

The Effects of COVID-19 on Tourism and Implications for Future Travel

by

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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science

Approved July 2023 by the  
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2023

## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic arguably affected the travel industry more than any other global industry. In what felt like overnight, both domestic and international travel was halted due to the spread of the virus. Travel organizations, such as The Travel Corporation, had to learn to adapt and create policies and procedures to help mitigate the consequences of the pandemic. This qualitative research examines the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel industry to provide an understanding of future travel implications and restrictions for travelers and guided travel companies, utilizing The Travel Corporation as an example. A total of 36 employees of The Travel Corporation surveyed regarding their views on how the company handled the pandemic. The research shows that the travel industry needs to have policies in place that ensure resilience against any future catastrophes.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on all aspects of society. In what felt like a blink of an eye, the world as it was known changed. The COVID-19 virus was introduced into people's lives like no virus before it ever had been. The COVID-19 virus "is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus" (World Health Organization, 2023). According to The World Health Organization (2023), the most common symptoms of the virus include fever, cough and loss of taste or smell, whereas more severe symptoms include difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, chest pain, and loss of speech or mobility. One of the scariest issues around the COVID-19 virus was that it was no respecter of persons. Both young and old, healthy, and unhealthy people were dying at a rapid pace from this disease. The virus spread swiftly as it was transmitted "from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing or breathe" (The World Health Organization, 2023). Due to this ability to spread quickly, the virus traveled from the first cases in China to cases around the world within a couple of months.

The spread of the COVID-19 virus around the world led to the declaration of a pandemic. On March 11, 2020, "after more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries and 4,291 deaths, the WHO declare[d] COVID-19 a pandemic" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Most people did not have any idea about how to understand or deal with a situation of this magnitude. The news constantly reported on the number of cases increasing and unfortunately, the rising death toll. Hospitals were not able to keep up with the demand as more and more cases developed. Hospital workers were also getting

the virus, which led to them being short staffed. There were also not enough beds to take care of all the sick patients. Many times, if the case was not as severe, patients were given oxygen or other treatments and sent home to self-care. COVID-19 patients were kept in isolation rooms at the hospital with nurses and doctors wearing protective gear to treat them. There was also a shortage of ventilators, so healthcare providers were forced to make tough decisions regarding who had access to ventilators and who did not. Visitors were not allowed in most hospitals (if not all) to try to prevent the spread of the disease. This visitation policy was in place even if the patient was not sick with COVID. Many people lost their loved ones without ever getting to say those final goodbyes.

The healthcare industry was not the only industry affected by the pandemic. Shortly after the pandemic began to spread, to limit exposure, governments began to regulate people's interactions with each other. Lockdown measures started to be enforced throughout the U.S. around March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (Table 1). These measures were not only enforced in the U.S. but also around the globe. This meant that stay-at-home orders were issued. People were told to only leave their houses if it was a necessity for food or healthcare. If people did leave their homes, then strict face masking regulations would be enforced in most communities. People were also required to follow strict social distancing guidelines of standing at least 6 feet apart. The largest impact of these orders was that businesses were forced to close their doors. Some businesses were able to send their workforce to work remotely, but others didn't have that choice. Unemployment began to rise as employers were forced to let employees go because the business was not making any profit. Many small businesses and restaurants went out of business. Although most industries (if not all) suffered losses during the pandemic, the tourism industry was among the most affected.

The global tourism industry was one of the hardest hit industries. It is estimated that between March 2020 and December 2020, the US travel economy lost about \$492 billion (Barnes & Holmberg, 2021). Local communities in tourist destinations worldwide depend on tourism for survival, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, communities were forced to lock down. Both domestic and international travel were halted unless travel was for a business necessity. Amusement parks, museums, concerts, movie theaters, etc. were all closed or canceled. When allowed to re-open, these venues were at limited capacity and had strict distancing regulations. Airlines had to accept government assistance to stay in business. Many travel agencies closed. Thousands of vacations were canceled or postponed. At the heart of the problem, economies suffered, and people lost jobs. As the pandemic and travel restrictions dragged on, the number of losses continued to grow.

**TABLE 1**

*Timeline of Travel Restrictions Issued During the COVID-19 Pandemic\**

Date	COVID-19 Related Travel Restrictions and Advisory
March 13, 2020	The Trump Administration declares a nationwide emergency and issues an additional travel ban on non-U.S. citizens traveling from 26 European countries due to COVID-19.



<p>March 14, 2020</p>	<p>CDC issues a “no sail order” for all cruise ships— calling for them to cease activity in all waters that the U.S. holds jurisdiction over.</p>
<p>March 15, 2020</p>	<p>States begin to implement shutdowns in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The New York City public school system— the largest school system in the U.S., with 1.1 million students— shuts down, while Ohio calls for restaurants and bars to close.</p>
<p>May 9, 2020</p>	<p>The unemployment rate in the U.S. is 14.7%— the highest since the Great Depression. With 20.5 million people out of work, the hospitality, leisure, and healthcare industries take the greatest hits overall, affecting essential workers, people with lower incomes, and racial and ethnic minority workers disproportionately.</p>

<p>December 28, 2020</p>	<p>Proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of departure is mandated for all foreign national travelers entering the U.S. from the U.K. due to the highly transmissible COVID-19 B.1.1.7 / “Alpha” variant circulating in the U.K.</p>
<p>January 12, 2021</p>	<p>CDC expands the COVID-19 negative test requirement to include all air passengers entering the U.S. CDC continues to recommend that people test again 3-5 days after arrival and stay home for 7 days after traveling to help slow the spread of COVID-19.</p>
<p>January 30, 2021</p>	<p>As part of the Biden Administration’s Executive Order on Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel, CDC requires face masks to be worn by all travelers while on public transportation and inside transportation hubs to prevent the spread of COVID-19 effective February 2, 2021.</p>

<p>April 2, 2021</p>	<p>CDC recommends that people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 can safely travel at lower-risk to themselves.</p>
<p>November 8, 2021</p>	<p>All non-citizens who are traveling to the U.S. will now be required to be fully vaccinated and provide proof of their vaccination status to fly to the U.S. All travelers will continue to be required to show a negative pre-departure COVID-19 test taken no more than three days before they board their flights.</p>
<p>December 6, 2021</p>	<p>CDC introduces a new one-day testing policy requiring international travelers to show a negative pre-departure COVID-19 test taken 24 hours before they board their flights to the U.S.</p>
<p>April 21, 2022</p>	<p>The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) extends the COVID-19 vaccine requirement for all non-citizens entering the U.S.– in addition to the requirement</p>

	that all travelers show a negative antigen test taken within one day of departure.
May 3, 2022	CDC recommends that everyone continue to wear a mask while in indoor transportation hubs to prevent the spread of COVID-19 – but this is no longer legally enforceable.

\* The information on this table is generated from “CDC Museum COVID-19 Timeline,” available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html>.

**Problem**

There were many improvements to the prevention and treatment of patients that contracted the COVID-19 virus, yet in 2021 the pandemic remained a concern for the travel industry. The tourism industry was attempting to rebound. Vaccine rollouts contributed to improvements as tourist destinations were allowed to reopen. People were left to consider whether traveling with restrictions in place was worthwhile or not. The travel experience was impacted by reduced availability of key attractions, hotel space, dining venues and even flight schedules. At the time of this paper, airlines are continuing to cancel and reschedule flights due to limited staff and aircraft availability. There was just an announcement May 4, 2023:

The Administration will end the COVID-19 vaccine requirements for international air travelers at the end of the day on May 11, the same day that the COVID-19 public health emergency ends. This means starting May 12, noncitizen nonimmigrant air passengers will no longer need to show proof of being fully vaccinated with an accepted COVID-19 vaccine to board a flight to the United States. (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

These restrictions have been in effect since 2021 and are just now being withdrawn. Most other countries had the same vaccination requirements, so travel was extremely limited for those that could not or chose not to get vaccinated.

These issues highlighted the question of when travel (both domestic and international) would be pursued at pre-pandemic levels again. People were ready to travel after a year of lock-down precautions and almost 2 years of other travel restrictions, but they did not want to miss out on the full experience. The COVID-19 pandemic affected all aspects of the travel industry in ways that have changed the future travel experience. Since many travel companies and hotels, etc. were forced to close during the pandemic, space was limited for tourists. Travel operations companies had the difficult task of procuring limited hotel and venue spaces, activities, and even restaurant availability in the pandemic world. Industry leadership understood the urgency to rebound and make informed decisions regarding how to function in the midst of the obstacles that COVID presented. A significant challenge was how to navigate issues around large groups of people traveling together and the risk of someone developing COVID-19 while on trip. Another, and equally important, obstacle was how to overcome travelers' fears and insecurities during the booking process.. While the lifting

of travel restrictions in 2021 have eased some of these concerns, the question remains even in 2023: Will travel ever be the same as it was pre-pandemic?

The pandemic indeed changed how many people viewed the world. Death tolls around the world were significant, leaving families broken. It is difficult to imagine that an event of this magnitude would not have lasting effects on people. When the World Trade Center collapsed on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the world stood still. People were gradually able to adjust and get their lives back to a level of normalcy over time, but changes were still introduced to the way we travel. Better security checks were implemented, and governments enforced stricter rules and regulations for travel. The point is that even though September 11<sup>th</sup> affected the United States more than any other country, the policies around travel (especially air travel) changed throughout the world. Airports tightened security to protect against any future attacks. The travel industry had to adjust as policies around safety got stricter and security measures got better at protecting travelers. The COVID-19 pandemic was spread around the world from the travel of infected individuals. The pandemic affected all tourist destinations and travel organizations around the world, so what policies and procedures will be introduced to protect from future pandemics? How can the travel industry ensure it survives and protects the livelihoods of those people depending on it for survival?

Many travel organizations are facing the difficult task of trying to answer these questions. The Travel Corporation (TTC) is just one example of a travel company that was affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. TTC is a family-run company that has been in business since 1920. There are over 40 brands in the TTC family of brands, which span many facets of the travel industry. There are hotel brands (Red Carnation Hotels), river cruise brands (Uniworld), and multiple guided travel brands (African Travel, Trafalgar,

Costsaver, Insight Vacations, etc.) among the travel styles offered by TTC (The Travel Corporation, 2023). Each of these brands suffered losses during the pandemic when travel was halted. TTC's leaders had to make tough decisions regarding staffing and limiting resource use to sustain the company through the pandemic. Once travel was allowed again, TTC had to navigate the world of travel restrictions and create policies that attempted to keep their guests safe.

### **Statement of Purpose/Research Questions**

This qualitative research aims to explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the guided travel industry and to provide an understanding of future travel implications and restrictions for travelers and travel companies. The research focuses on The Travel Corporation (TTC), a U.S. guided vacation company with multiple travel brands. The research will concentrate on the time between the onset of the pandemic in 2020 and the middle of 2021 when travel restrictions were lifted. However, given that some of the challenges for the travel industry have persisted beyond the official travel restrictions, part of the research will highlight the lingering and continuing impact of the COVID-19 shutdown.

To achieve its purpose, the research is framed around the following questions:

**Central Question:** What were the impacts of the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020 on The Travel Corporation and how did the organization mitigate them?

#### **Secondary questions:**

- Did the pandemic lead to new policies and strategies for the organization? If so, what were they?

- Did the shutdown affect managers and employees equally?
  
- How did the pandemic influence the attitudes and travel experiences of the company's clientele?
  - Based on the impact of the COVID 19 travel restrictions, what are the organization's strategies for resiliency against future disruptions in the travel industry?

The research focuses on U.S. travelers and The Travel Corporation. U.S. travelers were not able to travel domestically or internationally and, therefore, U.S. based travel corporations were not able to operate any trips during the lockdown period of the pandemic. Although this study focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on the U.S. travel industry, it also implicates the same requirements for future travel independent of the traveler's originating country.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Initial studies highlighted the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel industry. Originating in Wuhan, China in December of 2019, the pandemic was wreaking havoc worldwide within a few short months. Uğur and Akbıyık (2020) investigated 75,000 comments on TripAdvisor to determine how fast the fear of the virus affected travelers' decisions to travel at the beginning of the pandemic. The researchers used text mining techniques to analyze user comments throughout U.S., Asian, and European forums from when the first case was discovered in Wuhan until four days after the WHO declared it a pandemic (December 30, 2019- March 15, 2020). These dates allowed for the study to understand those initial travelers' responses before travel was no longer allowed. As expected, the study found the phrase Corona Virus the most, followed by the phrase travel insurance. Due to this, the authors speculate that travel insurance may help travelers overcome hesitations to plan travel in the long-term since they now understand the importance of having travel insurance. One of the most important results of the study was that it found that "travelers cancel or delay their trips "on the same day", with the spread of the news" (Uğur and Akbıyık, 2020) of the COVID-19 virus. The authors conclude that the travel industry will need to be more flexible to adapt to these situations, especially with the prominence of the internet and social media.

