

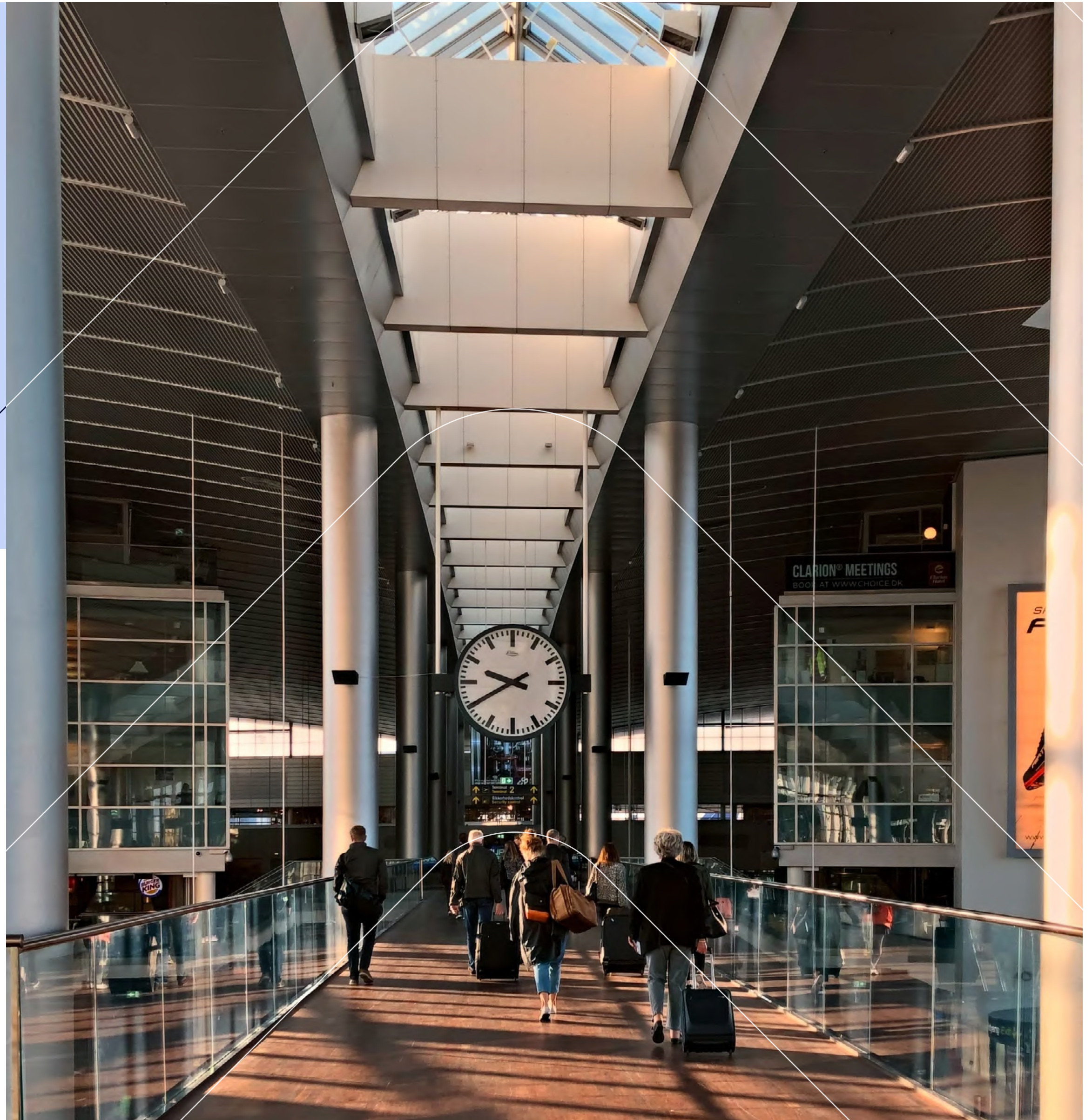
Managing Disruption

Different meanings to different audiences

The word 'disruption' has multiple interpretations – and each of them brings a nuanced difference to how it's perceived, understood, and responded to.

'Disruption'

→ is a word travelers don't want to hear. It brings mental images of lengthy queues at check-in or people sleeping at the airport as they wait for their flight to depart. Travelers see and experience delays or operational issues in ways heavily reliant on the media narrative (planes routinely leaving on time isn't a news story, after all).



Issues of this kind come in many forms – and often outside the control of those in the travel industry. They might be environmental (such as a weather event); industrial (such as general strike action); incidental (such as a passenger falling ill); or it may be technical disruption in terms of faulty equipment.

However, we also need to factor in known, predictable disruption that can be planned for and acted upon to minimize impact. Here we might consider how transformation itself can bring a positive disruptive element as siloed systems, technologies and services are put to pasture and new tools are brought in to replace them. It's not simply plug-and-play.

Finally, we also need to consider the regulatory side of disruption. New compliance mandates will demand changes and upgrades in operations – with a greater or lesser degree of disruption at every step. When we consider the scale to which data underpins the entire travel ecosystem, the impact of new storage, privacy, security or collaboration regulations brings fresh challenges.

Let's look at these.



Reactive transformation

It's a fact of life that things go wrong – and with such a vast ecosystem as travel and hospitality there are naturally going to be more pressure points where problems occur. Moreover, you'd be hard pushed to find a global industry more at the mercy of the weather than travel and hospitality.

At the point of delivery or rather moment of truth, the traveler needs reassurance and confidence that the problem is being dealt with. They need to know that they're still getting to where they need to be (albeit later than planned).

