

Entry #03: KEEPING IT SIMPLE

Background: At the end of 2021, the Canopy Lab conducted a survey of almost 950 international development professionals about the future of work, including their preferences regarding working models and insights around employer attributes. One area we explored was work-related travel.* We asked respondents about how much of their job entailed travel prior to the pandemic. We also asked respondents about desired travel in a post-pandemic world.

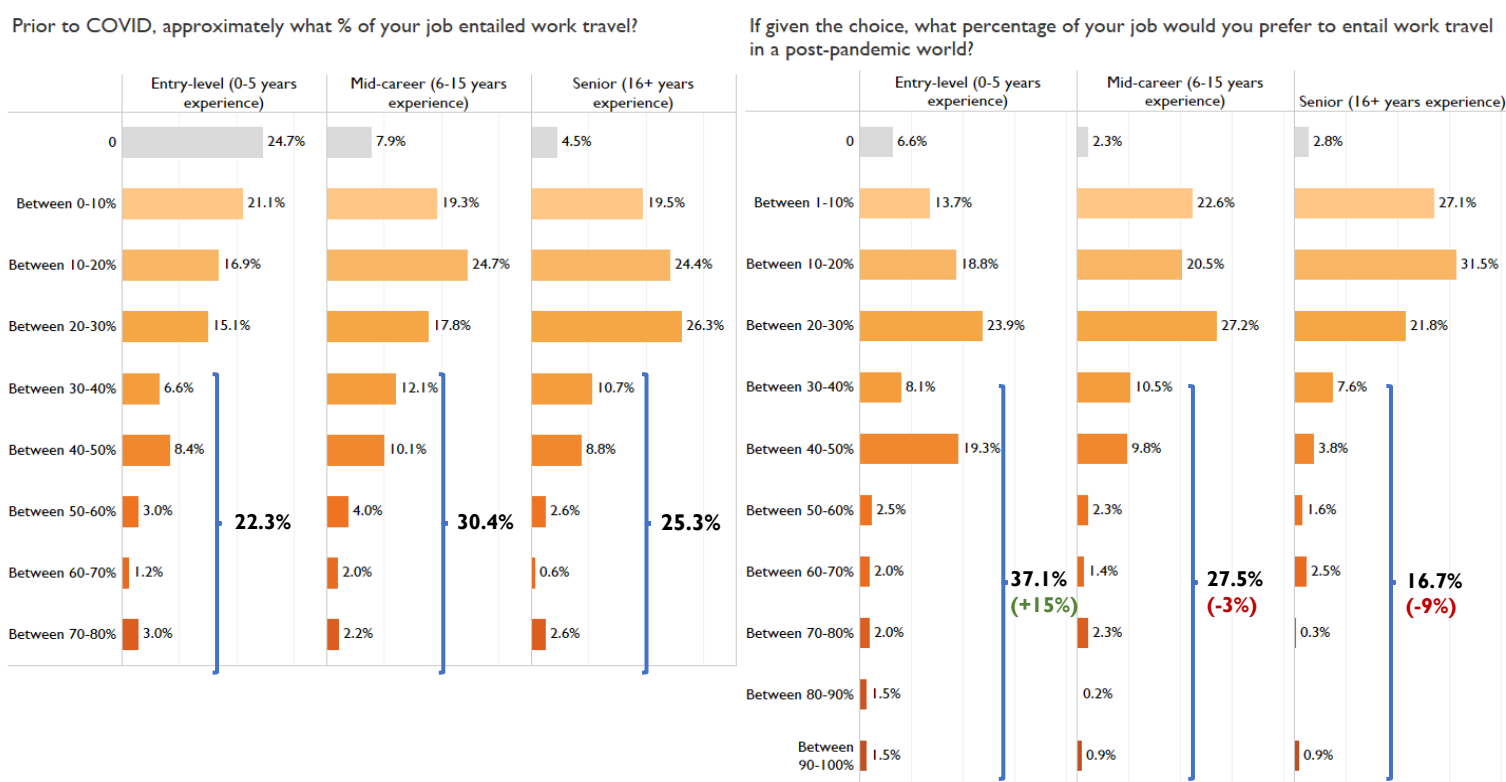
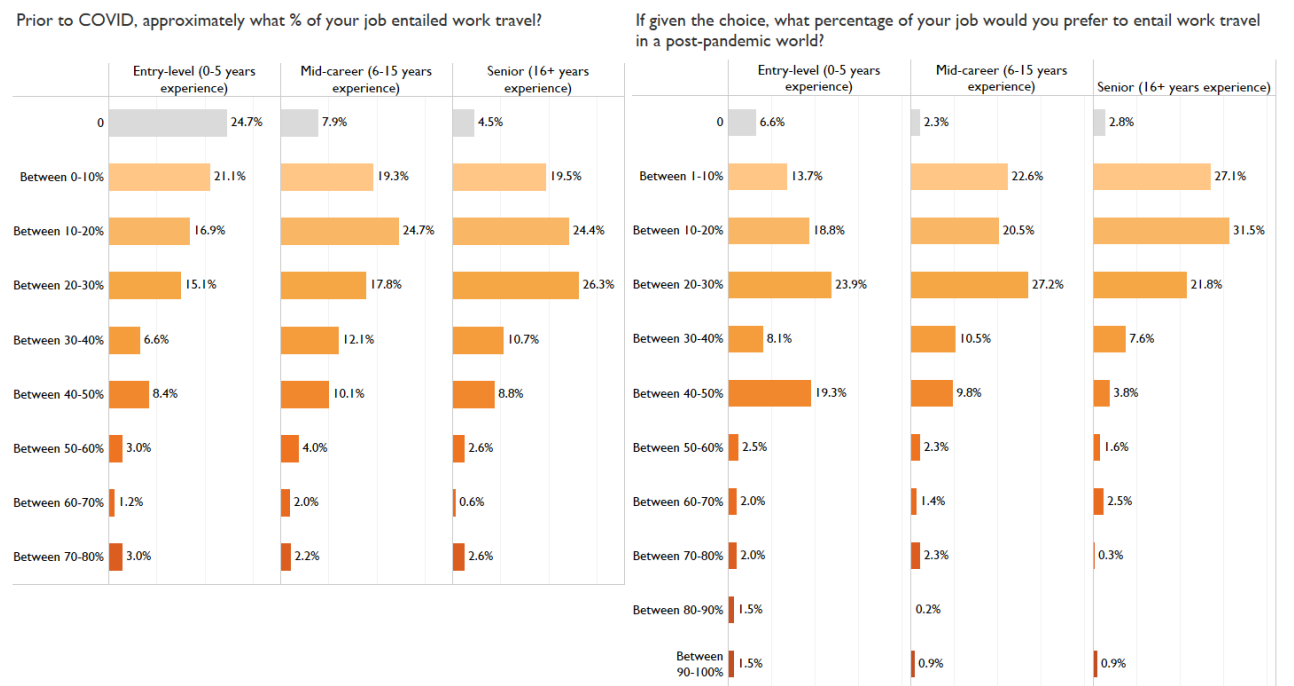
I wanted to show the change between pre-COVID travel actuals (as a % of one's job) versus post-COVID desires. This entry was a classic lesson in making sure data viz is simple and easy to understand.