In April 2020, The World Tourism Organization released a report reviewing the extent of travel restrictions. They found that

96% of all worldwide destinations have introduced travel restrictions in response to the pandemic. Around 90 destinations have completely or partially closed their

borders to tourists, while a further 44 are closed to certain tourists depending on country of origin (UNWTO, 2020, para. 2).

The reaction of the travel industry to the pandemic was immediate. The pandemic was declared in mid-March and already a month later destinations around the globe were completely shut down. There were speculations that jobs would be lost, issues around sustainable tourism would be forgotten, and that economies would surely suffer. As destinations began to reopen in late 2020/ early 2021, travel restrictions were still in place. Some examples included wearing a face mask in public spaces (including on airplanes), providing negative COVID-19 test results from within 72 hours of arrival, and extending to showing proof of vaccination for some destinations.

Other studies discuss more general consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel industry, such as decline in tourism and the effect on the hospitality industry. One of these consequences was a drastic decline in tourism GDP globally due to the travel restrictions imposed and tourists' general fear of traveling. The global tourism market reported in 2020 had decreased by 40% from the 2019 reports and the number of international tourist arrivals worldwide declined by about 72% over this same time (Popşa, 2022). The decline in tourist arrivals was linked to the implementation of lockdown procedures and travel restrictions that were prominent in the early stages of the pandemic. Popsa (2022) also argues that even though the consequences of the pandemic on the travel industry are significant, the industry will now be forced to adapt to consumer trends and digitization that it was slow to adopt previously. The author also foreshadows that there will be more environmental regulations imposed on the travel industry post-pandemic.

Research from Nayak, Mishra, Naik, Swapnarekha, Cengiz, & Shanmuganathan (2021) relates the initial decline in the tourism sector to the aviation industry. Lockdowns caused the almost complete cessation of both domestic and international travel as people were forced to shelter in place. The authors point out that since the airlines were canceling flights due to the pandemic, travel companies were not able to operate since they are dependent upon travelers flying to different destinations. Some smaller hospitality businesses were forced to close their doors forever, whereas even larger hospitality businesses had to lay off workers due to lack of demand.

Another consequence of the pandemic was a fear of traveling because of how quickly the virus could spread between people. Maio, Im, Fu, Kim, & Zhang (2021) and Landry, Bergstrom, Salazar, & Turner (2021) evaluated the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism to determine travelers' risk perceptions. The idea of "travel risk and management perceptions" was further researched in a study conducted by Rahman, Gazi, Bhuiyan, and Rahaman (2021). The study found that tourists avoided popular destinations that could be prone to overcrowding. Tourists reacted this way because being around more people increased the chances of exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Lim (2021) employed rapid review processes to develop the theory named "the agency and reactance theory of crowding," which relates to undercrowding when quarantine measures are in place and overcrowding once those restrictions are lifted. This could be seen throughout the travel industry as restrictions were imposed limiting the number of people allowed in venues at one time. Popular travel destinations and even theme parks saw significant decreases in the amount of tourism when restrictions (such as wearing face masks) were in place, and once the restrictions eased visitation levels approached capacity again. Lee, Olasehinde-Williams, & Akadiri (2021) shows the correlation between geopolitical risk and a decrease in tourism demand and

recommends that policy makers establish crisis management plans to protect the tourism industry from future events.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only affected international travel, but it affected domestic travel as well. Different states had different policies in place regarding masking regulations, COVID testing requirements, and quarantine enforcement. One state that had difficult requirements to mitigate was Hawaii. Hawaii had instituted a two-week quarantine for all visitors that ended on October 15, 2020 (Rizzo, 2020). Visitors were allowed to skip quarantine measures if they had a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of arrival, but it also had to come from a certified laboratory. The protocols became difficult as some islands did not offer the same procedures. Only Hawaii, Oahu, Maui, Molokai, and Lanai allowed for the quarantine period to be skipped, while Kauai was not part of this and required

visitors to test negative with a pre-travel test within 72 hours of traveling to the island, stay at an approved ‘resort bubble’ property, and test negative for a second time more than 72 hours after arriving” (Fox, 2021, para. 15).

Situations such as these made it difficult for travelers to even be able to travel domestically between states.

There are not many studies that predict what post-pandemic travel will look like. Akhtar, et al (2021) suggest that digital tourism may be a solution to government-imposed travel restrictions due to the pandemic. Digital tourism utilizes live video feeds of travel guides discussing popular travel destinations posted to travel companies social media feeds. Although this technique may provide some short-term satisfaction for tourists, it will not likely sustain the intrinsic need to travel in the long term. A more likely solution is presented in Haque, et al (2021), where the authors present the need to

develop a system to prove COVID-19 vaccination status of travelers to cross international borders. This proposed system implies that travelers will need to prove vaccination status to travel in the future. Travelers are expected to be more cautious about the trips that they take post-COVID (Southan, 2021) because they are concerned about contracting the virus. Southan (2021) also conveys that travelers' attitudes will determine how the travel industry responds to different restrictions. Traveler's attitudes and perceptions of the travel industry will also determine the emergence of the industry post-pandemic.

As COVID cases continued to soar and a new strain of the virus was found in the U.K. at the end of 2020, many people wondered what travel would look like for 2021. One of the speculations was that there would be a requirement for travelers to prove vaccination status. Experts also predicted that the return to some sort of travel normalcy would be linked to the vaccine rollouts. Road trips were thought to continue in popularity, while cruises and air travel were thought to be back to operation by the end of 2021. (Mzezewa, Yeginsu, Glusac & Firshein, 2021). These considerations were important for the travel industry to take into account when making policies and planning for the next year.

It is not likely that the travel industry will emerge from the pandemic without experiencing some repercussions and reformations in a post-pandemic world. Some studies suggest that tourists will want to look for more sustainable tourism options once travel is open again (Palacios-Florencio, Santos-Roldan, Berbel-Pineda, Castillo-Caalejo, 2021). Palacios et al (2021) suggest that since the lockdown measures effectively limited capacity at tourism destinations, the travel industry should draw on the pandemic crisis to focus on sustainability principles. The authors argue that one facet of sustainable

tourism is to avoid overcrowding at popular destinations. They believe that tourists will naturally look toward traveling with fewer people post-pandemic to avoid contact with the virus. Sustainability issues were also discussed in Kumar (2020), who argued “the emergence of COVID-19 has underscored the mutually-affective relationship between people and nature,” that “we must try to understand and appreciate the limits to which humans can push nature, before the impact is negative” and arguably more controversially that “those limits must be embraced by our consumption and production aspiration” (as quoted in Jones & Comfort, 2020). This research suggests that travel companies may initially draw back on their sustainability efforts as they try to recover from the financial burdens of the pandemic. As this article was written in 2020, it did not provide clear evidence that consumers will look for sustainable travel options in the future. However, the authors propose that the pandemic made tourists more aware of their impact on both the environmental and social aspects of communities, so preference toward sustainable tourism organizations is inferred.

Tourists are also predicted to want to avoid mass tourism destinations in an attempt to minimize risk of contracting the virus. Some mass tourism destinations may also start to charge entry fees to try limit the number of visitors to the city (Froyd, 2020). Fowler (2022) discusses the need for the travel industry to make changes to supply chains and health and safety measures to ensure future profitability. There is a deficiency in the literature regarding the long-term travel restrictions expected to be imposed and the impact of these on the travel experience. There is also a lack of research regarding the effects of the pandemic on the guided tourism companies specifically and how they handled the pandemic.

Therefore, this qualitative research aims to explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel industry to provide an understanding of future travel implications and restrictions for travelers and guided travel companies, utilizing The Travel Corporation as an example. There will likely be future travel restrictions imposed on travelers due to the rapid spread of the virus among individuals. These restrictions may include the need to be vaccinated, the wearing of a face mask while traveling, or limited numbers of people allowed in certain destinations or key attractions. The research will focus on the impact of COVID-19 on the travel industry as portrayed by The Travel Corporation's responses to the pandemic and government-imposed travel restrictions. The study is important because it will expand existing research to include future long-term travel restrictions and trends imposed due to the virus. It is unlikely that the travel industry will be the same post-pandemic because travelers are now concerned with contracting the virus and certain precautions must be taken to ensure safety. Travel companies and travelers alike need to be aware of restrictions and risks of travel due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continues to affect the world, it is important to have current information about its impact on the travel experience.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The research was designed utilizing a qualitative research method. The design is an explanatory case study method. This qualitative research aims to explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel industry and to provide an understanding of future travel implications and restrictions for travelers and travel companies. It is an appropriate strategy because data will be collected from the participant surveys to explore their attitudes towards the travel industry post-COVID. The explanatory case study approach provides information about a specific phenomenon (COVID-19 pandemic) during a specific time frame (2020- early 2021) with an attempt to provide information about any future effects (travel restrictions).

#### **Role and Reflexivity**

As a current employee of The Travel Organization (TTC), I have received permission from organizational leaders to survey coworkers about their attitudes regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the travel industry. Although all of the participants will come from the same organization, they do not all work in the same departments. The organization has multiple travel brands and departments whose employees will be invited to participate in the study.

My 5 years in the travel industry provide me with background understanding of the topic. I was working in the travel industry pre-pandemic and experienced the impact of it on the industry first-hand. Therefore, I may be predisposed to emphasize those views that align with my own. To control personal bias, a team of advisors will review the data and verify the themes that are presented. Secondary research will also be performed to verify the data with peer-reviewed journal articles.



An application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that no harm will be caused to the participants by the interview process. Participants read a consent statement explaining that consent will be assumed by them clicking to submit the survey. The Research Integrity and Assurance training has already been completed as part of the IRB certification process. The IRB approved the study.

## **Methods and Sources**

This qualitative research project focused on the collection of original data from primary sources. The participants consisted of The Travel Corporation's (TTC's) employees that work in the call center. These employees are the front line of TTC. They had to adjust to the ever-changing regulations and travel conditions, while educating guests on new procedures and dealing with escalated calls. A recruitment email (Appendix A) was sent to approximately 200 of TTC's employees asking for participants in the research study. Participants were advised that the data collected from the survey would be kept anonymous. A brief introduction to the study was given along with a request for consent. Participants were asked to click on a link to a Google form if they consented to participating in the study.

Participants submitted their answers to the survey (Appendix B) over a two-week period. After one week, a follow-up email was sent to remind potential participants of the deadline. There were 36 responses received. Participants were not required to answer every question, so some of the questions received less responses than others. Data was analyzed using the Google Forms results summary and through thematic coding. The following codebooks were developed to help analyze the results.

**Table 2**

*Thematic Codebook for Question 5a.*

Question 5a. If Yes, what were some of the specific policies and strategies?
Flexibility
Future Travel Credits
Remote Work
Sherpa Tool- Travel Restrictions

**Table 3**

*Thematic Codebook for Question 5b.*

Question 5b. If No, what could the organization have done better?
Long-term Solutions
Management of on-trip Covid cases
Clarity of policies

**Table 4**

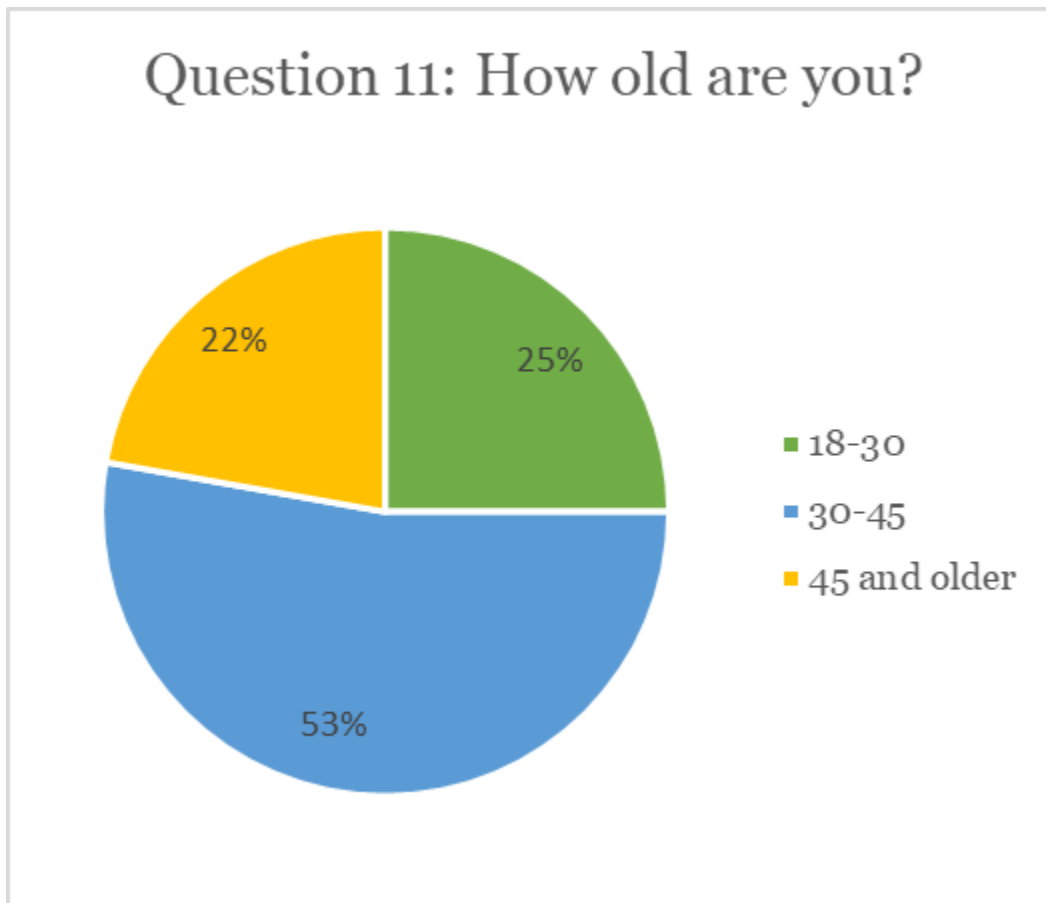
*Thematic Codebook for Question 10.*

Question 10. In your words, please describe how the COVID-19 travel restrictions affected your emotional, mental, physical, and financial health.
Stress
Frustration
Fear
Financial Hardship
Isolation
Strain on Mental Health
Lack of Job Security

