# THE SECRET GOLDMINE:
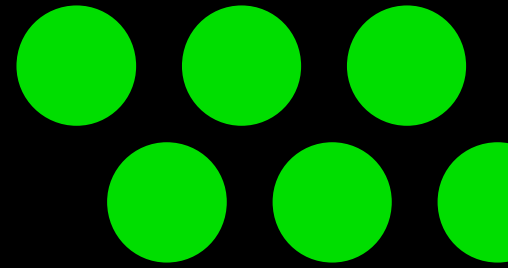
What can you do with all that data?

# Why look at data?

The business travel industry has a problem. No, this time it's not wellbeing or sustainability or a certain pesky pandemic. This time we're talking about data.

Data has become a hot topic, but also a taboo one. It is a loaded subject and yet another area where you now have to become an overnight expert. We all know there's a goldmine of data out there, but what are the TMCs doing with it all, and how can you harness its power to pave the way to a high performing travel programme?

Through listening exercises, Propathons and thought disruption from the FCM Th!nk event in Athens, you've been telling us your struggles, issues and concerns. You want to turn your reporting and analytics into action, but don't know where to begin. Big Data feels just that – BIG.

So we're here to break down the data taboo. This isn't another white paper. You spoke, and we listened. And now we are giving you a playbook with tangible takeaways and actionable advice for you to implement, wherever you are on your data journey.

Think of this document like a blueprint for success. Building a travel programme today is like building a skyscraper: you need a good architect. And we've just handed you the plans.

- **The journey so far:** What has been seen, said and heard. We reveal all from our Propathon and speak to industry experts.

- **Fixing the basics:** We take you back to basics, talking hygiene, data frequency and booking in programme.

- **Finding what works for you:** Get your data (ware)house in order and find out how to progress your data journey, whatever stage you're at.

- **Realms of possibility:** Hear from data experts on their predictions for the future and see how data can provide answers for today, tomorrow, and beyond. No crystal ball required.

# Journey so far

All journeys have a start and an end. But not everyone's departure or arrival points are the same. Wherever you are at on your data journey, we want to help and support you towards the next steps.

We've taken the time to include the feedback we have heard over the past year. There's the new, the bad and the ugly. But we haven't shied away from it. Our aim is to uncover and tackle travel taboos – so we're laying the biggest data ones out for you in all their glory.

**What we've heard**

The pressure on travel managers at present is huge. Alongside a myriad of new focus areas, there is data – a highly complex, highly skilled discipline, which used correctly can open up insights and advantages which will revolutionise your travel programmes. But where on earth do you start?

You know that there's a whole world of possibility out there, but many travel managers and teams simply do not know how to take advantage of that. There is confusion around who takes the first step: Is it you or your TMC? Then there's the skills needed to fully execute a data strategy of the scale you're hearing about. And finally, the fundamentals of what do you do with all that data to make it make sense?
In short, it's a lot. There's a lot of talk, but little information. And you want guidance from the people at the heart of the collection process – your TMC.

**What the industry is saying**

The wider travel industry is mirroring these sentiments. Data has always been crucial to travel, underpinning decisions surrounding policy, suppliers, budget and risk management. But that was then. Now more and more companies are recognising the potential for taking historic data and turning it into insightful, predictive solutions. And this trend is only set to increase.

We know the profile of travel has increased exponentially in the past two years. So now we're getting a seat at the table in boardrooms across the country, we need to continue to show that value in the insights, stories and actions we can deliver.

> We've entered the era of the analyst as lockpicker, the storyteller through the numbers.

**MIKE ORCHARD**
**CONSULTANT, FESTIVE ROAD**

# Fixing the basics

Everything we've heard pointed to one key thing: You need to fix the basics.

There is simply no point in discussing AI, predictive modelling and data mining, if you haven't got the foundations right. Remember the building analogy in the introduction? Trying to push ahead without fixing the basics is like laying the first brick with no architectural plans. You might get some progress, but the project is ultimately doomed.

So, what are the basics and how can you fix them?

**Data Hygiene**

Your outputs are only as good as the data you're inputting. There's a lot of mistrust around data and data quality. Is it a true representation? Is it accurate? Can I confidently pin my next year's travel strategy on these findings?

