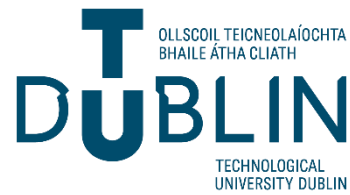


The Carmichael logo consists of the word "Carmichael." in a dark blue serif font, centered within a solid yellow rectangular background.

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***Organisation Resilience in action: The
Experiences of Irish Charities during the
Covid 19 pandemic.***

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Executive Summary

Organisation resilience has become an area of intense debate throughout the business world in the last decade. The not-for-profit sector has not been exempted from this debate. However, Covid 19 has put the spotlight on organisation resilience displayed by nonprofit organisations, during such a turbulent time in the organisation's life cycle. This research study is an attempt to highlight the resilience displayed by organisations within the NPO sector in Ireland during the Covid 19 pandemic. The overall objectives of the research study were to gain an understanding of how the managers within these organisations define organisation resilience, to examine the role of employees, innovation, information technology and leadership in driving the organisations strategy during Covid 19. Finally, to examine the role (if any) of resilience capacity and resource management in managing the organisation throughout the Covid 19 pandemic. The key findings are outlined below in Table 1. The overall findings suggest that the NPOs surveyed demonstrated huge resilience in terms of coping with increased demand for their services while experiencing a drop in funding, and in the decreased availability of volunteers. They did this by innovative approaches to service delivery which often involved the increased use of technology. In addition, the NPOs were facilitated by committed and motivated staff and trustees, and the flexible nature of the organisations. The key lesson learned has been that in the future, there will be a greater use of IT to deliver many services and this will require additional training.

Table 1 Key Findings of Research Study

94% of respondents stated that their organisation was resilient.
58% of respondents reported a moderate to substantial increase in demand for their services during the Covid 19 pandemic.
49% of organisations experienced a moderate to substantial decrease in funding during Covid 19.
90% of organisations engaged in flexible working during the Covid 19 pandemic.
77% of respondents reported that flexible working arrangements, in terms of working from home was a key option for their organisation going forward.
85% of respondents reported that their organisation did become more innovative during the Covid 19 pandemic.
42% of organisations experienced a decrease in volunteering as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.
30% of organisations do not have a plan at this point in terms of how they will recruit and retain volunteers at the end of the Covid 19 pandemic.
The top three strengths of organisations during the Covid 19 pandemic were: committed and motivated staff, flexibility, and the ability to deal with change.
The top three weaknesses of organisations during the Covid 19 pandemic were: Information Technology, lack of funds and fundraising ability, and connectivity and broadband issues.
48% of organisations were not in a position to address these issues during the Covid 19 pandemic.
The top three lessons learned and shared were: have a firm plan, believe in your team and the need for a clear structure and volunteering policy.
Top three priorities going forward: future training plan, increased efficiencies and focus on innovation and creativity.

1.0 Introduction

Organisation Resilience has become a research area of intense debate over the last decade, yet the topic is still in many ways under researched from a practical or applied perspective, with much of the literature concentrating on concepts or frameworks with scant attention on empirical research, in terms of how it is understood or practiced in the real world (Barasa et al, 2018; Rahi, 2019). When attention is turned to the not-for-profit sector, the research is even more scant (Witmar and Mellinger, 2016). In addition, these writers contend that there is a gap in the literature in relation to the resilience of the not-for-profits (NPOs) organisations and the identification of conditions for successfully taking on board external variables that can threaten their continued existence (Witmar and Mellinger, 2016). The Covid 19 pandemic has presented from a business management perspective, extreme sets of key external variables, in particular a changing funding world and a world of turbulence in the economic environment. In addition to facing reduced resources the NPO sector encountered increased pressure to remain fiscally viable and socially relevant in the communities in which these NPOs operate. Unfortunately, the ways in which organisations “do” organisation resilience has remained relatively unexplored (Witner and Mellinger, 2016). This research study addresses this gap by concentrating on analysing how organisation resilience operates within an NPO organisation from a management perspective. The outputs from this research study will give an insight into the experiences of NPOs during the Covid 19 pandemic, in terms of their readiness to adapt to the changing internal and external environments they faced. In addition, it will provide the foundation on which to build a positive way forward, in terms of the tools needed to build or strengthen their organisational resilience. Through the research study, an insight was gained as to how organisations managed through the Covid 19 crisis and, the lessons learned in building more resilient organisations. While many definitions of organisation resilience exist, the common thread across these key definitions is the ability of the organisation to deal with disturbances in their internal and/or external environments. For the purposes of this research study, the definition of organisation resilience applied throughout is as follows” *Organisation resilience refers to the ability of organisations to respond productively to significant disruptive change and transform challenges into opportunities*” (Witner and Mellinger, 2016).