## Study Demographics

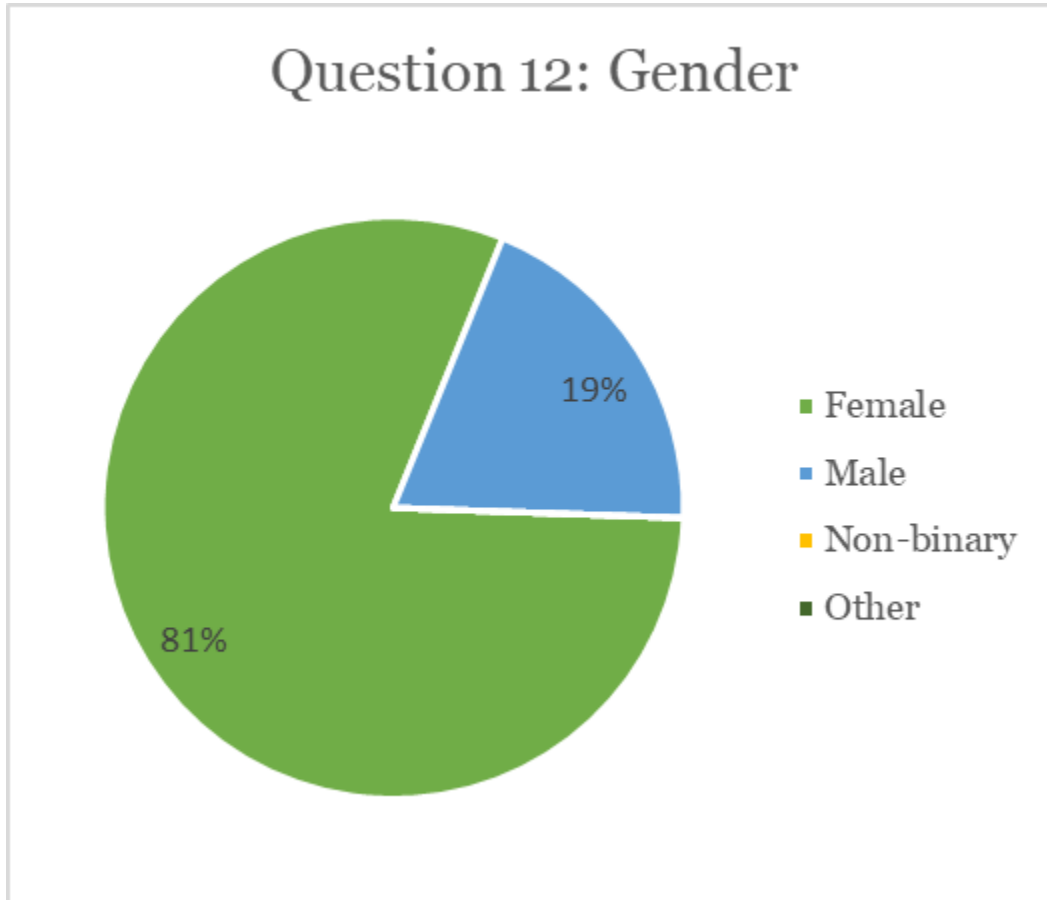
**Figure 1**

*Participant's Age*



**Figure 2**

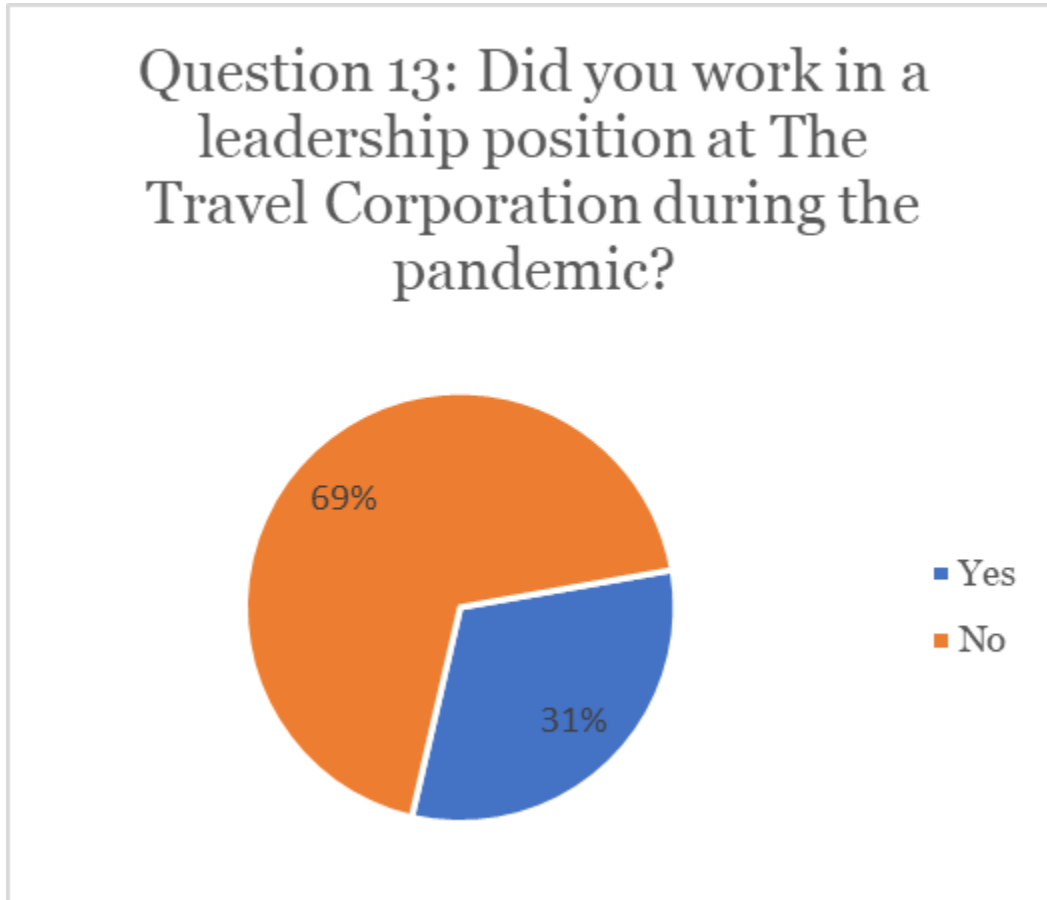
*Participant's Gender*



The demographics of the study were determined through questions 11 and 12. Both questions received 36 responses. There were 19 (53%) respondents between the ages of 30-45, 8 (22%) that are 45 and older, and 9 (25%) between the ages of 18-30 years old. 29 (81%) of the participants were female and 7 (19%) were male. No participant identified as non-binary or other.

**Figure 3**

*Participant's Leadership Status*



Question 13 asks if participants worked in a leadership position at The Travel Corporation during the pandemic. There were 35 responses, 24 (69%) of which indicated they were not leaders and 11 (31%) indicated that they were in a leadership position at TTC during the pandemic. Of the respondents that stated they were in a leadership position, only 4 were male. The remaining 7 participants that were in leadership

positions were female. The intention was to understand if leaders had a different view of the way TTC handled the pandemic compared to non-leaders.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020 on the Travel Corporation and to understand how the organization mitigated them.

The study addressed the following secondary questions as well:

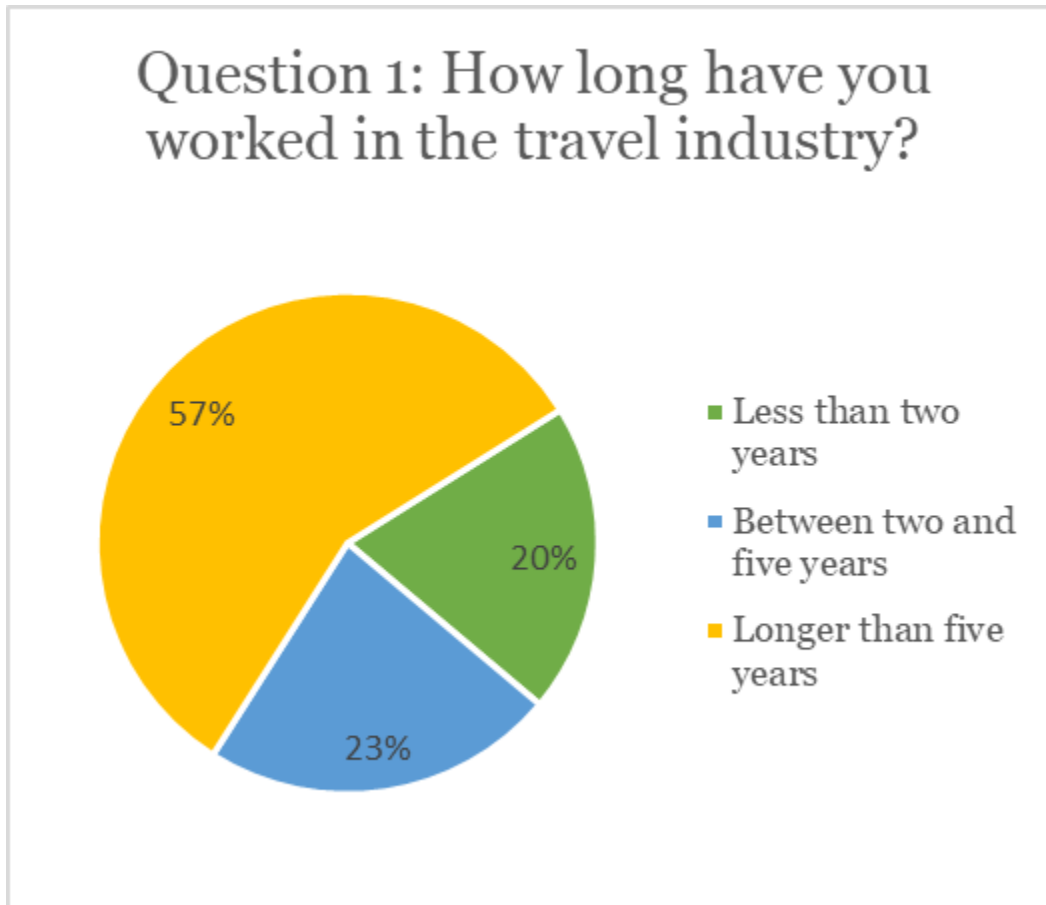
- Did the pandemic lead to new policies and strategies for the organization? If so, what were they?
- Did the shutdown affect managers and employees equally?
- How did the pandemic influence the attitudes and travel experiences of the company's clientele?
- Based on the impact of the COVID 19 travel restrictions, what are the organization's strategies for resiliency against future disruptions in the travel industry?

The first questions on the survey determined the length of tenure in the Travel Industry and then with the Travel Corporation. This was meant to determine if the respondents had worked in the travel industry during the onset of the pandemic. If respondents had not worked in the travel industry or with the Travel Corporation during the pandemic years, they were asked to skip ahead to the more general questions (9-14) on the survey.



