty of Care**, **Health & Medical assessments**, and the use of **Tracking and Monitoring Technology** on a business. Although many other opportunities are likely to be present; the discussion of these points was to provide an opportunity for the audience to provoke themselves into thinking what opportunities might exist for them and their organisations.

Possible TRM actions to consider

- Build resilience into your security and TRM plans by allocating resources for both the routine and emergency situations. Identify key activities that require attention even in times of crisis and ensure these are attended to.



- In assessing country risk, concentrate within these assessments on areas that directly impact your activities in the short and medium term initially, but don't take your eye off the long term, that type of information will be important as the situations allows for further growth.
- When reviewing TRM policy and practices and associated check lists, to see if they are still fit for purpose, concentrate on building resilience, flexibility, and agility into your policies and practices, so they are able to be moulded for a changing environment. Start discussing what travel might look like into the future and prepare how and what policies might need to change. Do not wait for the change to happen, start the conversation.
- In relation to testing, vaccinations, and other related public health activities on your staff, business activities, stakeholders, etc., start considering whether, your company will be able to require employees to get vaccinated, or not, and the implications of either. This needs to be properly thought out, forcing or coercing staff is likely to create further risks.
- Anyone travelling now does so with greater (and some different) risks (for a many reasons). Businesses need to remain vigilant in an ever changing complex environment.

Travel Security: COVID 19 as a lever of change

The title 'COVID 19 as a lever of change' was used, because there is little room for not changing in the current climate, and because of the implications COVID 19 is and will have into the future. While the discussion was to concentrate on the opportunities, a recent survey conducted by SAR Consultancy found that many security professionals are finding that they are under an increased intensity within their role, specifically because of the ongoing pandemic. Given that this might mean that some of the audience may not have the well talked about (for many of us, much desired) downtime, to comprehensively examine and review Travel Risk Management policies and plans, it was decided to give a brief reminder to a few activities that are worthwhile conducting to ensure organisations are in a better place to capitalise on the opportunities that may become available to them.

Even in the midst of a crisis, security professionals and travel risk managers should not forget to do the routine, standard, and emerging updates that are required. COVID 19 has been a shock to us, and to our business, but prioritising it at the expense of everything else, is also so a risk.

Advice: *Build resilience into your security and TRM plans by allocating resources for both the routine and emergency situations. Identify key activities that require attention even in times of crisis and ensure these are attended to.*

Actions you could be considering now; (if not done so already, even if they were conducted in the early phase of the pandemic, they probably require another look. The situation is very dynamic and many of these activities are not something you ever tick off as *complete*, rather they have a cyclical format, with identified triggers often dictating how often they are reviewed.)

- Conduct country assessment risks in the areas of operations for you, your business activities. There is a growing need to extend these beyond your own organisation's footprint now because of Covid, to include customers, suppliers and other stakeholders in your business operations.
 - Advice to contain this exercise: *Concentrate within these assessments on areas that directly impact your activities in the short and medium term, initially; but don't take your eye off the long term; that type of information will be important as the situation allows for further growth.*



- Examine the likely adoption rate of new and traditional policies and practices in light of COVID 19, a lot is changing to make people in some areas more compliant, but in others less so. You should be trying to identify them and assess their associated risks.
- Review your TRM policy and practices and related check lists, to see if it is still fit for purpose. This is a considerable job for several reasons, for example, policies now must incorporate a significant number of quickly changing scenarios, and the travel situation is not likely to return to where it was.
 - *Advice: Concentrate on building resilience, flexibility, and agility into your policies and practices, so they are able to be moulded for a changing environment. Start discussing what travel might look like into the future and prepare how and what policies might need to change. Do not wait for the change to happen; start the conversation.*
- Assess the risks associated with testing, vaccinations, and other related public health activities on your staff, business activities, stakeholders, etc., plus their impact at a geographical level. Vaccines are unlikely to solve everything.
 - *Advice: You could start considering whether your company will be able to require employees to get vaccinated, or not, and the implications of either. This needs to be properly thought out, forcing or coercing staff is likely to create further risks.*

In general, things to look at include adapting the travel policy as required; consider resources available to do this; aligning all within the overall risk framework for the business (to do this, will require you directly participating in this process); continue to be mindful of other risks, the changing threat landscape, and the changing capacities to respond; identify potential new risk exposure to the organisation; competency of destination country to respond.

- *Advice: Anyone travelling now does so with greater (and some different) risks (for a many reasons). Businesses need to remain vigilant in an ever-changing complex environment.*

Five key areas where COVID 19 has presented an opportunity to take a greater role

While many businesses are just trying to keep the wheels moving, and/or trying to (re)create the status quo; it is the opportunity to try something different.

- *Advice: Consider taking a leaf out of horizon scanning activities and look up and out, take time for a forward-facing review and start exploring options for new approaches. The environment has never been more conducive.*

Security and TRM will always have a reactive element. We are also increasingly seeing much more, the merits and value of it as an enabler, but the pandemic has provided the opportunity for it to have a much more direct impact on growth and development within the business.