2.0 The objectives of this research Study

The overall objective of the research study was to gain an insight into how smaller NPOs coped and managed their organisation throughout the Covid 19 crisis and pinpoint the levels of organisation resilience that existed. More importantly for these organisations it would identify lessons learned and the development of a tool kit going forward with organisations sharing their experiences in an anonymous manner.

The research question and objectives of the overall research were defined as follows:

- How resilient were NPO organisations throughout the Covid 19 pandemic?

In order to answer the above research question, the following research objectives were formulated.

- To gain an understanding of how the manager defined organisation resilience as it applied to their organisation.
- To examine the role of employees, innovation, information technology and leadership in achieving the strategic objectives throughout the Covid 19 pandemic.
- To examine the role (if any) of resilience capacity and resource management in managing the organisation through the Covid 19 pandemic.

3.0 Methodology applied in this research study

In order to achieve the above research objectives, the following methodology was applied - Working with Carmichael, it was decided to contact their service users with a questionnaire via the online research software - Survey Monkey. After initial consultation with Carmichael on the objectives and proposed approach to be used, it was confirmed a questionnaire would be delivered via email using the above research tool to NPO organisations affiliated to Carmichael. This questionnaire (copy in Appendix 1) consisted of a mix of statements and open-ended questions. Managers of NPOs were invited to participate and the results from each respondent would be strictly confidential. The survey was administered in early June over a nine-day period. In all, 115 respondents completed the survey, which is deemed

representative in research terms for a survey of this nature. Not all questions were completed by all respondents and so on average 111-115 respondent answers were extrapolated from the questions included in the survey, thus allowing rich data to be gathered and analysed from the respondent responses. Thematic Analysis was applied to analyse the array of answers obtained from the open-ended-questions. Thematic analysis involves an analysis of the data through themes (Quinlan et al., 2015). Themes can be defined (p.161) as *‘a pattern in the information that at a minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at a maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon’* (Boyzatis, 1998). Themes were identified through careful reading of the responses to the open-ended questions. It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Such an approach assisted in extrapolating the key themes or points from the rich data contained in these responses which were varied and diverse and highlighted in the Findings section to follow.

4.0 The Findings of the research study

The findings from the research survey are outlined below using the same order as the questionnaire, that being the resilience of the organisation, the impact of Covid 19 on such issues as the demands of the organisation’s services, funding, flexible working, innovation, volunteering. The survey then addressed issues pertaining to the organisation in terms of the “coping skills” of the organisation during Covid 19 including issues such the strengths of the organisation, the weaknesses, lessons learned and the way forward for the organisation as it emerges from Covid 19. These issues mirrored the objectives of the research study outlined above.

4.1 The Resilience of the Organisation

The first question asked if they deemed their organisation to be resilient. 112 responded with 105 stating that they were resilient and 7 saying that they were not resilient. Figure 2 highlights the degree to which resilience was reported and reflected many responses to the Covid 19 crisis as it impacted their organisations.