Without good data hygiene, the answer is likely to be no. To move towards the good stuff – analytics that drive your travel programme forward – you need to be confident that your data is telling you the whole story. And to do that, you need to address these common data hygiene issues.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Did you know approximately 60% of dirty data is attributed to human error?

| What's the issue? | What does that look like? | What does that mean? |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Data Errors | Completeness | There should be no gaps or missing information for your data to be truly complete. Using data with missing information can lead to costly mistakes and false conclusions. |
| | Outliers | Consider what constraints can be established to guard against "dirty data". Setting a range constraint on hotel spend, for example, will flag up that £25,000 room and ensure that the data entered is consistent and correct. |
| Inconsistent Trends | Formatting | With data coming in across the globe different regions may have different formatting trends. For example, 03/04/2022 is 3rd April in the UK, but is read as 4th March in the US. Consistent formatting helps to eradicate these errors. |
| | Data Relationships | Those in the data business refer to these as "black swan events". The pandemic for example has made trending and predictability forecasting very, very difficult, as the past two year' data is a complete anomaly and unlikely to provide true insight. |
| Source Nuance | Fake Data | When testing a new system or running checks, the people involved can often enter in 'test transactions'. These are often bookings which are cancelled immediately, but they will still be captured in the reporting. Identifying that these are not customer bookings, and therefore do not need to be reported on is one area of source nuance. |
| | Immaterial Data | Consolidating global data means understanding that not all back office systems work in the same way. This leads to different processes, producing different data. For example, one system may process a refund and re-book. Another system may just add on the additional cost of rebooking, and not report the initial refund. The outcome is the same, but the process and the data will look very different. Spotting anomalies and applying manual intervention where needed is crucial. |

This may feel daunting. But it's important to know that you don't have to do this yourself. Your organisation will likely have a data team who can provide internal support and FCM has a team of Account Managers and Data Scientists to help bridge that gap and deliver the data you need.



> Data shouldn't be about damage control and spending hours manipulating the data to get it into a usable state. If you are so far removed that you can't have a conversation, you are decreasing efficiency. Communicate with teams and get the right data from the start.

**SOLAYR LAYTON-THOMAS**
**SENIOR PAYROLL BENEFITS AND TAX**
**MOBILITY SPECIALIST AT IMPROBABLE**
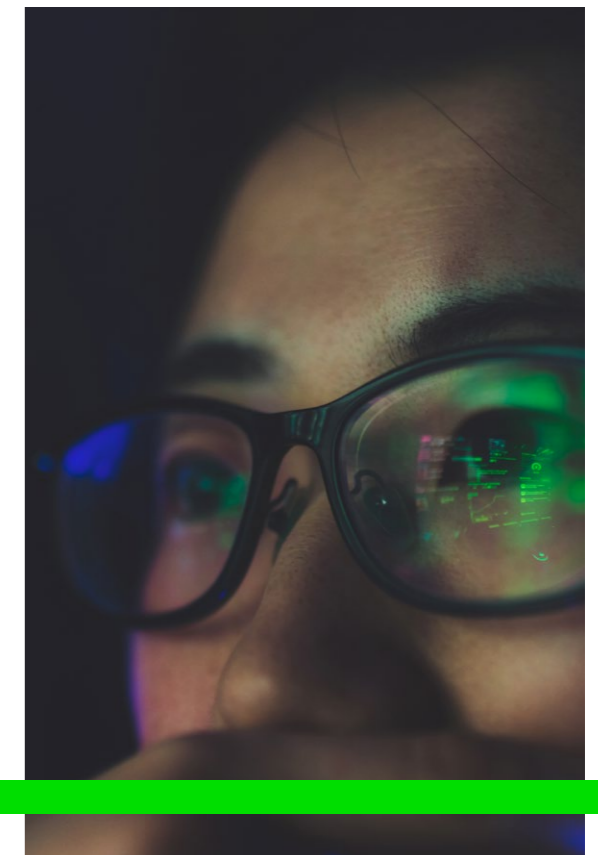
## Data Frequency

*"We need real time data"*

Ok. Let's just take a pause and assess the situation. There is much discussion around 'real time data' and the assumed benefits. But what does it really mean? And do you really need it? Or do you just need data within a reasonable time frame?

**Real time data:** The second a booking runs through the system it's automatically coming in to your data through a reporting link.

**Near real time data:** Data that is quality checked and enhanced before being available via your reporting tool in 15 minutes

Still think you need real time data? If you want minute by minute data, challenge yourself and your stakeholders – what will you be doing with it?