Pandemics as the lever of change

Pandemics have been an item in good risk management plans, and in horizon scanning assessments for years. Many of us have always included them, but if honest we probably never really thought of a situation like COVID 19 occurring. We were at fault for this, because as we know the past is a great predictor of the future.

- *Advice: Examine every threat on our risk management plans, and ensure it is not there to tick a box, but rather evidence based and intelligence informed.*



Our bigger mistake was not ensuring we had properly understood and researched why we had pandemics on the risk management plan, which in turn restricted our ability to explain the potential impact to our organisations, so they in turn could build resilience to such threats.

- *Advice: Ensuring all entries are intelligence driven helps us communicate such threats and risks to others within the business. If we are not able to justify the specific reason for its inclusion, how can we expect others to buy into it and to support the necessary mitigation and resilience building measures.*

COVID 19 has given us that opportunity to change that, to do things differently, and to demonstrate at the highest level of our organisations, even at the level of C-Suite, how **Risk Management** and **Travel Risk Management** needs to be more closely aligned with business activities to ensure resilience in times of crisis or unexpected change. COVID 19 is redefining the rules of the game for business, we have little choice but to play, but we have the choice to influence the rules, if we position ourselves correctly. Five areas identified that offer such opportunity include:

1. Business appetite

The business appetite is often prioritised over security, which has a direct impact on travel activities. A lot of travel can and still is happening (oil, energy, humanitarian, military etc.). It still comes with risks, but it happens. In these cases, as security professionals we need to clearly demonstrate these risks so the C-Suite can understand them and provide enabling options to make it happen. But COVID 19 has created the opportunity for a more influential role, and one which can help in business continuity and potentially growth. For example, clusters of staff in certain areas may provide opportunities for potential business continuity and development. This might be something worth exploring for some of your businesses.

- *Advice: To optimise this, you should take a position of leadership, understand the risk profile in these areas and related travel issues, and about how you may support work and possibly travel. You can lead and support the conversation about where activities could happen (although with some risk) if you know and understand not only the business of today, but also tomorrow. You will need the cooperation of others within the business, but be a person who starts the conversation, if possible, suggest locations that could be better managed to optimise activities for your organisation.*

A key element in this area, worth noting is the ongoing debate in businesses as to what definition will be used for an **Essential Travel**. Many organisations are struggling with this, because of the dynamic change that is happening.

- *Advice: Don't try and have a single definition, what constitutes essential travel in one jurisdiction may not be the same, as what another sees as essential. This does not mean waiting until the C-Suite tell you what essential travel is; join the conversation; understand the activities that are happening and planned for and get involved in understanding the impact, with this knowledge also identify other areas, present them, see if they align with other activities that could be capitalised on. Positioning yourself as one of the decision makers in these discussions is important, so you become both reactive and proactive.*

2. New Travel



TRM was traditionally about keeping employees and their activities safe when travelling between two points or a number of points. But because of COVID 19, a new form of TRM is required, because so many people are working from home, a position that is likely to remain for the considerable future. Members of your company may have returned home to locations outside those of traditional areas of operations. They may think they know the area better than you do, which to some extent is likely, but I believe as people start travelling more, you may need to view home as a key node of travel, and this requires new policies and practices.

Not specifically related to travel, but worth noting, people working from home will have resulted in your organisations acquiring new risks. Organisations need to be mindful of this. Two particular ones to highlight; People may have moved back to locations where the social and economic situation is such that because of the nature of their employment, they are now viewed as a target (wealth, opportunity, etc.), putting them at risk of crimes like armed robberies, kidnap, extortion, bribery, etc. Organisations need to be mindful of this, and other risks, and take appropriate action.

Secondly, there are personal personnel risks that organisations have taken on, for example, health and safety obligations in respect of physical working conditions, but also organisations need to be mindful of other risks. For example, isolation can enhance feelings of loneliness and depression. Staff may be at risk. Moreover, the rates of domestic violence are increasing in some areas during COVID 19, organisations should be mindful, home is now also place of work, exploring the potential risks this creates would be timely to ensure staff are properly supported.

3. Changing nature of Duty of Care

This has relevance beyond TRM, but within that context before COVID 19, there was a traditional duty of care to employees (directly) and possibly indirectly to a few others, families, customers, suppliers etc. This is and is likely to change further. Maybe not legally just yet, or at least the system may not have been tested in the courts yet, but ethically and morally, organisations would be better placed to explore the changes this might have for them.

An example of one area where organisations might look at, relates to who now should be included within their duty of care; might it include families (would it extend to their communities and social networks); customers and suppliers; service providers, such as drivers, hotel staff, airlines staff, etc. Organisations should be able to demonstrate if travelling, that they have taken the necessary precautions, to keep themselves and others they encounter along that journey as safe as possible. Not considering this can have a significant impact on reputation and brand image.

- *Advice: It might be worth considering aligning the organisation and its brands to good practices in this area, going beyond mere compliance by demonstrating a willingness to shoulder some of the burden; thus, helping to build resilience in the brand and reputation not only internally but externally. This helps to reduce risk but also to help ensure a conducive safe environment for doing business.*

4. Medical and Health.

The fourth area could be dealt with under duty of care, but for us it stands out as an important element in its own right. Similar to defining essential travel, travel risk managers need to be part of the discussion that helps to better understand the characteristics of suitable travellers, from a medical perspective. Although knowledge and understanding of what puts people at greater risk of COVID 19 is still in its infancy, some lifestyle risks have been identified, many of which align with business travel lifestyle risks.