Figure 1



The 94% of the respondents stated that their organisation was resilient. Respondents were offered the option of elaborating on their response and a total of 71 comments were made. The researchers were able to drill down to tease out the responses as to how organisations responded to the Covid-19 crisis and demonstrated their resilience. While the move to online working was deemed to be challenging for many, several of these respondents reported that their organisation did find that within a week, there was a clear movement to online communications, internally across their organisations and externally using this period to upskill their people in technology to be able to communicate effectively with their clients and stakeholders.

“We pivoted really quickly when Covid hit, transitioning online ahead of most other disability sector organisations”.

“Ability to react and adapt quickly to change. Funding sought to facilitate and implement necessary changes immediately so that little service disruption. While pandemic was not on a risk register, other risks previously identified, had action plans that could be adapted quickly”.

The key initial issue was to stay in touch as much as possible, and while the mix of services or the mode of delivery of services may vary as discussed below, the important first step was to keep the communications flow active and relevant.

“We transferred in-person groups and events into online groups and events. We found opportunities to collaborate with a wide range of organisations. We upskilled in technology and a range of other areas that COVID necessitated”.

Some organisations also referred to the fact that they used the time during the Covid 19 lockdown to upskill their staff, connected more with their volunteers, and social media platforms to also connect with their clients. In addition, the organisations used this time reviewing their training needs and particularly in the area of volunteering and this formed a strong foundation to build on when the Covid 19 lockdown lifted.

“We took the opportunity during lockdown to upskill staff, move to an online platform to engage with our volunteers and were more active on social media so we could keep stakeholders and the general public informed about our service during all the different level of restrictions. When we did return to a limited service, we were able to offer help to similar organisations who did not have staff and/or volunteers available at all times. We used the time effectively to review our volunteer training programme so we could hit the ground running and be ready for when the time comes to recommence our recruitment programmes.

In addition, the respondents stated the cohesiveness of teams within the organisation worked well and helped ensure resilience in responding to Covid 19 and this coupled with the online communications outlined above helped organisations to respond to the challenge of Covid 19 presented to them.

“We have a good network of engaged partners, are innovative and responsive and work well with change. Excellent internal and external communications which supports our relationships as leverage for times requiring greater resilience. We are a passionate team who are invested in the mission of our organisation and our 'team' is a family, which I think has been invaluable for our resilience as an organisation”.

A number of respondents referred to their organisation's ability to adapt, in terms of service provision at the beginning of Covid 19

"Initially it was difficult because our students have little or no education and online learning was not an option, but we did stay in touch and sent out materials by post. When we opened in September, we front loaded every course with IT skills so when the next lock down started, they were able to go online. We also allowed students borrow our centre tablets. Unfortunately, we could not help everyone who needed our service as they did not all have access to Wi-Fi".

In addition, many organisations experienced an increase in the level of service they needed to provide during Covid 19 and were able to respond to this increased demand.

"Due to Covid-19 our organisation went from cooking and delivering 80 fresh meals a week to 170, in the same facilities. We had to organise extra drivers to deliver the meals".

In contrast, one respondent reported their organisation having to close during Covid 19 but used their premises to bring in funding during this period.

"While we had to close during the lockdown due to us serving vulnerable groups. Our premises were used by the film industry thus garnering funds we would have missed out on".

Some respondents, on the other hand, reported how difficult their organisation found the Covid crisis, in terms of the survival of their organisation.

"The loss of staff from the office has had a significant impact on our services. We did not have sufficient resources to draw on and just about kept our heads above water. Significant investment of time by some board members was key to enabling us to maintain the threadbare services we did".

"We have not achieved the aims that we had at the beginning of 2020".

Going forward, respondents stated their organisations have moved to an online environment and that this transition will make them rethink their model of delivery and in many ways see Covid 19 as accelerating to movement to an online platform in terms of service delivery going forward.

“Converting to an online business model was challenging but we’re making progress and learned so much. Revising how members and beneficiaries can interact continues to be challenging however with relaxation of restrictions will make good progress for us to revisit in-person requirements to support beneficiaries”.