Finding the answers to these questions can be challenging. Use the decision tree below to help you navigate these questions and find out your real time requirements.
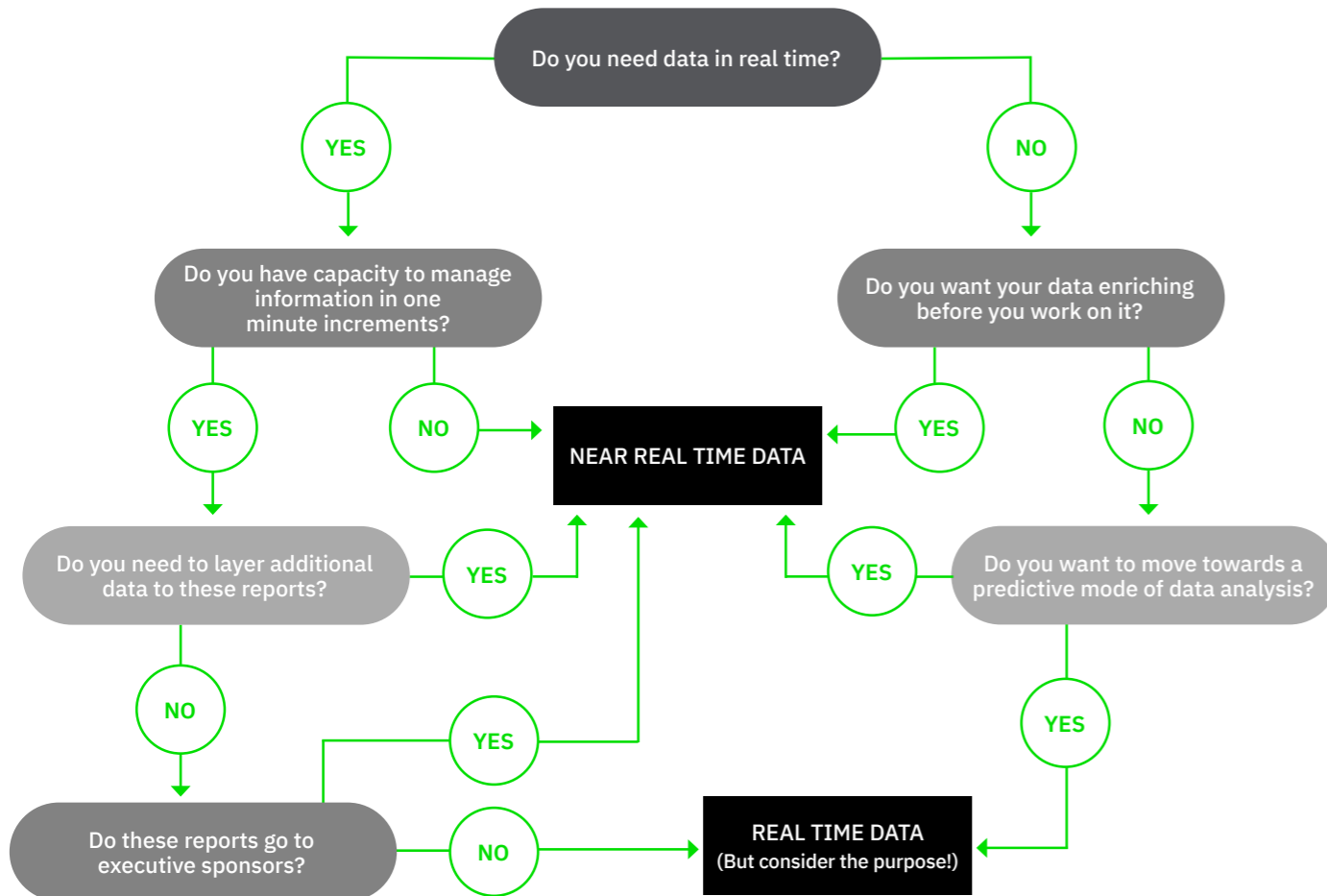
> **Near real time data is looking at data in 15 minute increments. I'd rather deliver GREAT data in 15 minutes, than GOOD data in 1 minute increments.**
>
> STEPHEN PITCHER
> CHIEF DATA SCIENCE OFFICER AT FCM

**Decision tree:**

- Do you need data in real time?
  - **YES** → Do you have capacity to manage information in one minute increments?
    - **YES** → Do you need to layer additional data to these reports?
      - **NO** → Do these reports go to executive sponsors?
        - **YES** → NEAR REAL TIME DATA
        - **NO** → REAL TIME DATA (But consider the purpose!)
      - **YES** → NEAR REAL TIME DATA
    - **NO** → NEAR REAL TIME DATA
  - **NO** → Do you want your data enriching before you work on it?
    - **YES** → NEAR REAL TIME DATA
    - **NO** → Do you want to move towards a predictive mode of data analysis?
      - **YES** → REAL TIME DATA (But consider the purpose!)
      - **YES** → NEAR REAL TIME DATA

## Complete Data

Booking in programme is a struggle as old as the horse and cart. And the challenges really manifest when it comes to getting a complete overview of your travel data. You can only report on what you know, but what about the activity you just don't know about?

It sounds simple but in programme booking (booking via the correct channels) is one of the biggest wins you can make when looking at the issue of complete data. The more data you can have inside your systems the better.

Having said this, we know that there is more to travel data than just number of bookings and cost. This is where knowing what you're looking for is essential.

> **Know what the question is you're trying to answer. Otherwise you will go down a data rabbit hole.**
>
> JO LLOYD
> HEAD OF GLOBAL ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT AND CONSULTING

> **We need to accept that customers are not considerate of your data collection methods. There will always be people you can't get to book in the way that you want them to. You need to figure out how they operate and work out how to incorporate this into your data.**
>
> SOPHIE KIM
> SENIOR PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, SLALOM.