Frequent business travel, especially long-haul travel, is associated with a number of health risks, for example, accelerates aging, increases the likelihood of suffering a stroke, heart attack, and deep-vein thrombosis and unhealthy lifestyles (e.g., poor diet, lack of exercise, excess drinking). Furthermore, jet lag can cause stress, mood swings, disorientation, and sleep problems. While chronic long term sleep deprivation can be associated with several chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression, some of which align with COVID 19 risks. From a business perspective many of these also impact job performance.

In a COVID 19 and post COVID 19 environment, organisations might want to better understand these risks more clearly and take precautions to reduce them for those travelling. Pre-pandemic business travellers should not have travelled unless deemed fit to do so. If someone was on medication, for example, it should have been ensured that they had enough of a supply in case their baggage got lost or their flight was delayed. Moreover, if their life depended on it and they were traveling to locations where kidnap was a risk for instance, they should not travel. Some TRM policies have changed leaving travel medicals a thing of the past. Resulting in organisations not fully understanding the medical needs of their staff or choosing to leave this as a point of personal responsibility (which in itself is a huge risk for all). However, because of COVID 19 this approach is likely to benefit from a review.

In a COVID 19 environment, there are huge risks with this hands-off approach, will people be able to access their medication? if their movements are restricted, will they be able to get the medical treatment they may require? for example the mental health support they require; these were all important pre-covid, but travelling today they pose key risks if not properly thought about. Travel today means doing so in a potentially ever-changing environment, a 48 hour trip, may result in days or weeks, even months.

- *Advice: Organisations should be mindful of the health and medical needs of their staff, and also the capabilities and capacities within the environments in which they travel to meet their needs. A practical option that might be worth exploring might be to introduce pre-travel medicals.*

5. The use of tracking and monitoring technology

The last and final point, that we have been monitoring in our horizon scanning activities but that came to the fore because of COVID 19, relates to use of tracking and monitoring technology and the potential risks for the business. There is little doubt that there are huge merits to such technology for an organisation, but it is not without its risk, and the pandemic has brought some to the fore. Two areas where we envisage potential problems that are worth monitoring relate to similar use by governments and internal use.

The monitoring of people (potentially your employees) by governments within the countries in which they travel is likely in many areas. While it is said that the information will only be used for health purposes, it might be naïve to believe that this will be the case everywhere. Moreover, there is a risk that its use may continue post COVID 19 in some jurisdictions. If misused or its use is widened or unrestricted it could have implications for organisations privacy, and that of the traveller.

- *Advice: It is worth bringing this to the attention of the C-Suite, (especially if traveling to certain locations, where there is the threat that its use may extend beyond medical parameters, as it may provide governments or other nefarious actors with information about sensitive business activities.*



Secondly, using tracking and monitoring equipment in the interest of keeping staff safe, may have great merits and their best interest at heart, but it comes with an ever-increasing risk. In the current social environment, especially in the global North, where there are many conspiracy theories being developed and circulated relating to COVID 19 as a government creation to track and monitor citizens and their activities (amongst other things). Therefore, any activities or developments in this area should be properly and carefully managed to avoid inadvertently bolstering these or related theories. Moreover, organisation staff are unlikely to be immune from such conspiracy theories and should they engage in them, it may pose a risk for the employee and the organisation. Therefore, adoption of such practises should be risk assessed and proper communication measures be articulated to avoid unintended outcomes.

- *Advice: If implementing or have implemented such technology, it would be worth clearly demonstrating (or reminding) the rationale behind such measures. Moreover, it might be wise to open dialogue with staff members about concerns and thoughts about such use, so an organisation can clearly demonstrate the use of such technology is in the best interest of the staff.*

Conclusion

Once again, the TRM areas for review and the five areas for potential opportunity are just a selection of factors that should be examined and reviewed at this time. We hope that providing the talking points, that Sheelagh used to inform her presentation at ASIS Ireland recent webinar, which in no way is a comprehensive review, will provide you some food for thought on the lever of change COVID 19 has provided.

Should you wish to talk to Sheelagh about any of the issues raised in this document, please contact her directly at sheelagh@sarconint.com or +353 87 677 1363; or contact us at info@sarconint.com for information about our services in relation to travel risk management, or those relating to other areas of security risk management. We will be more than happy to discuss our portfolio of offerings in Ireland and further afield.

Remember you know your business better than most, be brave, be open, and try to position yourselves so you can contribute beyond enabling to impact continuity and growth. COVID 19 is a challenge, there is no doubt, but we can also see it as an opportunity. An opportunity which has opened the door to the C-Suite like it has never been before, **it is now our time to show the importance of our roles.**

Tip: Putting things down in writing is important but being part of the discussion to which that report influences is more effective and important in influencing change. Be brave, try to ensure your position at meetings where the impact of your efforts is being discussed.

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