4.2 The Impact of Covid 19 on the demand for the organisation’s services

The second question asked “Covid 19 had an impact on the demand for our organisation's services”. Respondents were asked to rate the impact on a 7-point scale from 1 which was a substantial decrease (50% or higher) to 7 which was a substantial increase (50% or higher). A score of 4 represented no change. The average score for the 112 respondents was 4.4 which suggests that there was a small increase in demand. However, respondents reported a very varied response to the impact of demand for their services as a result of Covid 19. In broad terms, 58% of respondents reported a moderate to substantial increase in demand of services among organisations, with 7% reporting no change and 35% reporting a moderate to substantial decrease in demand for services. This can be seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

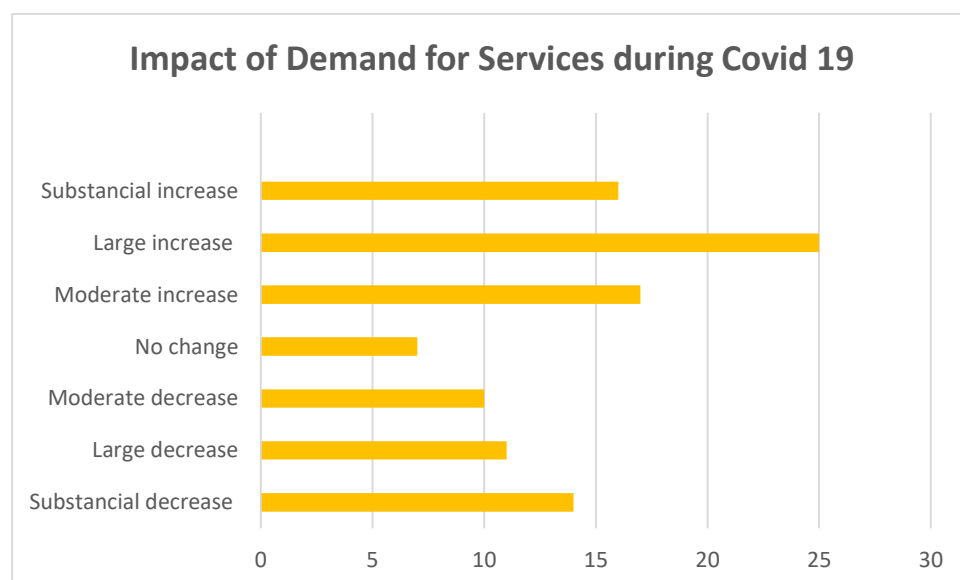


Figure 2 depicts a huge variety of responses to the impact of demand for services as discussed above. Respondents were offered the option of elaborating on their response and a total of 69 comments were made. The researchers were able to drill

down to tease out the responses as to how demand was impacted. These comments give an overview of the different ways in which organisations were impacted by the demand in their services throughout Covid 19. Ten respondents reported on a change in the mix or combination of services being offered as a result of Covid 19.

“Our Home Care services had a dramatic decrease as directed by the HSE, we had to cease provision of home care to a cohort of clients based on priority. However, our Meals on Wheels services grew by 150% for a period of 4 months during COVID, as other organisations were unable to continue and the HSE asked us to step in to assist in provision of services at this time”.

“Our volunteering and global citizenship programme (that includes 4 weeks overseas), decreased by 50%. But our broader global citizenship programme evening classes (which moved online) and our Annual Forum either ran at same capacity or increased numbers”.

One respondent stated the impact on demand for their services resulted in a major upheaval in services delivered.

“Some programmes we deliver, e.g...., we had to stand down nearly all participants on their schemes. Other programmes were fast tracked due to Covid, e.g., opening a ... Call Service for the county, commencing Meals on Wheels support... So overall demand was a little up, but this didn't reflect the upheaval in service provision Covid caused”.