To truly gain value and actionable insights, you will need to look wider than just your travel programme data. How can you encourage people to book in programme? And if they don't where is the info stored? Because it will be stored somewhere, you may just need to employ a little "data wrangling" - looking at general ledger data or expense tool data - to find it.

### YOU SPOKE, WE LISTENED

The value of data is diluted when you have bookings out of programme.

### DID YOU KNOW?

FCM Extension can nudge booker behaviour in browser to encourage compliance.
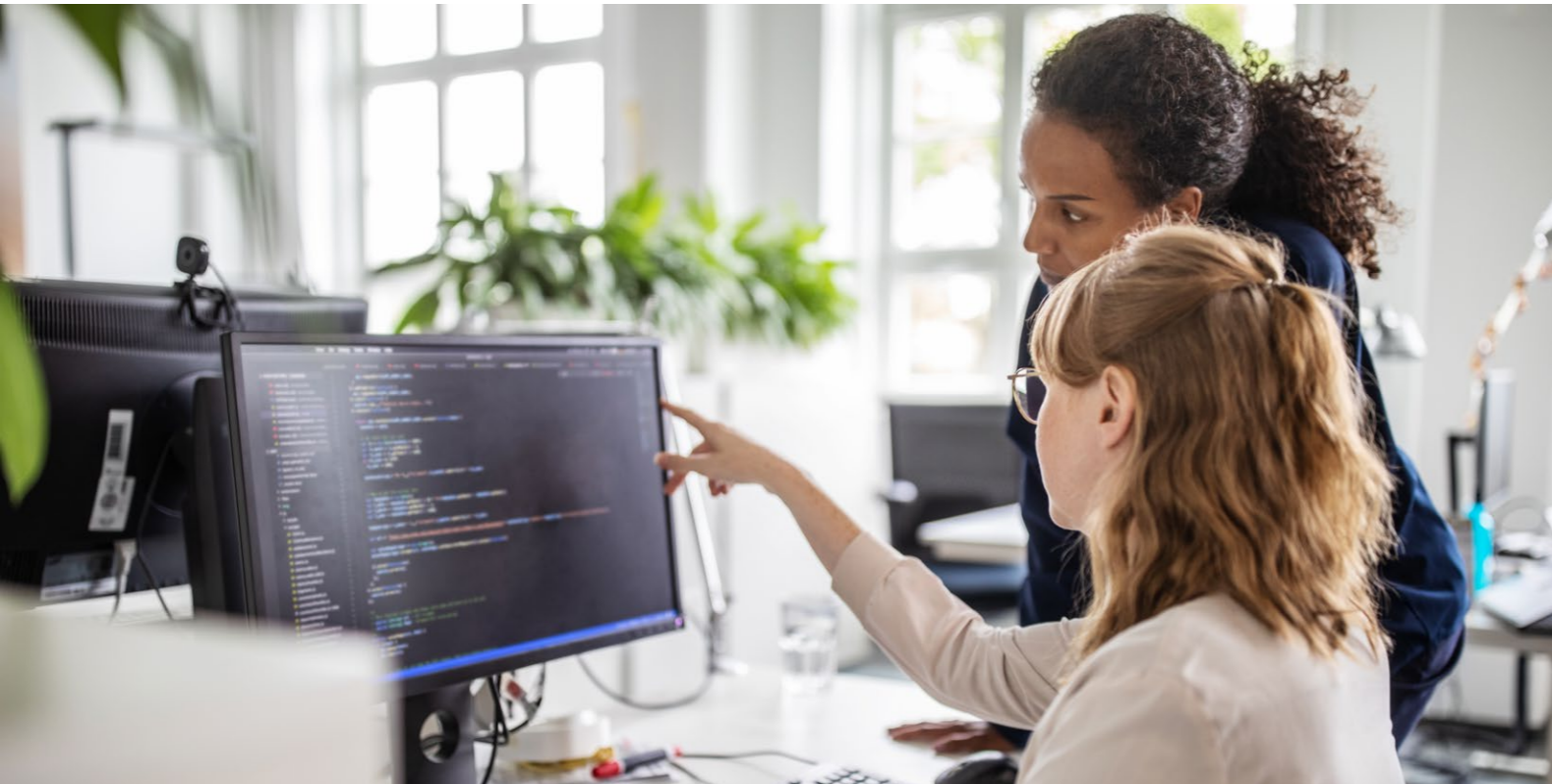
# Finding what works for you

You don't know what you don't know. So how can you ask for an improved data provision, if you don't know what to ask for?

You have two options here: approach, or wait to be approached. If you have buy in from your internal stakeholders and the resources to embark on a data journey, start knocking on the door now. Your Account Manager will be waiting on the other side, ready to swing it wide open and usher you in with open arms.

If you're not quite at that level yet, you can start getting your internal pieces in place and may well find your TMC knocking on your door, ready to help you on your way.

Either way, your first port of call is your Account Manager. They are your gateway into the world of TMC data. As your day-to-day consultant they understand your goals and objectives better than anyone else. They will provide guidance and access to the specialists you need to get your data journey off the ground.