It's in this instance that customer service becomes business (and reputationally) critical. Anxieties, emotions, and tensions are heightened – predominantly due to a combination of uncertainty of what's going on and pressure on the purpose of the trip happening in the right place at the right time.

Having ‘someone’ to talk to

In times of distress, travelers need answers.

Historically, these demands fell predominantly on either staff at the airport or those in a call center. But crowds swell around the former and lines are held on the latter.

The introduction of chatbots changed the game in this regard - initially solving straightforward decision-tree based questions, and now increasingly sophisticated solutions able to parse natural language. These are, to all intents and purposes to those using them, as good as the real thing. Again, provided the traveler has the right information and knows the situation, they’re going to be calmer.

Amadeus is working with partners across the industry to pioneer new approaches to customer interaction and support. Importantly, where these solutions are automating enquiries and answering known responses, these are freeing up time for airport staff or customer support centers to speak with those who want a real person to talk to.

This need could be demographic (different generations will have different levels of trust and confidence in AI chatbots), or it could simply be a matter of preference and level of complexity.



Regardless, if most of the customer service enquiries are easily anticipated, frequently asked questions, then handling these with Agentic AI frees up customer service teams to handle more complex and in-person enquiries.

Preparing for disruption

Ensuring that the right information and systems are in place (and at the touch of a button), is critical to guarantee that disruption is negated as much as is possible, irrespective of the cause.

This is another area where AI is coming to the fore. It's able to meticulously plan potential situations and prepare teams and individuals regarding their role should these arise.

Virtual Reality is already proving a success in this regard. It's allowing remote teams to diagnose in-the-field with the support of centralized experts. This means deploying solutions doesn't need to wait until the specialist is on-site.

Equally, fixing identified problems can be done remotely. Digital twins and virtual replicas of equipment and systems enable experts to visualize data, identify problems, and then subsequently guide on-site personnel through repairs.



Proactive disruption

Technological change doesn't happen overnight – especially when we look at the current tech-driven seismic shifts taking place. Transforming isn't a one step process, but instead an ongoing process of constant evolution as an organization strives to meet customer needs and leverage emerging technological solutions.

However, crucially when we look at how these changes are being made and prioritized, there's been a redistribution of power when it comes to technology in business.

In the last few years, the way businesses are treating IT has flipped on its head. Technology is now a strategic business consideration – it's no longer seen as a cost center, which was one of the first heads on the chopping block when it came to budget adjustments.

Technology is crucial to ensure any business (or industry) is able to transform and tackle today's problems.

With this perception shift has come an acceptance that to transform you need to disrupt. The challenge is doing so with the least impact possible.

Transforming innovation with AI

The benefits of generative AI (Gen AI) are being seen internally within those companies pioneering the face of travel for the customer. Air France-KLM Group is one such company. It is using large language models (LLMs), to rapidly accelerate the time it takes to bring products to market.

“You can very quickly develop a prototype and even technically scale it, and it’s relatively simple for developers. The cost of development is not huge, so the time to market from a technology perspective is really fast.”

Pierre-Olivier Bandet
CIO,
Air France-KLM

AIRFRANCE KLM

Through being able to road test solutions at pace, Gen AI can scenario plan and test feasibility sooner, better. It is also allowing its developer teams to scale prototypes at unprecedented speed – and in doing

so bringing the time-to-market down to a fraction of what it was previously.

The benefits of this are huge. It’s reducing the cost of IT development teams in being able to use the same expertise, skills and knowledge faster than before – freeing up headspace to think about the prompts which will get the answers to the problems they’re trying to solve.

Disruption for compliance

Few industries operate across as many borders, jurisdictions and regulatory frameworks as travel and hospitality. This makes compliance a uniquely tangled challenge.

The sector must constantly navigate a complex landscape of legal, financial and data obligations that make compliance far more than just a checkbox exercise. Every booking, boarding pass, and baggage claim adds yet another data point about the customer – one which also needs sharing with either the right authorities or simply the right operational partners to ensure travel is smooth and stress-free.

Keeping pace with the ever-changing legislative and regulatory landscape brings its own disruption as companies have to understand, for example, how to change processes or store data. But it’s change nonetheless.

And in an industry built on trust, mobility and data, getting compliance wrong simply isn’t an option.





A sustainable balance

In addition, beyond the governance side, we have to consider how the increasing use of Gen AI and Agentic AI is putting demands on energy and water supplies. In this regard the reporting side of compliance needs focus to ensure reported data is accurate, targets are reached, and operations aren't hit with significant penalties or fines.

This use of AI does, however, bring a conundrum to the table when it comes to reporting and sustainability. Yes, the increased use of Gen AI will consume orders of magnitude more energy than the systems it is replacing. But the processes it's taking over are, as a result, being rapidly sped up by significant orders of magnitude.

If you remove slow, laggard processes with fast, automated ones, then there's likely a net gain in productivity. Having the right technologies in place – and being able to efficiently upgrade them accordingly – can therefore reasonably be expected to create savings and drive down carbon impact.

Tackling silos

Ultimately, disruption can be sourced back to a lack of interconnectivity or silos – something which a cohesive infrastructure tackles head on.

This need for the common currency has to sit at the core of how technology is transforming the travel and hospitality industries. Consistency in platforms and infrastructure can address potential interoperability issues and in doing so create consistent, reliable, and ultimately expectation-meeting solutions for the traveler. The industry ignores this mandate at its peril.

“Disruption can often occur because something in the operational chain is not performing as expected. The reason why it propagates or snowballs is because then other functions are not well aware of what's happening and carry on as normal without responding to the imminent challenge.

“By aligning processes and sharing data – what we call working on a common currency – we can share collective decisions and head off disruption before it happens.”

Pierre-Olivier Bandet
CIO,
Air France-KLM

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