Covid 19 impacted group activities due to the restrictions in place for some organisations. This resulted in similar type of restructuring of services provided.

“We offer a range of services, and some were more impacted than others, for instance our Childcare Service experienced a decrease in numbers in late 2020 as families were fearful of the risk of infection. Our Couples Counselling has seen a decrease in demand as people are slow to engage in remote Counselling. As a result of restrictions our group work has diminished. On the other hand, we have seen an increase in demand for Adolescent Counselling and Family Support work has remained constant”.

The Covid 19 restrictions impacted the services required by clients and the change in demand was dictated by the change in the clients' needs.

“Older persons were unable to do shopping or collect prescriptions; we did this for them. Money was scarce with individuals and families, and we sourced funding which enabled us to provide food and fuel. Because people were unable to come into the centre, we had to maintain contact over the phone which took more time. We also saw an increase in the need of our services”.

Similarly, services were no longer required during the restrictions and resulted in a redirection of resources to areas where they were needed.

“.....some of our services were stood down but we redirected our resources to community response activities and supporting agencies such as the Local Food Cloud, Local Authority Response Team, Alone etc.”.

“We were a face-to-face organisation delivering 60 activities weekly to 700 participants - this stopped. However, we set up counselling services and a foodbank and delivered essential childcare and alternative respite. Even though demand for our regular services collapsed we were able to increase our level of service to the most vulnerable”.

Many of the respondents reported on substantial increases in demand for their services as a result of Covid 19.

“Our helpline saw significant increase in calls. Online events/webinars attracted up to 300% more participants than our in-person events”.

“We had to take on new services and extend other services we also needed to apply for more assistance grants and go out with an ask to our warm donors”

“We provide therapeutic and advocacy services so these both increased”.

“Going from 80 to 170 meals a week”.

In relation to vulnerable clients, the restrictions had a greater impact on these clients, for example those with mental health difficulties, particularly anxiety among students and also help needed for job seekers.

“We work with students at risk of early school leaving or disengaging from education. The school closures have seen an exponential increase in the number of students presenting with mental health difficulties, particularly anxiety. Also,

some students have struggled to readjust back to school. Some students who did not engage with online schooling (there were a lot of different reasons behind this) are now struggling academically. All of which has led to a substantial increase in our referral numbers”.

“There was an increased demand for information, emotional and practical support and counselling during the pandemic”.

“Increase in demand for employment support services”.

“....helpline calls up 38 per cent in 2020 as compared to 2019”

On the other hand, some respondents reported a decrease in demand for services during Covid 19, due to a variety of reasons including the following:

“People cannot come to our service and are only able to access phone/online”.

“The overall demand for our community bus service decreased during the lock down due to no school runs/ church services/ clinics/ shopping trips and so on”.

“Due to social distancing we had to reduce numbers and could not mix with a lot of the elderly service users face to face”.

“Centre has been closed for all lock downs”.

“When we opened up in September, we had to reduce our class sizes and they had to stay that size (although we were online) and we could not recruit new students as they needed to be able to go online and to do that, they needed some face-to-face classes that were not possible during 2nd /3rd lockdown”.

“.....we were closed due to government restrictions and as a visitor/ tourist attraction the online activities were good but not didn't replace the physical interaction of visitors entering the building”.

“Predominantly run a face-to-face drop-in service and this was significantly impacted during lockdowns - service provision continued via email and web and telephone however there was a drop in service provision”.

Therefore, the closure of organisations, the restrictions as a result of Covid 19, the closure of schools and the non-availability of Wi-Fi to clients were among the key reasons organisations experienced a decrease in demand as a result of Covid 19.