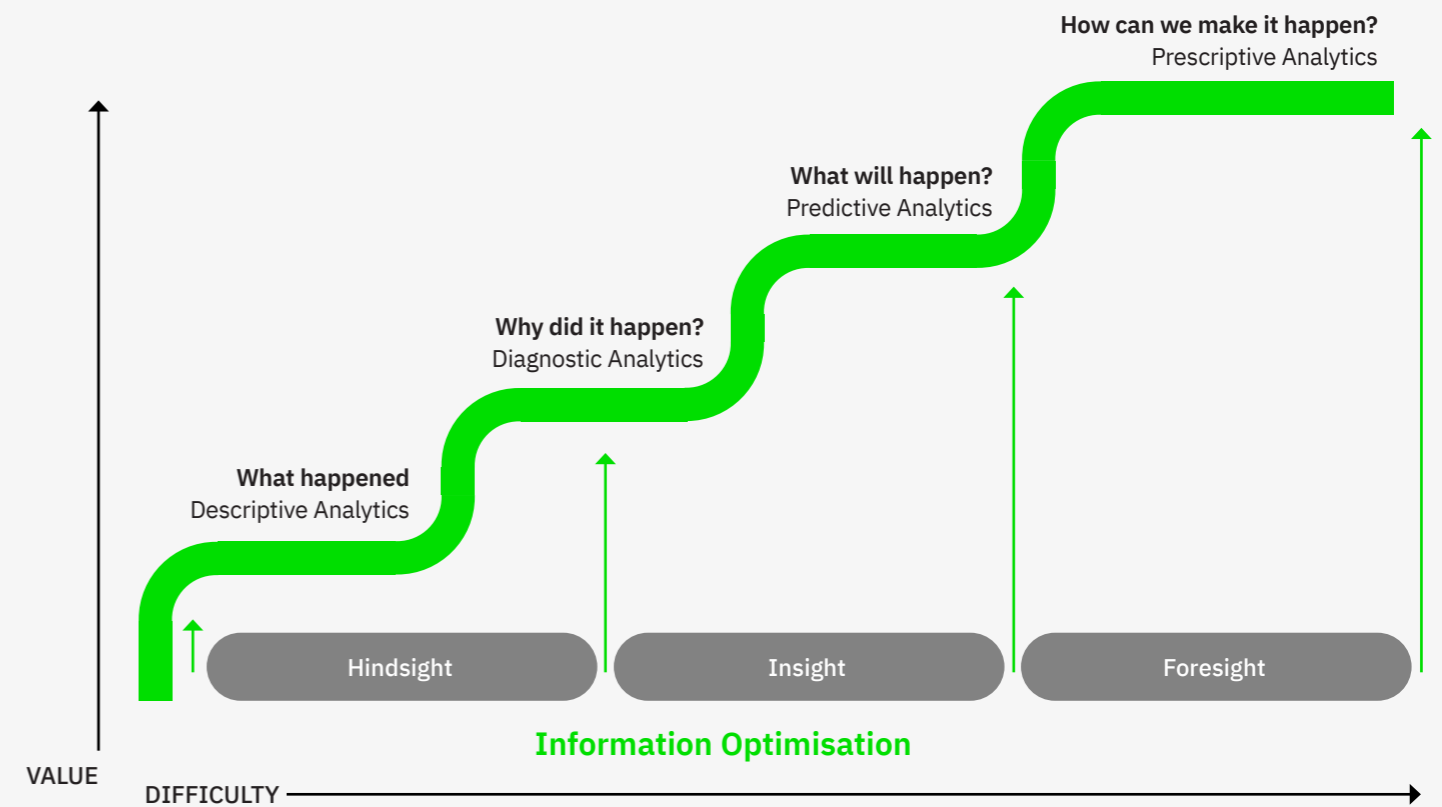> **Who should be making the approach? Do I need to ask my Account Manager about data or should they be approaching me?**
>
> TRAVEL BUYER

> **Communication is the quickest and easiest way to affect change and improve systems and processes.**
>
> SOLAYR LAYTON-THOMAS
> SENIOR PAYROLL BENEFITS AND TAX
> MOBILITY SPECIALIST AT IMPROBABLE

# The Analytics Ascendancy Model

Where do you think you are on your data journey right now? This model shows the progression from Descriptive analytics – looking back at what happened and when – through to Prescriptive analytics – how we can make changes to allow something happen.



**How can we make it happen?**
Prescriptive Analytics

**What will happen?**
Predictive Analytics

**Why did it happen?**
Diagnostic Analytics

**What happened**
Descriptive Analytics

| Hindsight | Insight | Foresight |

**Information Optimisation**

VALUE

DIFFICULTY

Don't worry if you're still in the early stages - you're in good company! We asked the same question to the audience at Th!nk back in May 2022. This is what they said:

**Descriptive** 56%

**Diagnostic** 31%

**Predictive** 10%

**Prescriptive** 3%

The majority of people are still using data to reflect on what has already happened. So how do you start to climb that graph and join the illustrious 3% in the lofty heights of prescriptive data? By following a simple, step by step plan.