**Figure 4**

*Length of Time Worked in the Travel Industry*

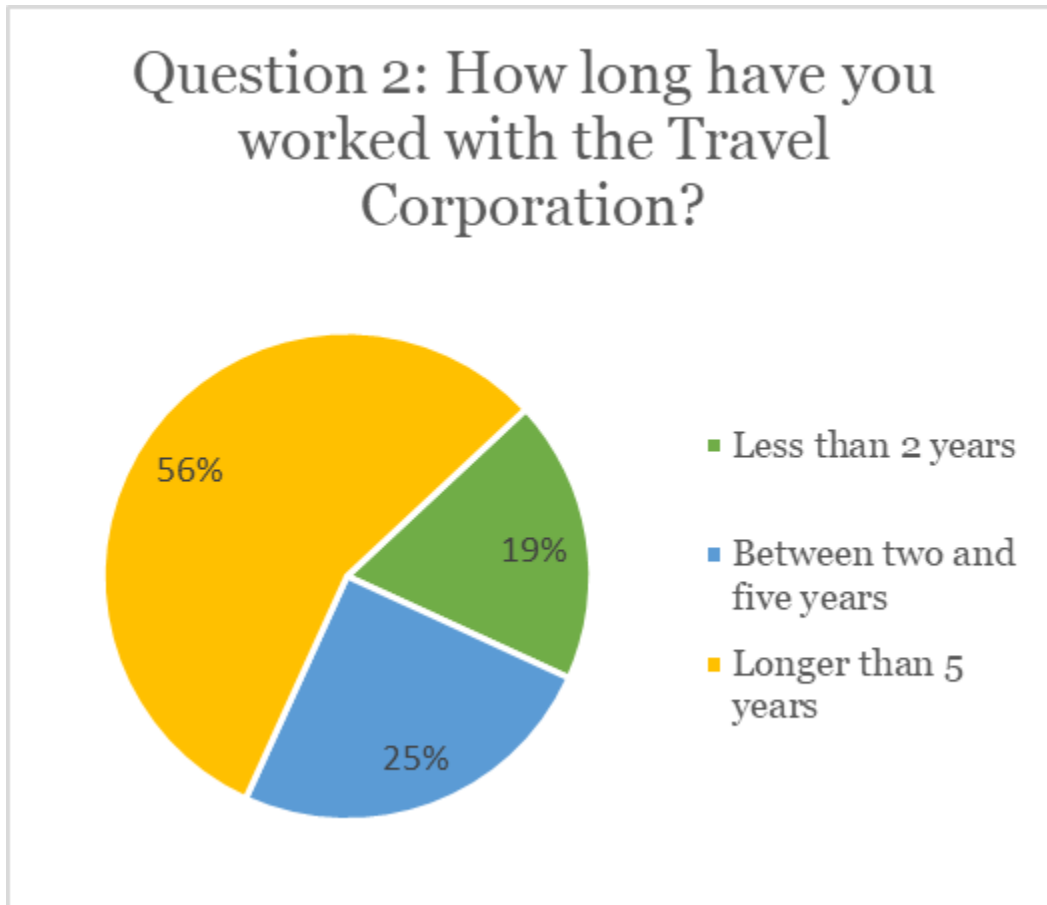


The first question was answered by 35 participants. Of those, 20 (57%) had worked in the travel industry for over 5 years, eight (23%) for between 2-5 years, and seven (20%) worked in the travel industry for less than 2 years. There were four males and 16 females who have worked in the travel industry for more than five years. Of these, four males worked in leadership roles while seven females who worked in the travel industry for more than five years were in leadership roles. All eight of the respondents who have worked in the travel industry for 2-5 years were female, with one in a leadership role. Only one male who worked in the industry for less than two years

leaving the remaining six respondents being female. None of the respondents who worked for less than two years were in leadership roles. It is important to note that 11 of the 20 participants that have worked in the travel industry for more than five years were also in leadership roles. Respondents with less than two years of work in the travel industry were excluded from the data collected regarding the pandemic travel policies. The assumption is that their responses would not add much value to the overall understanding of pandemic travel concerns. Also, the point about the leadership status of respondents is significant as it contributes to an understanding of the difference (if any) in the responses about the pandemic between leaders/supervisors and the rest of the employees. This question showed that most respondents worked in the travel industry during the onset of the pandemic, which was about 2 years ago at the time of this paper.

**Figure 5**

*Tenure With the Travel Corporation*

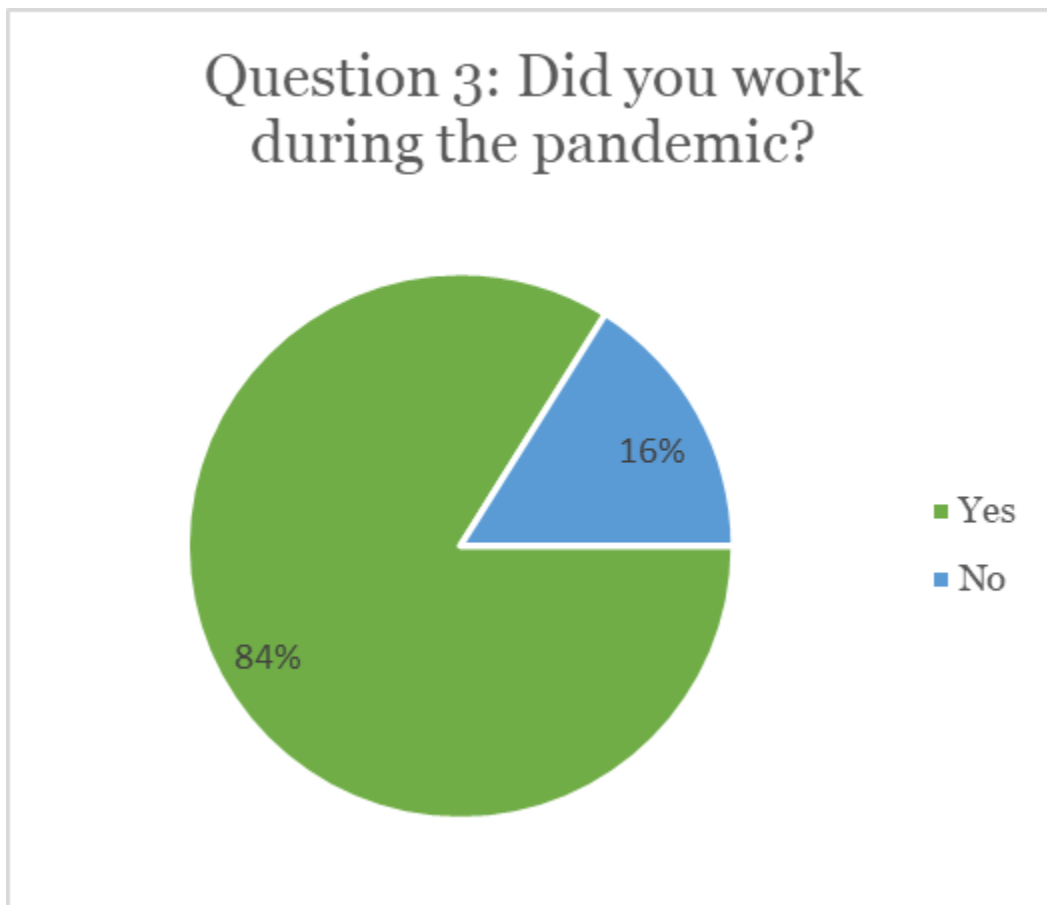


The second question was also meant to determine tenure in the travel industry, but now more specific to employment with The Travel Corporation. This question received 32 responses. There were 18 (56%) that were employed by the company for longer than 5 years, 8 (25%) employed 2-5 years, and 6 (19%) who were employed for less than 2 years. There were 13 females and five males that were employed for more than 5 years. All five of the males were in leadership roles, whereas six of the females were in leadership roles. Of the eight employed for 2-5 years, seven participants were female, one was male, and only one female was in a leadership position during the

pandemic. There were five females and one male that were employed with The Travel Corporation for less than 2 years and none of these participants worked in a leadership role. Participants were again asked to skip ahead to questions 9-14 if they were employed by The Travel Corporation for less than 2 years.

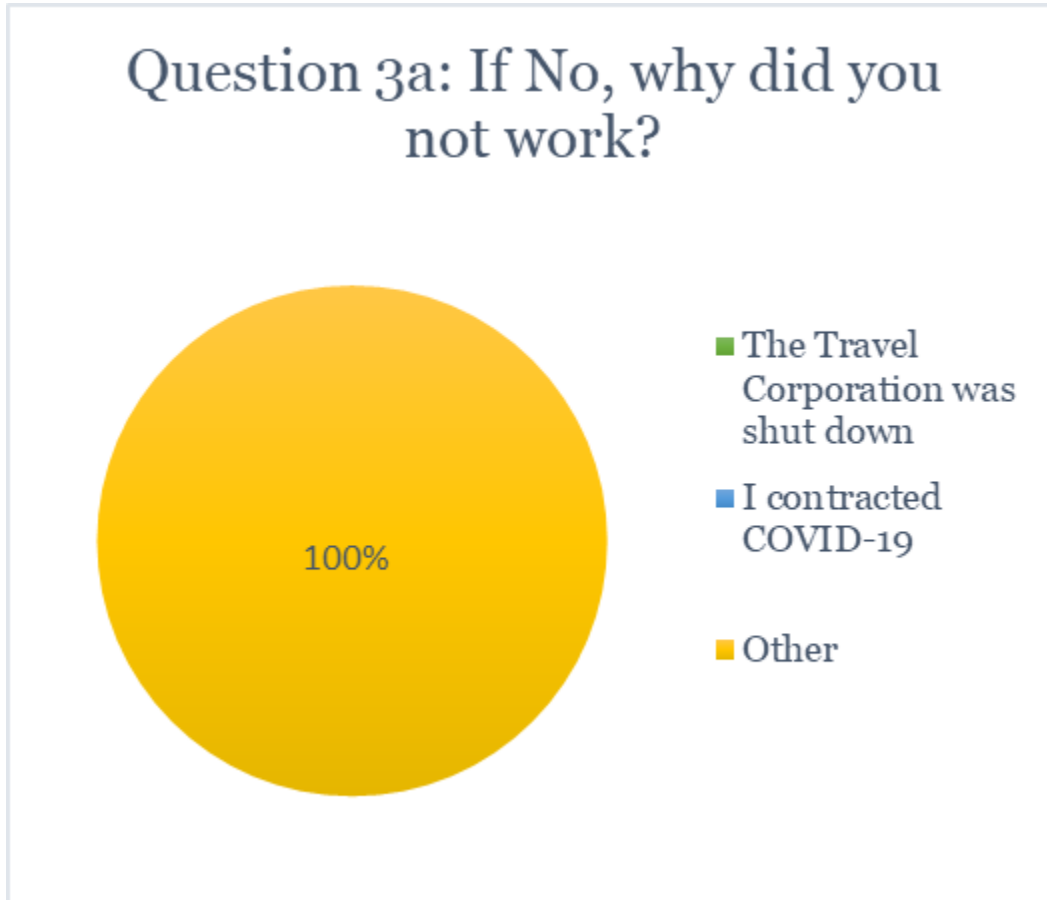
**Figure 6**

*Work During the Pandemic*



**Figure 7**

*Reason For Not Working*

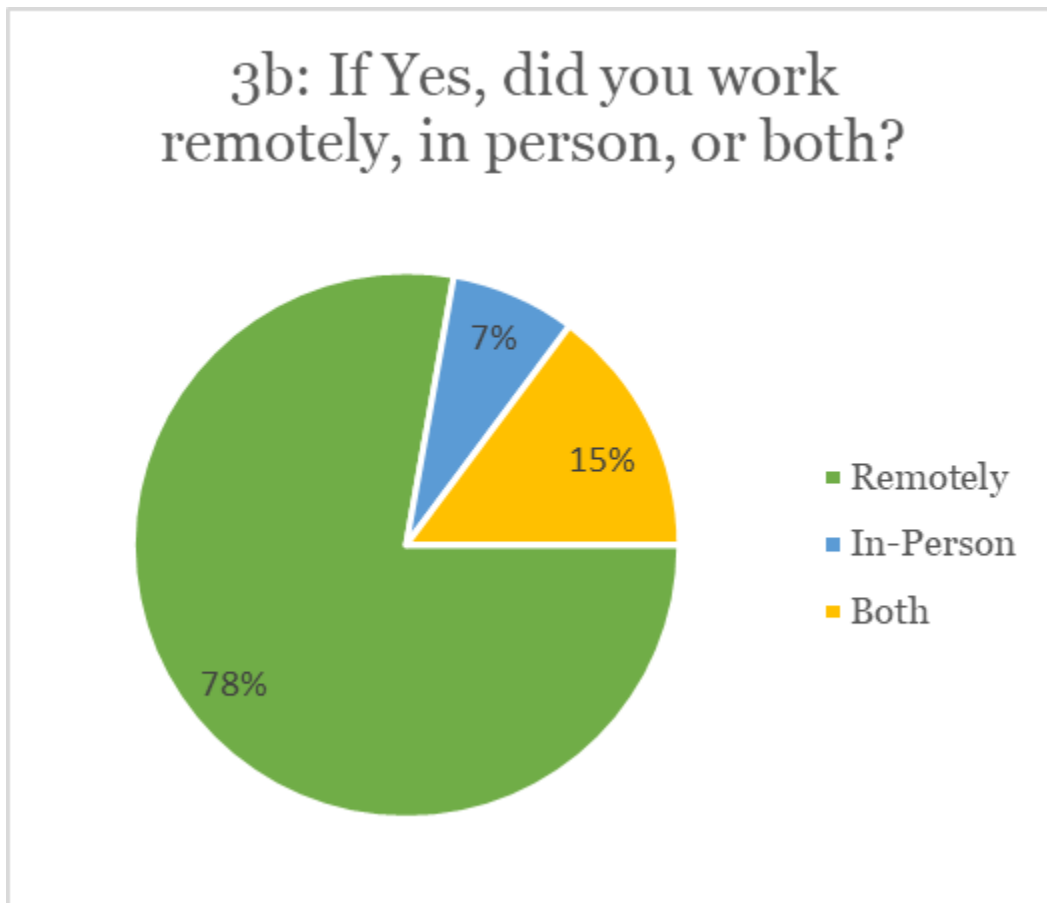


Questions 3 and 3a addressed if the respondents worked during the pandemic. There were 31 responses to question 3. There were 26 respondents that answered “Yes” to the question, whereas five respondents answered “no.” There were seven males, four of which were in leadership roles and 19 females, with five of them being in leadership roles that answered “yes” to working during the pandemic. All of the participants that stated “no” were female, one of which was in a leadership role. Question 3a received a total of eight responses. All the respondents (100%) listed their reason for not working as “other.” This is interesting because some respondents must not have answered question

3. There were only five respondents that stated they did not work during the pandemic, yet eight gave a reason for why they didn't work. Since all of the respondents to question 3a answered the same, it is not important to the study whether they were male or female and their leadership status. It is difficult to determine if these participants did not work during the pandemic because they were laid off, furloughed, or if they had previously been working in a different industry altogether.