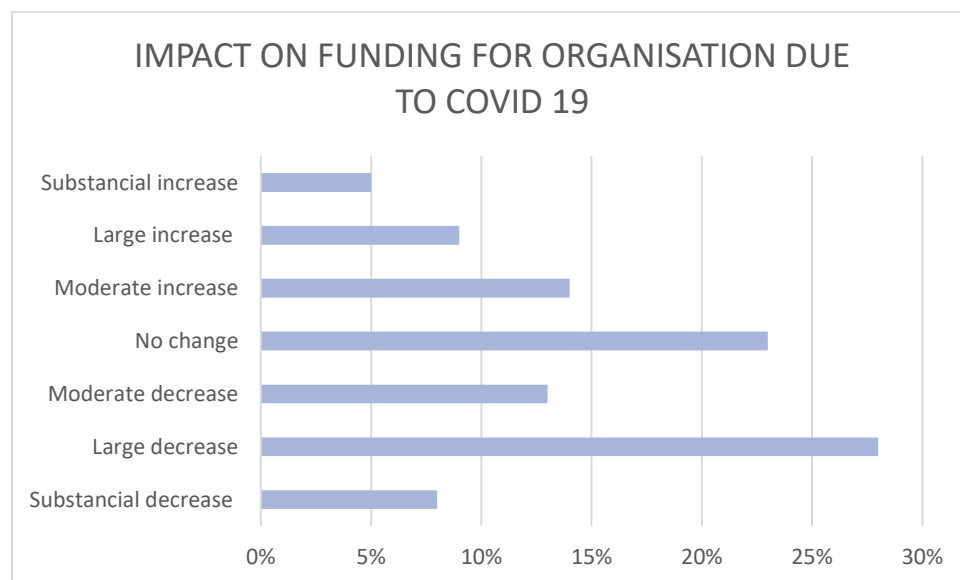
4.3 Funding

Two questions were asked in relation to funding, the first looked at the impact of the Covid 19 crisis had on funding and secondly, what actions did the organisation take to alleviate the funding crisis.

4.3.1 The Impact on Funding of the Organisation during Covid 19

Question 3 asked “Covid 19 had an impact on the funding for our organisation”. Respondents were asked to rate the impact on a 7 point scale from 1 which was a substantial decrease (50% or higher) to 7 which was a substantial increase (50% or higher). 4 represented no change. The average score for the 112 respondents was 3.5 which suggests that there was a small decrease in demand. However, this average disguises a wide variety of impacts on organisations with 28% of respondents reported an increase in funding during Covid 19, 23% reporting no change in funding for their organisation and 49% of organisation experienced a moderate to substantial decrease in funding during the period. Figure 3 outlines this variability on organisational funding.

Figure 3



Respondents were offered the option of elaborating on their response and a total of 66 comments were made. The researchers were able to drill down to tease out the responses as to how funding was impacted, an array of reasons are put forward by

respondents as to why donations and fundraising activities dipped significantly, remained unchanged or increased during Covid 19 for their organisations.

In relation to those organisations that experienced a decrease in funding, the key reasons put forward by respondents for this decrease in income included, their retail outlets were closed, non-availability of fundraising events, stakeholders cutting back on contributions, workshops cancelled, payment breaks to clients and leasing income to community groups depleted.

“Significant dip March-June 2021; settling more recently to pre-Covid levels”.

“Donations and fundraising was significantly affected. Membership fees also dropped as people in financial difficulties”.

“Our shop had to close programs could not be sponsored by corporates and the last direct mail campaign made a loss”.

“Our main funding came from on-site rentals of event space and retail which had to be closed”.

“The non-availability of fundraising events has effected all organisations”.

“Funding stakeholders’ government and non-government have all cut back on contributions. Which is a shame considering the needs for the beneficiaries have increased exponentially through the pandemic. Some extra tax credits and reducing operational processing fees by banking/ fintech providers for non-profits would have helped during the period”.

“As our centre was closed, we were unable to hold groups which provided some funding. We could not do any fundraising which forms a big part of our income. Our project is core funded so we found ourselves with nothing to cover the cost of overheads”.

“....sources of income from our workshops/ guided walks/ local products craft shop were way down/ hackney service”.