# Getting your data (ware) house in order

KEY
- 🟢 FCM actions
- ⚫ Travel manager actions
- 🟡 Joint actions

### Kick off meeting

It's a meeting of minds. Like any great working relationship, both sides need to meet, understand the goals and aims of the other side and establish a way to work together.

In the first instance, reach out to the person in your organisation who is responsible for data and speak to them. And don't worry if there is a lack of travel knowledge – your TMC can talk to them direct and fill in the pieces.

### FCM build you a data extract

From the detail of your meeting, we will know what data you require and how you require it. Your exact requirements will be worked on by our team of data experts to seamlessly deliver what you need, when you need it.

### Your data team builds a pipeline to accept the data from FCM

Now it's over to you. Your data team will need to build a system that can accept the data FCM have prepared. You will have our experts on call to assist, making sure the transition goes as smoothly as possible.

### FCM and your analytics team need to meet

Congratulations! You're on your way! Now you're receiving your data, you need to look towards the next step: how will you draw meaningful narrative and insight from it? Luckily our data team is on hand to meet with your Business Intelligence and Data Analysts to establish where your data journey is taking you next.

### FCM Data analytics training

"How do we take our data from reactive to proactive?"
From Descriptive to Prescriptive analytics, you will be taken through the whole raft of possibilities and trained in the possible options for your data analysis, all in line with your business objectives. We don't just data dump and run – we ensure that you have all the skills you need to be able to transform your data analysis.
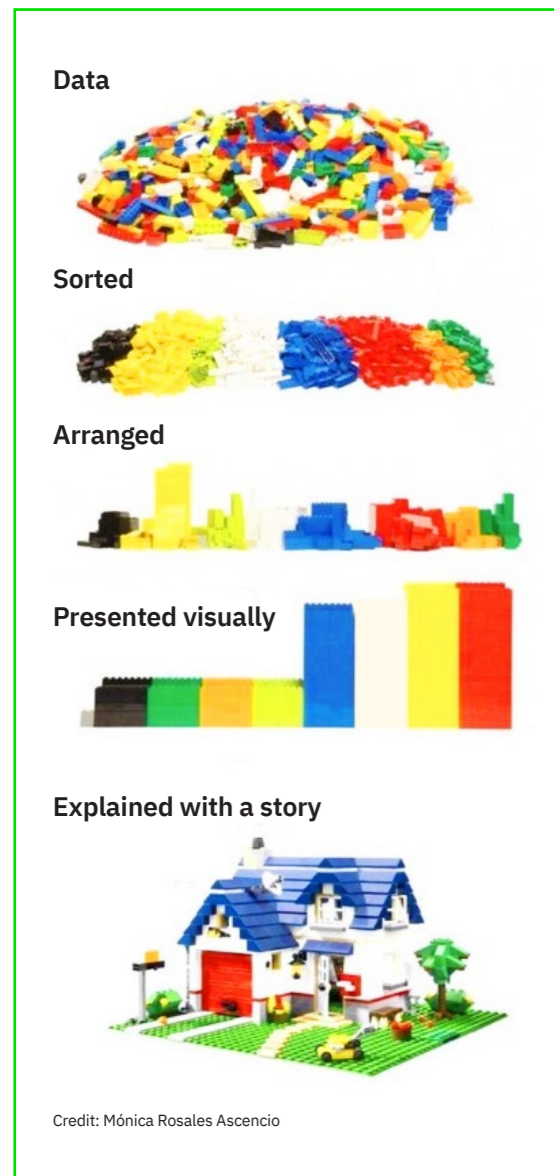
### Continued Consulting

You've been through the hard part. So now is the time to take advantage and stay ahead of the curve. The world of data is ever changing and you don't want to get left behind. Through continued consulting you can ensure your data programme is adaptable, flexible and continues to transform your business.

**YOU SPOKE, WE LISTENED**

Trends and insights are what a TMC can do. We need actionable insights to drive positive change.

# Realms of possibility

You've fixed the basics. You have decided on the right path for your organisation. Now's the part where you go next-level and turn your analytics from a heap of data into a fully-fledged narrative.



**Data**

**Sorted**

**Arranged**

**Presented visually**

**Explained with a story**

Credit: Mónica Rosales Ascencio

**Things to look out for**

Narrative and correlation are just two of the ways you could be enhancing your data. This is no longer, operational, business as usual data. This is what's new to the scene. This is using the past to predict the future, staying one step ahead and following emerging trends.

**Correlation**

To do this successfully, you need to be looking at data beyond the operational. You need to be blending and overlaying rich data from HR, Sales, Operations, to understand a full picture.