**Figure 8**

*Style of Work*



Question 3b asks if respondents worked remotely, in person, or both during the pandemic. There were a total of 27 responses. Of these, 21 (78%) worked remotely, 2 (7%) worked in person, and 4 (15%) worked both. There were four males (2 leaders) and 17 females (5 leaders) that worked remotely during the pandemic. There was one male and one female that worked in person during the pandemic, and the female also worked in a leadership role. Of the four respondents that worked both, there were two males and two females. Both of the males worked in leadership positions, but neither of the females worked in leadership positions.

Many companies were forced to allow employees to work remotely during the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. With “stay-at-home” orders throughout most of the U.S., many organizations were left without any other choice but to switch to remote work. The 2021 Business Response Survey, focused on U.S. private sector businesses for dates from July 2021 to September 2021, found that “one-third (33 percent) of establishments increased telework for some or all employees during the COVID-19 pandemic” (Dalton & Groen, 2022, para. 26). This change to remote work was both sudden and unexpected. Both leaders and employees were not necessarily prepared or trained for such a drastic change to the work structure and environment. By 2021, companies found that they needed to be more flexible. They not only needed to ensure that employees had the tools and resources available to work from home, but they also had to offer support on a personal level (Vasel, 2021). Organizations had to provide employees with computers and other hardware or technology that would allow them to do their jobs properly. They also had to understand that some employees were working from home at the kitchen table, others were possibly working while also doing homeschool with their kids, and other employees may have been dealing with anxiety or depression over the whole pandemic situation. This caused organizational leaders to also

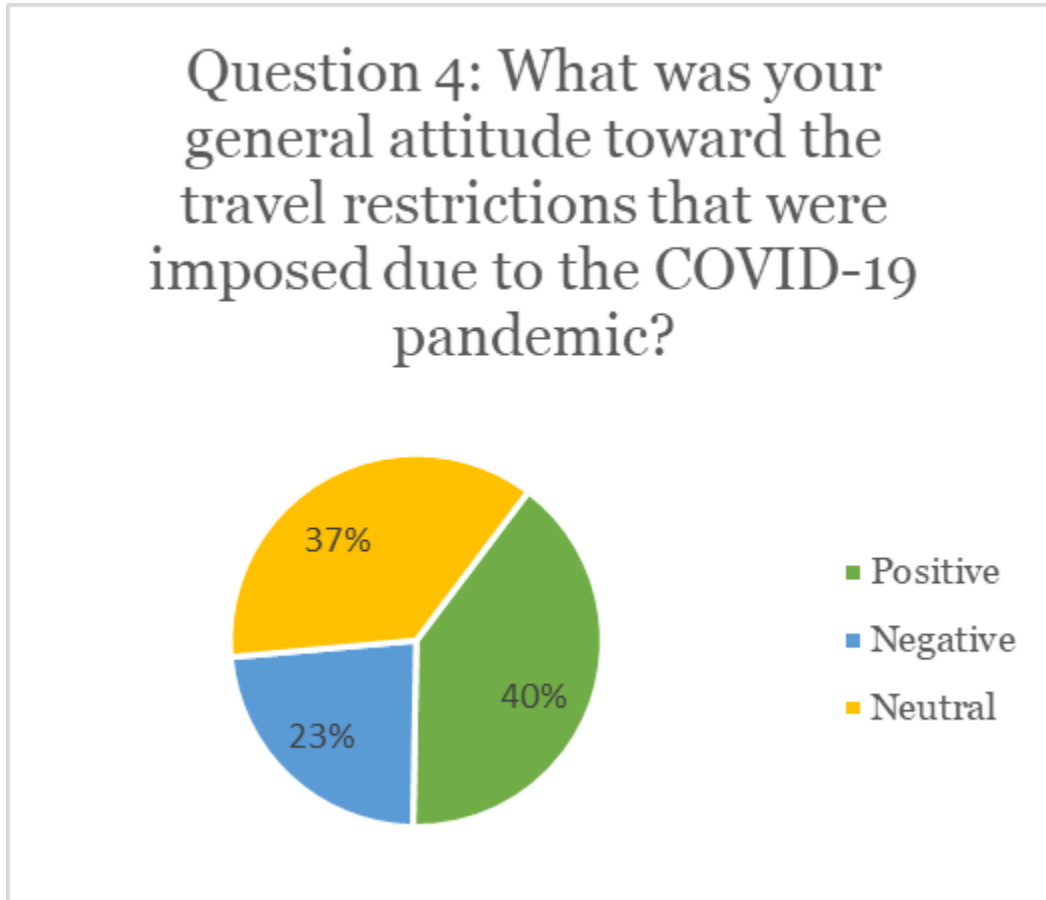
have to consider employees' mental health while dealing with the pandemic. Meetings might have spent some time just checking in on employees before getting down to the business needs.

The Travel Corporation had to adapt to a remote work model during the pandemic as well. As shown from the data, most of the participants in the study worked remotely during the pandemic. Only 2 participants worked in-person and 4 worked in a hybrid situation. Of those that worked in-person or hybrid, half of each category also worked in a leadership capacity which implies that there is not a difference in how participants responded to the pandemic based on leadership status. The Travel Corporation was able to operate their business with a remote workforce throughout the pandemic, with a few employees choosing to return to the office at least part time.



**Figure 9**

*General Attitude Toward Travel Restrictions*



The fourth question refers to the respondents' attitudes toward the travel restrictions that were imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 30 responses to this question, 12 (40%) stated they had a positive attitude, 7 (23%) had a negative attitude, and 11 (37%) were neutral. Of the positive attitude responses, there were three males and nine females. Only one male responded negatively toward the travel restrictions and the remaining six responses were female. There were three males that responded that they had a neutral attitude, with the remaining four with this response

being female. The neutral and positive responses to this question were close to equal, with the negative response not too far behind.

When evaluating responses for leadership status, four of the 12 participants that answered they had a positive attitude about travel restrictions were female leaders, while one was a male leader. Also, five of the 11 (two male and three female) neutral responses worked in a leadership capacity during the pandemic. There was one male leader that responded he had a negative attitude about the restrictions. It is interesting that there was an equal number of leaders that responded both positively and neutral to the question, while only one leader responded negatively. Again, there doesn't seem to be a significant difference between those participants in leadership roles and those that were not in leadership roles for this question. There were participants in leadership positions split pretty equally between the positive and neutral responses. There could be a situation where a leader did not want to express a negative opinion, but there was 1 leader that did choose the negative answer.

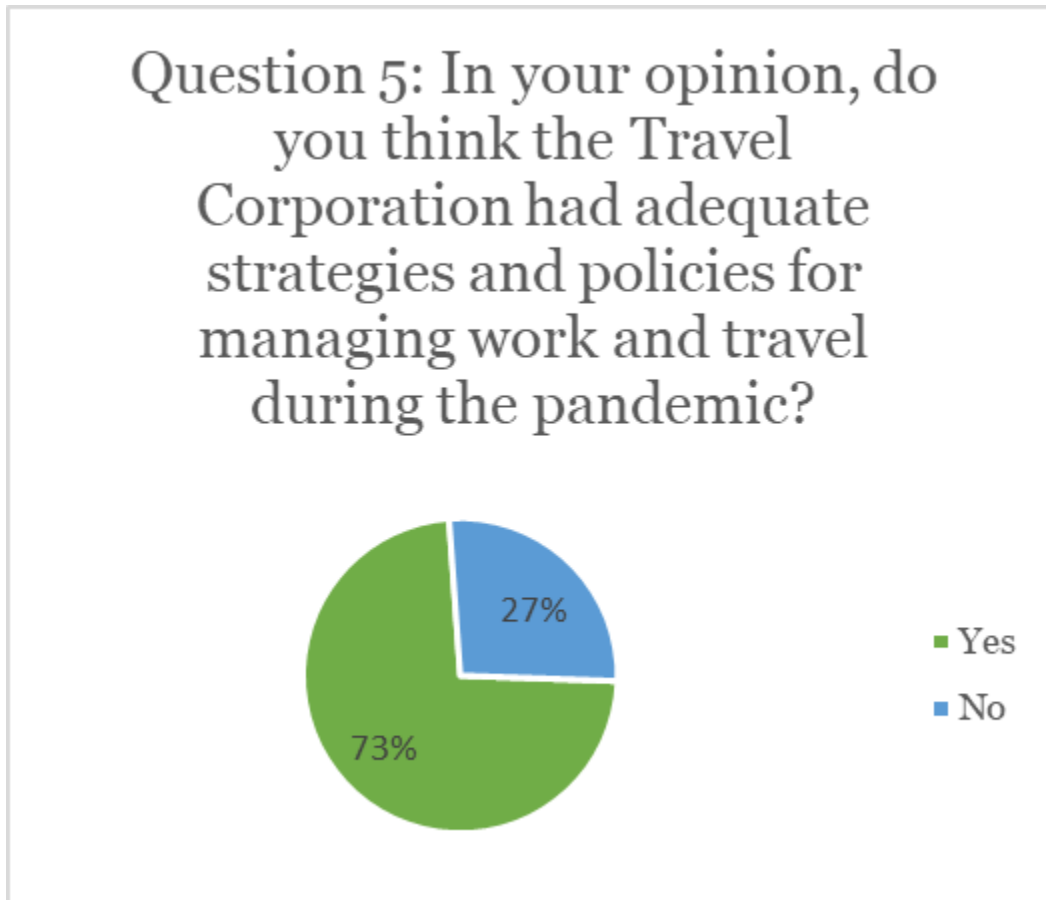
The Travel Corporation had to consider travel restrictions on multiple levels. As the company operates multiple brands and types of vacations, there were many different rules to follow. At the beginning of the pandemic, travel halted completely. On March 17, 2020, "the United States and Canada mutually agreed to close their border to non-essential travel and, three days later, the United States and Mexico mutually agreed to close their border to non-essential travel" (Clarke, 2020). There were already travel bans for travelers from China and most of the Schengen area of Europe about a month earlier.. Cruise lines also had to suspend operations to try to limit the spread of the virus. As could be expected, the travel industry was facing a serious situation.

As COVID-19 testing and vaccine procedures improved, countries began to reopen for travel. Traveling during early to mid 2021 did not come easily though. There were multiple travel restrictions that travelers had to follow. Travel restrictions were in place not only for international travel, but for domestic travel within the United States as well. Things like wearing a mask in public spaces or taking a COVID test prior to travel seemed simple enough. Complications arose as COVID testing sites became too busy and results were not received by the traveler in time for travel. Many destinations required COVID testing within 3 days of arrival to the destination, which also made issues like the exact timing of the COVID test important and complicated. There were constant updates around travel restrictions for each destination and on top of those, there were times when airlines had different restrictions than the destination and both needed to be followed. Some travel restrictions were more difficult to follow. For example, many destinations required travelers to quarantine for anywhere from 10-14 days upon arrival. For a guided travel company like The Travel Corporation, how could that work? They have set itineraries that could not allow for guests to be quarantined to a destination for days before the trip even began.

For The Travel Corporation, all of the constant updates made it imperative to understand and relay pertinent information to their guests. The company needed to operate trips, but also needed to ensure that guests were as safe as possible on trips. This caused the TTC leadership team to set policies and procedures in place to help mitigate the risks.