“We would have got funding from Europe for youth exchanges though we could not bring the young people abroad it did not impact overheads. We also lease space out to community groups in 2020 that took a 65.5% drop”.

The impact of funding as a result of Covid 19 had a moderate to substantial negative impact on the funding capabilities of many of the organisations included in the research study and the reasons as depicted above are varied and diverse.

23% in total respondents reported their organisation reported no change in the level of funding during Covid 19, although the make-up of the funds may have changed. For example, the organisation received a donation, or the organisation was able to secure additional grants which compensated for the loss of funds, due to the cancellation of regular (pre-Covid) fund raising events.

“We received a major donation in February 2020”

In addition, many respondents reported (15 in all) that their organisation received state funding, and this remained similar to the levels of previous years’ or increased with extra Covid grants being distributed to these organisations.

“We succeeded in securing slightly more funds in 2020 relative to 2019, but this was due to our success in relation to the COVID-19 Stability Fund and other once off State and COVID-19 Trust grants. Our organisation depends substantially on an ongoing basis on fundraising from the public to pay for our services”.

“100% state funded”.

“We are primarily HSE funded, plus some from trusts which have all stayed steady. We do not rely much on fundraising, but we had an increase in donations from the public in December”.

“Secured additional public grant funding to provide COVID-19 response services”.

“HSE supports mainly, but also more project funding available”.

“....grant aid stayed the same - got some additional local authority grants re Covid”.

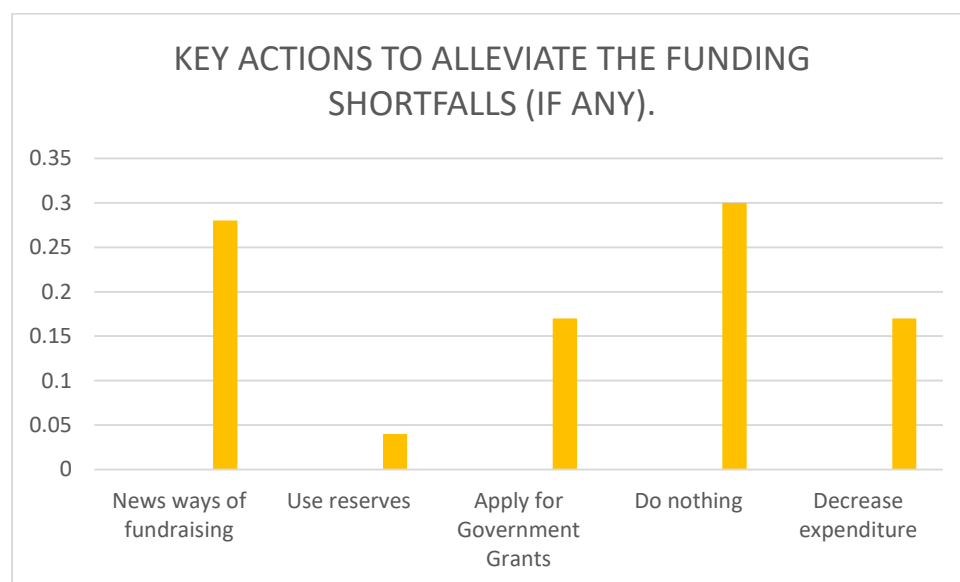
In summary, Covid 19 had a major impact on the funding capabilities of the organisations included in the research study, with 49% experiencing a decrease in funding, while grants and supports or in one case a major donation existed during the pandemic, the cause for concern is as organisations come out of the pandemic how long will these supports last, one respondent stating that their organisation received a major donation at the beginning of the pandemic and “ *because of this*

we could not show a major drop in fundraising/donations for that year and were unable to apply for COVID grants. We are now seeing the impact in our 2021 accounts but there are no additional funds to apply for". The impact of the funding issue will develop into the future.