*International or domestic travel that was not commute-based or within close proximity of one's home.

TAKE #1:

In our survey, we had asked respondents to provide their responses in 5% increments - for both pre-COVID travel actuals and post-COVID travel preferences. I wanted to show the different in actuals and preferences disaggregated by seniority. During analysis, I realized that 5%-increments had been too granular of an ask, I used 10% increments. I added in color-shading to show intensity of travel.

The problem with this visual was that it was simply undecipherable - and required too much work for a reader to make sense of the findings.



TAKE #2:

My solution to this problem was quite embarrassing. I told myself that the graphs should remain "rich" and that by "doing the math" for the reader, I could easily demonstrate the difference between pre-COVID actuals and post-COVID desires across seniority levels.

In the end, I realized this effort was counter-productive, as my modifications only made the graphs more uninviting. Moreover, as you can see, I also made some arbitrary calculations starting at 30%.

TAKE #3:

It finally occurred to me - if I'm trying so hard to just show the differences between desired post-COVID and actual pre-COVID travel levels - **why not just show the change itself?**

This required calculating each respondent's pre-COVID and post-COVID responses and then averaging the percentage point change. The graph to the right ultimately did justice to the point that I had wanted to make all along: entry-level professionals wanted to travel more post-COVID, whereas mid-career and senior professionals wanted to travel less.

Figure 7: Average change in desired travel levels from pre-COVID levels