**Figure 10**

*Opinion of The Travel Corporation's Strategies and Policies*



Respondents gave a mostly positive response to The Travel Corporation's strategies and policies for managing work and travel during the pandemic. There were 22 (74%) that said the strategies and policies employed were adequate, while there were 8 (27%) respondents that disagreed. There were a total of 30 responses to this question. There were 16 females, five of which were in leadership roles, and six males, four of whom were in leadership roles that believed TTC had adequate strategies and policies for managing work and travel during the pandemic. In contrast, there were seven females, two of whom were leaders and one male that disagreed. There doesn't seem to be any

difference between how males and females responded to this question. There is also not much to suggest that those participants that worked in leadership roles answered any differently than those not in leadership roles. Although, it may be important to note that there were 2 female leaders that disagreed with the policies that TTC had in place during the pandemic. Based on the date from the second part of this question that follows, perhaps these two leaders thought that TTC could do more.

The second part of this question, question 5a. asked “If Yes, what were some of the specific policies and strategies. This part of the question received 18 free responses. These responses were coded, and the following themes emerged: Future Travel Credits (FTC’s), Flexibility, remote work, and enforcing travel restrictions. The results indicate that The Travel Corporation implemented policies revolving around offering guests the ability to travel in the future (FTC’s) and that allowed for changes outside of 30 days from departure. This flexible policy allowed guests to change their departures without penalty. On the flip side of this, TTC did not offer refunds for any suspended trips during the pandemic. Suspended trips were those trips that were not able to operate due to government restrictions. Trafalgar, one of The Travel Corporation’s brands, states the following regarding FTC’s:

Your Future Travel Credit is valid on any brand within The Travel Corporation (TTC) which includes Trafalgar, Insight, Luxury Gold, Cost saver, Brendan Vacations, Contiki, Uniworld Boutique River Cruises, U River Cruises, African Travel and Red Carnation Hotels. Whatever your taste, whatever your pace, we have a travel style that will suit your needs and desires. (The Travel Corporation, 2023, para. 3).

Similar statements are found on the websites of the other TTC brands as well. Looking back to when the FTC policy first originated for suspended trips, affected guests were understandably upset. Many believed that they should've been refunded their money since they were not able to go on the trips that they had booked. Tons of guests took to social media platforms to voice their complaints. An example of this is Dave V. of Concord, North Carolina. He posted on the TripAdvisor forum on July 21, 2020:

Live in the US, just cancelled a fall 2020 Ireland trip due to Covid-19 uncertainty entering Ireland and EU from the US. Had to pay all penalties (lost deposits) as documented in the T&C's. The insurance covers the deposits paid however for Covid-19 this refund is as a Trafalgar credit only as pandemic induced travel restrictions are not reimbursed by the insurance in cash. All that said the disappointing part is the refund of the actual trip cost above the deposits come from Trafalgar itself and they will take 120 days to process! They have had the full payment since early 2020. Very unfair, unlikely we travel with Trafalgar in the future (TripAdvisor, 2023).

As this guest pointed out, due to the high demand for refunds and the issues associated with the pandemic (and a remote workforce), refunds were taking an extremely long time for TTC to process. Guests were not thrilled with the idea of first, being told that their money was going to be kept as a FTC for future use and then secondly, that if they did happen to qualify for any type of refund it would take about 120 days to be processed. Suffice it to say, it is understandable that the respondents mention the FTC policy as one that was difficult to explain to guests.

There are also some references to remote work being implemented during COVID, with the option to work from the office once it was available. As discussed in

previous sections, the ability to work remotely was important to most organizations. Respondents believed that TTC was “able to quickly pivot to work from home when needed and back to in office when available” (Response 10). TTC recognized the need for their employees to switch to working remotely and provided the means for them to do so. Once employees were able to return to the office, TTC had made policies to improve the cleanliness of the office and instituted contact tracing to track people that came in contact with someone that had tested positive for COVID-19 (Response 18).

Participants also reference TTC enforcing travel restrictions. Travel restrictions were required forcing guests to be vaccinated and follow the rules of each destination. TTC instituted a vaccination policy requiring all guests that traveled with them to be vaccinated. This was due largely in part to the requirement of travelers to be vaccinated to travel internationally. Although some countries had already lifted this requirement by 2021, many countries still required it. TTC operates many multi-country trips that cross multiple borders throughout the duration of the trip. For ease of policy, they made a blanket guideline that all guests would need to be vaccinated, regardless of the destination. TTC did not change their vaccination policy until 2023. Their website was updated to state “For guests traveling with Trafalgar from 1 January 2023, Covid-19 vaccinations and boosters are highly recommended, but no longer required” (Trafalgar, 2023, para. 4). Respondents also mention the use of a map that TTC used to help advise travelers of the ever changing travel restrictions and policies around the world. The tool used was called the Sherpa tool. Guests (or travel agents) could enter the country of their passport along with which country they were traveling to and get up to date information about travel restrictions. A link to the Sherpa tool was (and still is) included on all of the TTC brands websites under the information regarding travel restrictions (Insight Vacations, 2023).

A few respondents also mention a Wellness Director onboard the coaches. The respondents are referring to a person that TTC put on board the majority of trips to mitigate any issues that could arise around the pandemic. The Wellness Director served multiple purposes, such as sanitizing room keys before passing them out, checking guests' temperatures and for overall wellness, and even staying behind with guests that tested positive on trip to ensure they had a hotel to quarantine in and that they were taken care of. A couple respondents mentioned that they believe that TTC did its best to keep up with and mitigate issues during the pandemic.

The next part of the question, 5b., asked "If No, what could the organization have done better? There were 9 responses to this part of the question. The themes that developed in the responses included: having long-term solutions, better management of on-trip COVID cases, layoffs, clarity of policies, and inclusion of other departments. Respondents seemed to understand that there was a learning curve to be expected throughout the pandemic since no one had been through this before. They mention multiple processes and policy changes that were difficult to keep up with, so they would've liked more long-term solutions or policies. One respondent mentions that leaders were "constantly changing the policy every couple of weeks" (Response 27). It seems that the employees that believe TTC could have done better with long term policies may not have realized how quickly things were changing during the pandemic.

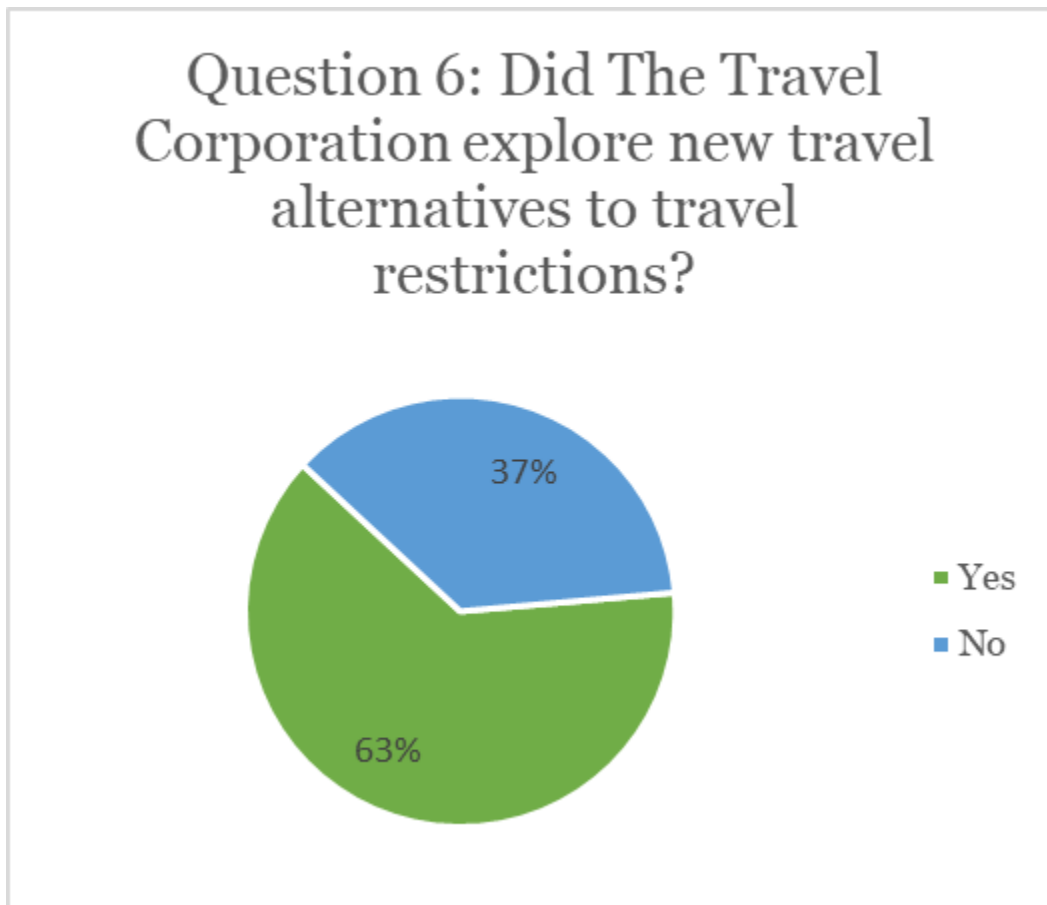
One of the most prominent themes is the handling of COVID cases while on trip. Respondents would have liked to see guests with symptoms get tested immediately while on trip. Related to this, respondents also think TTC should have done a better job of explaining the need for travel insurance if the guest tested positive while traveling. One participant stated they should've "explained more that if you don't have travel insurance,



you get COVID you will be stuck and will pay those hotel and change fees out of pocket. I don't think guests were really clued into the likely hypotheticals" (Response 24). Although some of the responses utilize slightly different wording, multiple responses mention the need for better policies around handling COVID cases while guests are on trips.

**Figure 11**

*Were Travel Alternatives Explored?*

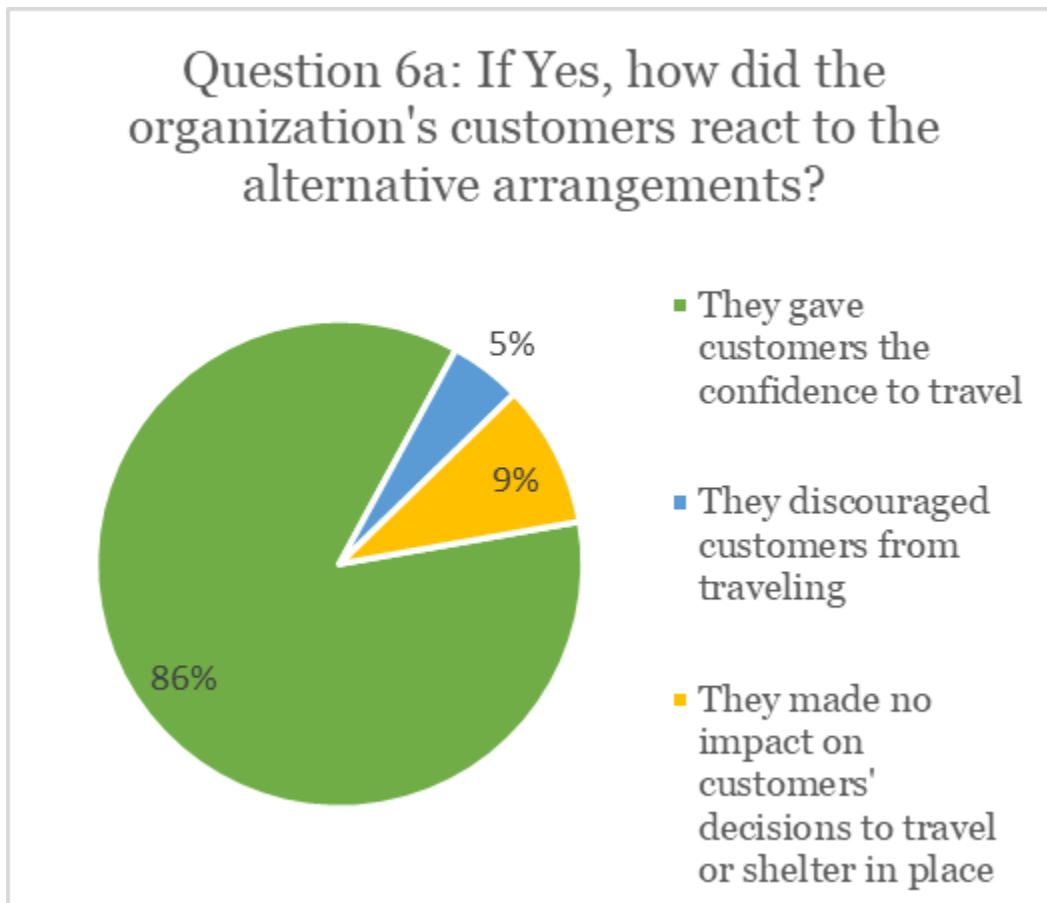


There were 30 responses to this question. Of these, 19 (63%) of respondents replied "yes," while 11 (37%) responded "no." There were five males and 14 females that

replied “yes.” Of these, three of the males and four of the females were in leadership roles during the pandemic. For those participants that responded “no,” there were two males and nine females. Only one of the males was a leader, whereas three of the females were leaders. Most respondents believe that TTC explored alternatives to travel restrictions. It is interesting that there were still a good number of respondents that believed that TTC did not explore new options for travel due to the travel restrictions.