- Are sales up? Look at travel too. Were business trips up in the same time? What does that correlation suggest?

- An increase in staff turnover? What were their travel habits? Is there a trend there that could explain why employees are voting with their feet?

- What's the prototype of the perfect sale? Do you have the same retention meeting once a year, versus four times a year? What is the best way to conduct those meetings?

**AI**

No longer a 'thing of the future', AI is here and is becoming more and more mainstream. Data science, AI and machine learning are all separate disciplines, however harnessing their power to work together has become remarkably useful. Whilst AI hasn't yet reached the stage of full cognitive and intellectual capabilities, there are a range of narrow AI tasks that can prove invaluable for your business:

- accurately recognise images, objects and other elements in unstructured data (as described by Tech Target);

- use derived insights to run predictive analytics applications; spot patterns and anomalies in large data sets;

- create detailed profiles of individuals for hyper-personalisation uses;

- drive autonomous systems with minimal or no human involvement; and

- solve scenario simulations and other challenging goal-driven problems.

> **When you build all your data within our organisation, you can create the trigger, very, very easily to say "we have a problem".**
>
> STEPHEN PITCHER
> CHIEF DATA SCIENCE OFFICER AT FCM

> **AI and Data experts have never been more expensive. Moving forward, AI will become more accessible through AI as a service or third parties. This is the way most businesses will implement it, rather than having in-house experts.**
>
> SOPHIE KIM
> SENIOR PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, SLALOM
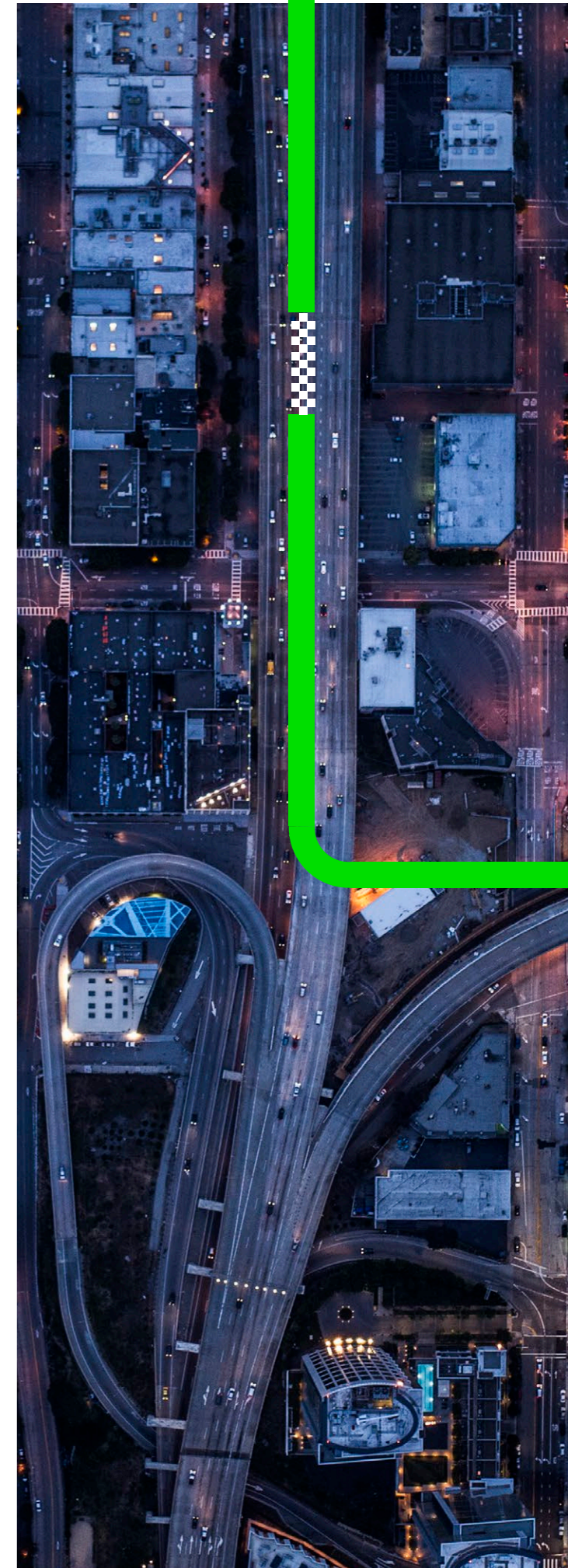
# Personalisation

This goes beyond NDC or knowing that a traveller prefers a window seat. This is where we start to measure return on human capital.

Travel is about connection. And at the heart of that connection is people. Hyper personalisation in data allows us to start measuring human capital and social capital, giving a true figure around the value of travel – something we have been striving for, but that has so far alluded our grasp.

Beyond measurement, personalisation means delivering value to someone at just the right moment. Just consider that. Whoever is your focus, for whatever reason, you can give them what they need when they need it. That is incredibly powerful.