**Figure 12**

*Customers Reactions to Alternative Arrangements*

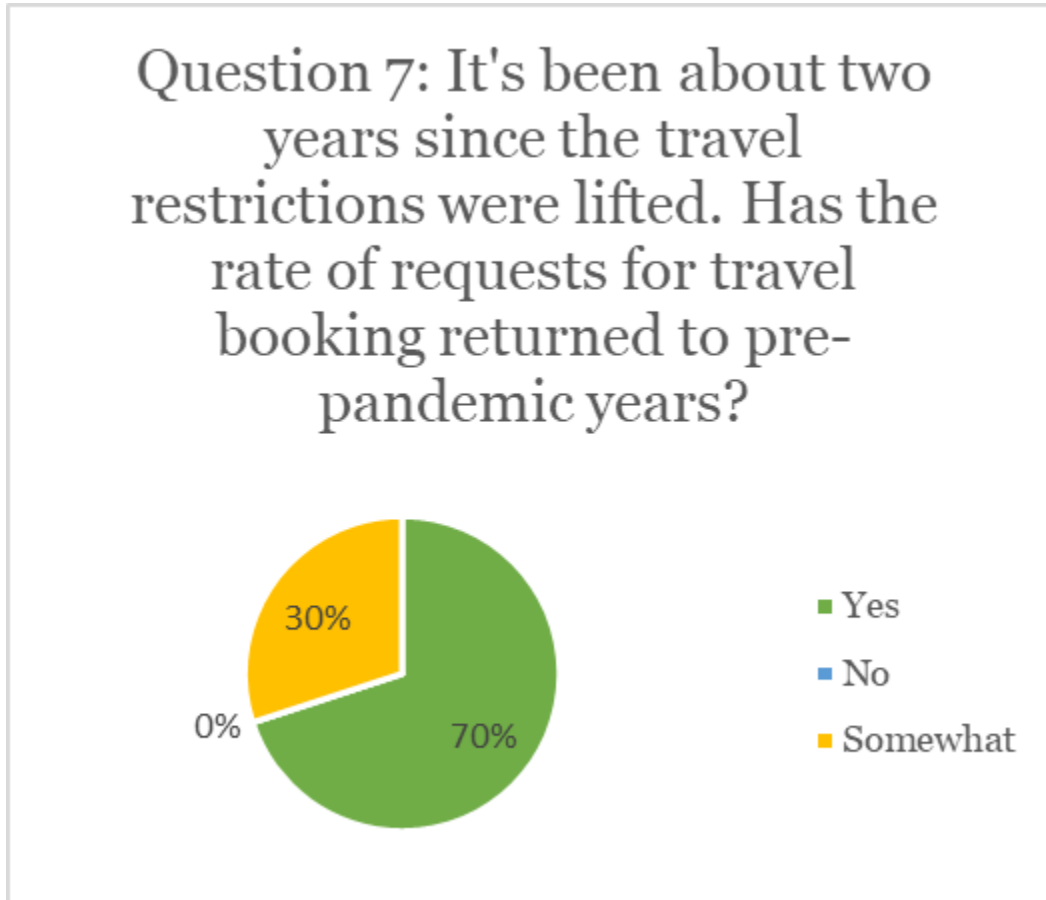


Question 6a. builds on the previous question to determine how TTC's customers reacted to the alternative arrangements. There were 21 responses to this question. A total of 18 (86%) stated that the alternative arrangements "gave customers the confidence to travel." There were two respondents (9%) that thought there was no impact on the customer, while one respondent (5%) believed the arrangements discouraged customers from traveling. There were four males and 14 females that replied that alternative arrangements "gave customers the confidence to travel." Of these, two males and four females were in leadership roles. Both of the respondents who said that the alternatives had no impact on customers and the one respondent that answered that the alternatives discouraged customers from traveling were male. Gender may have played a role in this since there were no females that felt the alternatives received more negative responses. The respondents had an overwhelmingly positive view of the customer's reaction to the alternative arrangements that TTC put in place.

Some of the alternative travel arrangements that TTC offered were virtual travel experiences and virtual interactions with some of their travel directors. As early as May 2020, TTC brand, Trafalgar, began posting videos that explored some of the top destinations virtually. One video explores a Lusitano stud farm in Alentejo, Portugal with Trafalgar's Be My Guest host Vera (Trafalgar Travel, 2020). In December 2021, Trafalgar Travel posted on their Facebook page "How to make the best Norwegian apple tarts" and "The best Tuscan family recipes, from Tuscan chicken to Chianti wine" (Trafalgar Travel, 2021). TTC was able to use their social media platforms and presence to still engage with customers about travel.

**Figure 13**

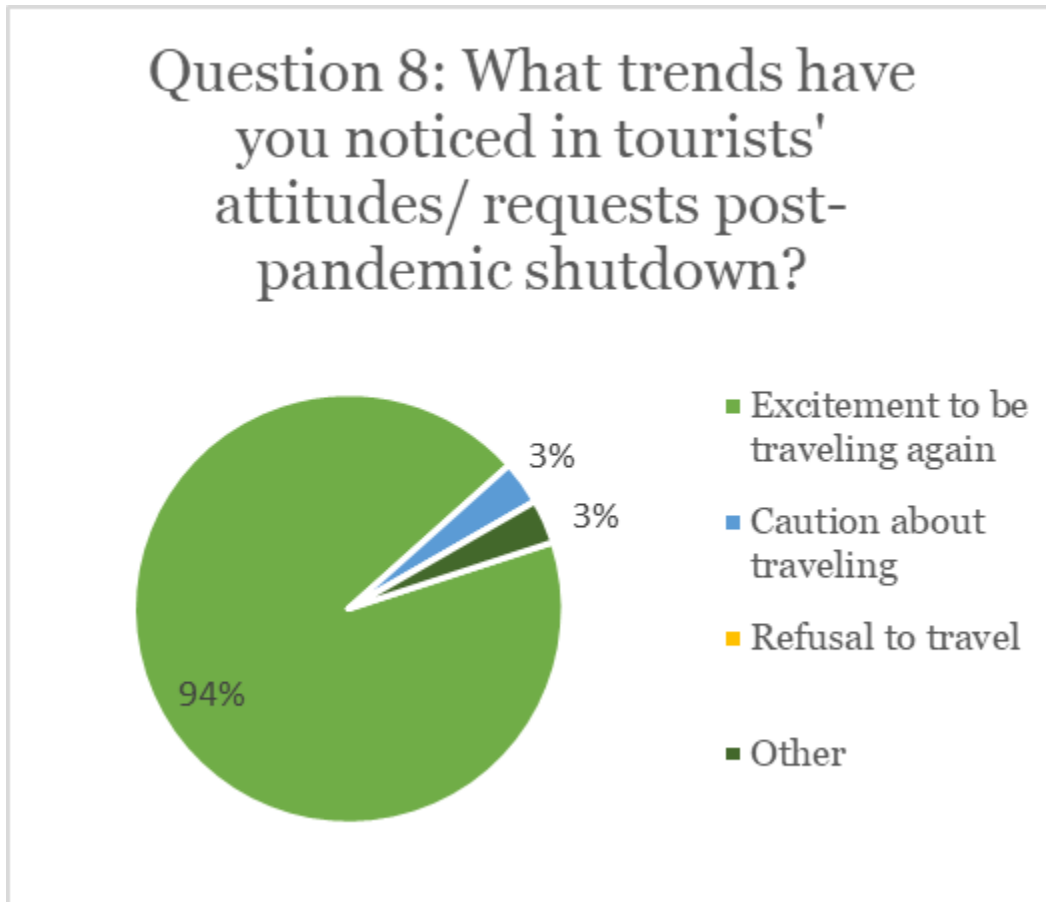
*Has Travel Booking Returned to Pre-Pandemic Years?*



Question 7 seeks to understand the current situation around travel now that travel restrictions have been lifted for about 2 years. There were 30 responses to this question, with 21 (70%) stating that travel requests have returned to pre-pandemic years and nine (30%) responding that travel requests have somewhat returned. There were not any respondents that stated that travel requests have not returned to pre-pandemic years at all.

**Figure 14**

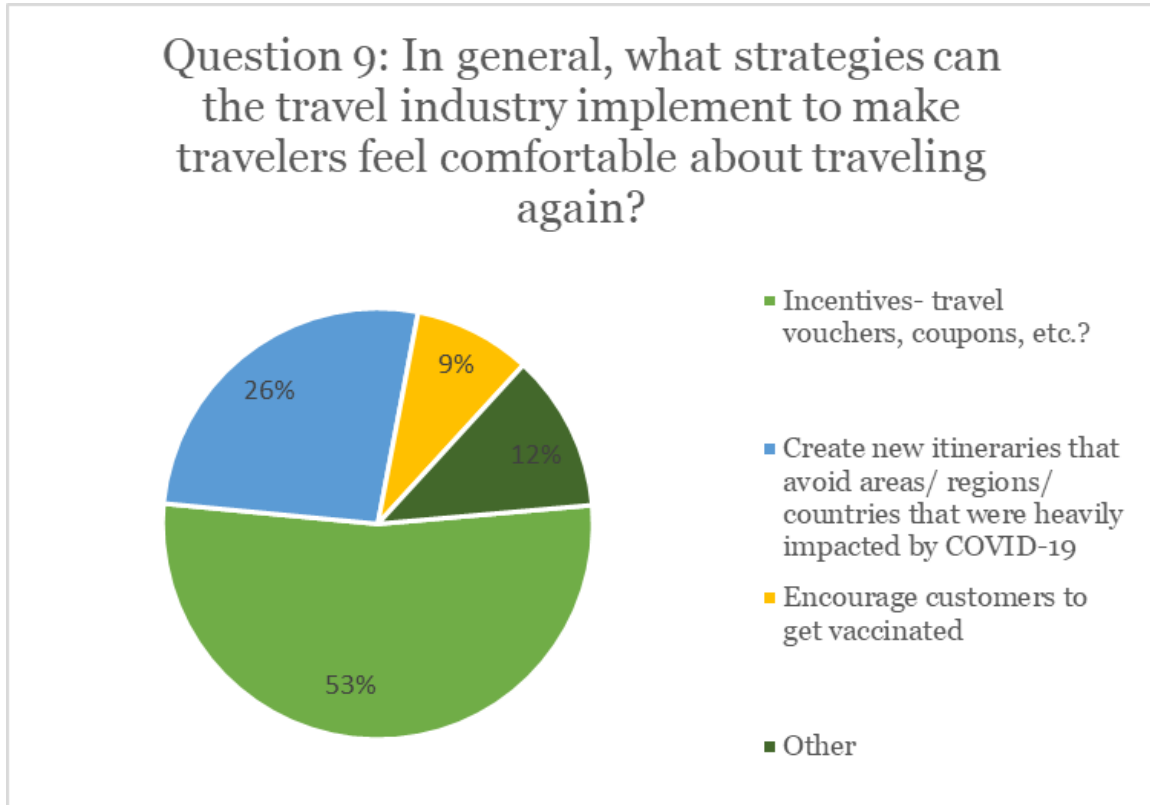
*Trends in Tourist's attitudes post-pandemic*



Question 8 asked respondents the trends that they have noticed in tourists' attitudes/ requests post-pandemic shutdown. There were 30 responses to the question. The result was overwhelmingly positive with 28 (94%) of respondents stating that tourists are excited to be traveling again. There was one (3%) respondent that selected that tourists exercise caution about traveling and one (3%) respondent that selected "other." This implies that most tourists are excited to travel again, which is good news for the travel industry.

**Figure 15**

*Strategies to Make Travelers Feel Comfortable About Traveling Again*



This question seeks to understand which strategies the travel industry can implement to make travelers feel comfortable about traveling again. There were 34 responses to this question. 18 (53%) of the respondents stated that incentives would help travelers feel more comfortable to travel again. These incentives could include travel vouchers, coupons, or other discounts to encourage travel. Another response was to create new itineraries that avoid certain areas that were heavily impacted by COVID-19. There were nine (26.5%) respondents that chose this option. There were four (12%) respondents that answered “other”, while three (9%) believe the answer is to encourage customers to get vaccinated.

Question 10 asked respondents to describe how the COVID-19 travel restrictions affected their emotional, mental, physical, and financial health in their own words. There were a total of 31 responses, which were hand-coded for themes. Themes of stress, frustration, fear, financial hardship, isolation, strain on mental health, and lack of job security were developed. One respondent described the pandemic as “the most difficult time of my life.” The responses convey a high level of stress. Respondents use words like “frustrating,” “overwhelming,” “exhausting,” and “terrible” to describe their feelings of how the COVID-19 travel restrictions affected them. Respondents also expressed stress from working during the pandemic, with the majority referring to the “no refund policy” as a point of stress between them and customers. There is mention of COVID tests that were required to travel, wearing masks, and the need to be vaccinated for some destinations. One respondent referred to “overwhelming and conflicting” information regarding vaccination requirements for children. Of the 31 respondents, ten conveyed ideas of financial hardships due to the travel restrictions effect. Most respondents link the financial hardship to their lack of hours at TTC, since trips were not able to operate. There were three respondents that stated that the restrictions actually helped them financially because they were not able to go anywhere to spend money.