- Can you have a greater understanding of your employee motivations? Will this help you to retain staff through personalised travel policy?

- Does knowing when individuals in your sales team perform best increase conversion rates? Will sharing this knowledge with them allow them greater success?

- Would trip cancellations decrease if you saw patterns and correlations in certain teams?

- How could you increase traveller wellbeing and satisfaction by knowing more about their wider performance?

- Will deeper understanding allow you to influence booker and traveller behaviour, keeping bookings in programme and increasing compliance?

- Will data elevate travel's position within your business as you have a positive and measurable impact on profit, people and planet?

# Curve balls

We know nothing is ever straight forward. So, to keep you on your toes, here are a couple of curve balls if you ever want to spice up the data conversation at an event!

- "Can we even rely on predictive analytic modelling right now? Modelling the future was based on analysing trends of the past. But our recent past is nothing like our future will be..."

- "What is the environmental impact of collecting all this data? Data warehouses take colossal amounts of energy to run. Is the concept of collect as much as you can, just in case, a sustainable one?"

> **Never has it been more difficult to forecast. Just think about how different human behaviour has been in the past two years. Predicting behaviour post-pandemic from data collected pre-pandemic is not going to work.**
>
> SOPHIE KIM
> SENIOR PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, SLALOM

> **Many industries have collected as much data as they can, storing it up for when they might need it – a form of future proofing if you like. But now we're coming full circle. The environmental impact of doing this is huge. Once your data collection becomes this big, you need to consider the impact of storage.**
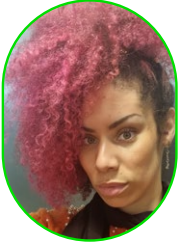>
> SOPHIE KIM
> SENIOR PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, SLALOM
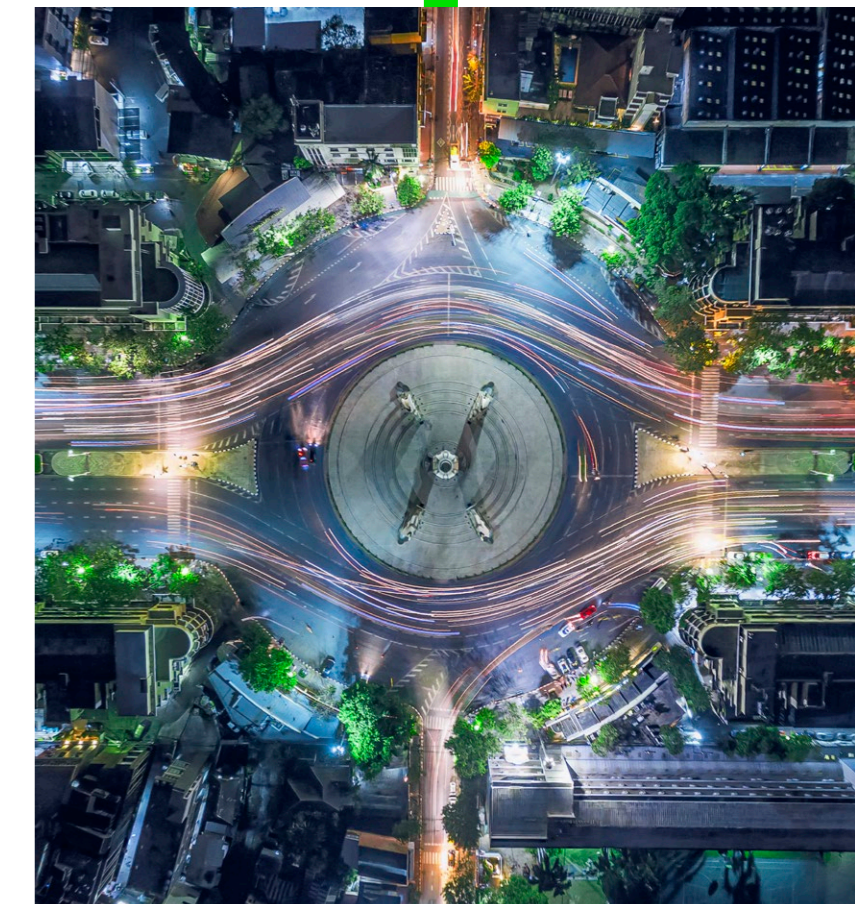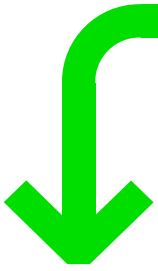
# A big thank you

to all of our experts featured in this playbook. Your insights are invaluable.

**STEPHEN PITCHER**
Chief Data Science Officer,
FCM

**SOLAYR LAYTON-THOMAS**
Senior Payroll Benefits and
Tax Mobility Specialist,
Improbable

**SOPHIE KIM**
Senior Principal
Consultant, Slalom

**JO LLOYD**
Head of Global Account
Management and
Consulting, FCM

**FCM**