Mental hardships were described mainly in terms of isolation due to the lockdowns and travel restrictions imposed. Many respondents convey that they were strains on their mental health from not being able to be around family. One respondent stated they are from Canada and the travel restrictions didn’t allow them to see family in the US. They describe this as “taking a huge emotional toll” on them. There were three respondents that mention being able to travel during the pandemic, but they all refer to the restrictions imposed like wearing a mask and reference dealing with delayed flights. Many of the strains on mental health have to do with being forced to work remotely and

the isolation of the lockdown period. There are also ties to the mental effects of financial worry on the respondents as many describe feeling a lack of job security.

There was only one respondent that had a different type of response to the question. This respondent attacked the pandemic restrictions stating that “COVID is just the flu renamed.” The respondent also mentions financial hardships due to this, but they refer more to the issue of inflation stating that the “covid stimulus money is the reason why inflation is so bad now.” There were a total of three respondents that stated that the pandemic and travel restrictions had no effect on them.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TRAVEL CORPORATION

#### **Summary**

This study sought to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020 on The Travel Corporation and to understand how the organization mitigated them. To understand, a survey of TTC employees was conducted.

#### **Implications for The Travel Corporation**

***Did the pandemic lead to new policies and strategies for the organization?  
If so, what were they?***

The Travel Corporation had adequate strategies and policies for managing work and travel during the pandemic. The one policy that was mentioned the most by participants is the policy of Future Travel Credit (FTC). During the pandemic, The Travel Corporation refused to give guests their money back for trips that had to be canceled due to travel restrictions and lockdowns. TTC was flexible and allowed guests to make changes to bookings up to 30 days prior to trip departure without penalty. Their normal policy was to charge penalties once within 60 days of the trip departure, but the uncertainty of COVID made them make changes to this policy. Participants described the policy as “good to keep the company’s future afloat but negative reaction from guests” (Response 36). This policy was also referenced in Question 10. A participant mentions the policy and states “the restrictions were hard when it came to telling people they weren’t getting their money back” (Response 21). Another participant expressed that it was “stressful to work during the pandemic. Not everyone accepted the no refund policy, so there were a lot of unhappy travel agents/ direct guests” (Response 26). The FTC

policy was necessary from the business perspective, but it was difficult for employees that had to explain that guests would not be receiving a refund when TTC couldn't operate their trips.

Another policy that TTC developed was to have a Wellbeing Coordinator on trips. The Wellbeing Coordinator was responsible for “communicat[ing] directly with guests and travel agents about last minute updates to travel restrictions” (Response 25). The onboard team of Travel Director, Motorcoach Driver, and Wellness Director were trained on how to operate trips safely as destinations began to reopen. TTC also had policies about wearing masks on trips if the local laws required it and they required all guests to be vaccinated to travel. The company was able to follow current travel restrictions and guidelines using the Sherpa Tool. The Sherpa Tool is a global travel tool that lists the restrictions for each destination based on the traveler's passport issuing country. Also, around on-trip policies, TTC ensured that the coaches were cleaned and sanitized for use.

TTC was forced to move employees to remote work during the lockdowns. Many of the participants in the study refer to working remotely in their responses to the questions. There were some participants that felt that remote work led to isolation and affected their mental health. Once the office was able to reopen, they implemented contact tracing to track exposure to COVID-19 between employees. The company also made improvements to the sanitation and cleanliness policies around the office. TTC had to lay off or furlough many employees at the pandemic onset, which led many participants to mention that they were fearful of losing their jobs as the pandemic progressed.

***Did the shutdown affect managers and employees equally?***

The shutdown appears to have affected managers and employees equally. There were 11 responses that stated that the participant worked in a leadership position at The Travel Corporation during the pandemic. There was not a significant difference between these responses and those of the 24 participants that marked that they did not work in a leadership position during the pandemic.

***How did the pandemic influence the attitudes and travel experiences of the company's clientele?***

The pandemic influenced the attitudes and travel experiences of TTC's clientele according to the survey. Firstly, the potential guests were not able to travel with TTC at the beginning of the pandemic due to lockdowns and other travel restrictions. Once travel began to open again, guests had to deal with FTC policies, mask mandates while on trip, vaccination requirements, etc. to be able to travel. There were also other logistical issues such as flight delays, lack of hotel contracts in some regions, and the fact that some countries took longer than others to re-open to travel which meant that potential guests had to postpone their trips even longer. Despite these issues, the survey found that TTC's alternative arrangements "gave customers the confidence to travel."

TTC was able to withstand the hardship of not being able to operate trips during the pandemic. The policy of FTC turned out to be effective, since guests have been able to redeem their credits now that travel has opened again. According to 70% of participants, the rate of requests for booking travel has returned to pre-pandemic years. This shows that TTC must have done something right to keep customers returning for their trips.

***Based on the impact of the COVID 19 travel restrictions, what are the organization's strategies for resiliency against future disruptions in the travel industry?***

The COVID-19 pandemic immediately called for travel restrictions to be imposed to stop the spread of the virus. TTC's leaders had to make difficult decisions and implement policies to help secure the future of the business, while still trying to do what was best for their employees and guests. One respondent stated, "with the rest of the world shut down, we did our best to keep staff employed and weather the storm" (Response 8). TTC was able to adapt to the necessary changes during the pandemic this time. Would TTC do the same things if there was another pandemic?

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic caused TTC to be unable to operate any of their trips for months. Some trips couldn't operate for years. Even two years out from the onset of the pandemic and most travel restrictions, travel to countries like Japan just reopened in the past few months. TTC must have strategies for resiliency against future disruptions in the travel industry. One suggestion is to operate trips that operate in destinations that are open instead of halting all trip operations.

### **Study Limitations**

The study was limited to the responses to the survey. Although the survey was sent out to about 200 of TTC's contact center employees, only 36 responses were received. The study could have gathered more insight into TTC's policies if more responses were available. Themes could have been more developed with more responses as well.

Another limitation of the study was that the questions did not really answer the question of what TTC's strategies for resiliency will be in the future. The survey questions attempted to gain this information, but the participants' free responses did not fully address this problem. There were only vague suggestions for what could be done in the future. Most of the participants just mentioned that TTC did the best they could.

## **Future Research Implications**

This study was meant to determine the effects of the COVID-19 travel restrictions in 2020 on The Travel Corporation and to determine how they mitigated them. Future research could delve deeper into the strategies and policies that TTC has developed to build resilience in the event of another catastrophic event to the pandemic. This event was unlike anything the world had dealt with before and so people did not have a plan to deal with such an issue. Future research could also take this information and apply it to the travel industry. This would help provide understanding of the travel industry's ability to withstand other catastrophic world events.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to understand the effects of the travel restrictions and the techniques used to mitigate them by addressing the impact of the pandemic shutdown on the travel industry generally and The Travel Corporation in particular. The results of the research demonstrate that the pandemic shutdown affected managers and employees in various ways such as the need to adapt quickly to ever-changing policies, learning to handle escalated phone calls with angry guests wanting refunds, and keeping current and explaining different travel restrictions for different destinations. Ultimately, the experience of stakeholders in the travel industry led to the new strategies of virtual travel experiences, Future Travel Credits (FTC's), and better methods to handle on-trip contraction of the COVID-19 virus. For resiliency against future disruptions, the travel industry should have policies and procedures in place to withstand any issues. Some of these procedures include transitioning employees from in-person to remote work, handling of issues on trips where guests have become sick, and ensuring clear communications about changes to policies and procedures. The pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities of the travel industry because the industry is reliant upon human interaction for operations. One method for resilience that should be furthered is the idea of virtual travel interactions, which would allow for people to experience travel without needing to actually leave their homes.

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## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT E-MAIL TO RESEARCH POPULATION

Hello All,

My name is Amber Burg, and I am a graduate student at Arizona State University. As part of my culminating experience, I am conducting a research project on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel industry. I would appreciate your assistance with completing a survey. Participation is voluntary and your identity will be kept anonymous.

The purpose of the study is to explore how U.S. travelers and The Travel Corporation have responded to the difficulties presented by the pandemic and the implication of future travel restrictions that may be imposed. The results from the research will be used to provide perspective about future travel restrictions and inform the travel industry of the attitudes towards travel post-pandemic.

The interview will take approximately 10 minutes. I appreciate your time and cooperation with this voluntary survey. This survey will be kept as a transcript of the discussion. Although your responses will be collected as data for the research, your identity will remain anonymous.

If you choose to participate, please follow the link below to the survey. Participants must be 18 or older. Please complete the survey by Friday, May 12<sup>th</sup> for your responses to be included in the analysis.

<https://forms.gle/tSGt4am9ABnn1k8A6>

Thank you in advance for your participation!

## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY FORM AND QUESTIONS

## Impact of COVID-19 on the Travel Industry

### Consent and Introduction

My name is Amber Burg. I am a graduate student at Arizona State University. This survey is part of a research project on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel industry. You have been selected as one of the participants for the case study. The purpose of the study is to explore how U.S. travelers and The Travel Corporation have responded to the difficulties presented by the pandemic and the implication of future travel restrictions that may be imposed. The results from the research will be used to provide perspective about future travel restrictions and inform the travel industry of the attitudes towards travel post-pandemic. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. Aggregate, de-identified data collected from the current study may be shared with other industry partners for future research purposes or other uses, including TTC.

You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes. I appreciate your time and cooperation with this voluntary survey.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: [Patience.Akpan@asu.edu](mailto:Patience.Akpan@asu.edu) or [amber.burg@asu.edu](mailto:amber.burg@asu.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Click 'continue' below if you consent to participate in the study.

Thank you for your participation!

### **Question 1: How long have you worked in the travel industry?**

1. Less than two years (*Please skip to Questions 9, 10 & 11*)
2. Between two and five years
3. Longer than five years

### **Question 2: How long have you worked with the Travel Corporation?**

1. Less than two years (*Please skip to Questions 9, 10 & 11*)
2. Between two and five years
3. Longer than five years

**Question 3: Did you work during the pandemic?**

1. Yes
2. No

**3a. If No, why did you not work?**

1. The Travel Corporation was shut down
2. I contracted COVID-19
3. Other

**3b. If Yes, did you work remotely, in person, or both?**

1. Remotely
2. In-person
3. Both

**Question 4: What was your general attitude toward the travel restrictions that were imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Neutral

**Question 5: In your opinion, do you think the Travel Corporation had adequate strategies and policies for managing work and travel during the pandemic?**

1. Yes
2. No

**5a. If Yes, what were some of the specific policies and strategies?**

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**5b. If No, what would the organization have done better?**

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**Question 6: Did The Travel Corporation explore new travel alternatives to travel restrictions?**

1. Yes
2. No

**Question 6a: If Yes, how did the organization's customers react to the alternative arrangements?**

1. They gave customers the confidence to travel
2. They discouraged customers from traveling
3. They made no impact on customers' decisions to travel or shelter in place.

**Question 7: It's been about two years since the travel restrictions were lifted. Has the rate of requests for travel booking returned to pre-pandemic years?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Somewhat

**Question 8: What trends have you noticed in tourists' attitudes/ requests post-pandemic shutdown?**

1. Excitement to be traveling again
2. Caution about traveling
3. Refusal to travel
4. Other

**Question 9: In general, what strategies can the travel industry implement to make travelers feel comfortable about traveling again?**

1. Incentives – travel vouchers, coupons, etc.?
2. Create new itineraries that avoid areas/regions/countries that were heavily impacted by COVID-19
3. Encourage customers to get vaccinated
4. Other



**Question 10: In your own words, please describe how the COVID-19 travel restrictions affected your emotional, mental, physical and financial health.**

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**Question 11: How old are you?**

1. 18-30
2. 30-45
3. 45 and older

**Question 12: Gender**

1. Female
2. Male
3. Non-binary
4. Other

**Question 13: Did you work in a leadership position at The Travel Corporation during the pandemic?**

1. Yes
2. No

**Question 14: Is there anything else you would like to share regarding COVID-19 and travel restrictions?**

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APPENDIX C

ASU IRB APPROVAL



EXEMPTION GRANTED

Patience Akpan  
CISA: Polytechnic Social Sciences  
480/727-1489  
Patience.Akpan@asu.edu

Dear [Patience Akpan](#):

On 4/28/2023 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	The Effects of COVID-19 on Tourism and Future Travel Implications
Investigator:	<a href="#">Patience Akpan</a>
IRB ID:	STUDY00017875
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval for Survey, Category: Other;</li> <li>• Approval for Survey, Category: Other;</li> <li>• Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• IRB Social Behavioral Protocol_final 03.03.2023 (2) (1) (1) (1) (1).docx, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• recruitment_methods_email_29-03-2023 (1) (2) (1) (2).pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• supporting documents 04-04-2023.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> </ul>

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2)(ii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (low risk) on 4/28/2023.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Amber Burg  
Amber Burg