4.3.2 Actions taken to alleviate the funding crisis

Question 4 asked "What key actions did your organisation take to alleviate the funding shortfall (if any) as it emerged during Covid 19?" It is interesting to examine the ways in which the 104 respondents described how their organisation coped with the funding shortfall (if any) experienced during Covid 19. Figure 4 depicts the array of actions taken by the organisations included in the study.

Figure 4



These actions include innovative ways which the organisations used to increase their funding and in changing the mix of fundraising initiatives. This included a move to online fundraising in many cases, the launch of an emergency appeal for funds, a mix of grant applications and online and social media appeals, moving from community to corporate appeals, rented out spaces to other industries, expanding paid services to supplement income.

"New fundraising activities online".

"We set up a 'Donate a plate' campaign to assist in the provision of meals services to families in need due to COVID".

“Everything moved online which had initial cost outlay however in the long term, this was much cheaper than in-person events. Application for funding to facilitate online workshops, events. Application for rent relief. Fundraising call for donations, text donations, fundraisers etc. However, these fell short on previous years”.

“Restructure of fundraising so shift focus from community to corporate”.

“We turned to alternative funding in non-profit industries such as Film and TV that could use our available events and meeting spaces. We also received charitable donations and relied on saving from past years”.

“We expanded our paid services to generate earned income. We increased earned income from 5% to 20%”.

These initiatives were vast and diverse by organisation to try to maintain their funding as previous years’ levels, but despite best efforts it did not come up to this level for some organisations.

4% of respondents reported that their organisations had built up reserves and used these reserves to fund the funding shortfall during Covid 19.

“Used reserved funding”.

“We were not in a position to cut back on our hackney service as it has to be available when required so we used our reserve funding to cover the loss in continuing to provide that service”.

The application of grants was a tool used extensively by organisations in an attempt to boost funds during the Covid 19 lockdown. Many respondents stated their organisations availed of many Governments supports, which helped in many cases, but as these were in many cases project specific, they alleviated the funding shortfall, as distinct from eroding it completely.

“We applied for other funding in anticipation of shortfall”.

“We applied for each and every grant available”

“Changed our fundraising strategy Pursued project funding”.

“We applied for grants as they became available but as they were for specific pieces of work, they did not help our funding shortfall overall”.

Many respondents reported their organisations did not do anything different in relation to boosting their income stream. For many organisations, as mentioned above they are 100% Government funded and so there was no disruption to their income during Covid and so do not engage in fundraising activities.

17% of the organisations stated that they engaged in a major restructuring of their cost structure to reflect the decrease in funding and need for increased efficiency.

“Cut expenditure to the core; deferred employment of additional staff; proactively pursued all funding opportunities that became available; and further developed out online fundraising activities”.

“This is still ongoing. We are trying to streamline our costs and save money where we can”.

“Staff have had to cut back hours, cut back on pay, cancel projects where funding wasn't available and reconsolidate on trying to find alternative funding and revenue options”.

“Our trading income was very seriously impacted in the period March-June 2020, and also in January 2021. During 2020, we moved as many services as possible to a telephone delivery model, we shed 6 jobs during March-May 2020, and we implemented a period of short-time working for all staff from May-August 2020. We also used the Wage Subsidy Scheme for the months April-August 2020 but have not been able to use its replacement”.

It is worth noting while the above section depicts the predominant actions taken by the organisations to alleviate the shortfall in funding, they experienced during Covid 19, but in practice many organisations used a combination of initiatives to ease their funding shortfalls.

The future funding issue is also a concern to these organisations and is summed up by one respondent *“future government funding is the issue, and we are working hard to communicate with our funding stakeholders on our value and future proposition”*. The concern is to build a funding mechanism that is sustainable as

organisations emerge from Covid 19 and try to rebuild their organisation. Another organisation stated that they have formulated “a Fundraising Strategy Plan for 2021”, developing this future focused theme is evident from the comments by these respondents.

4.4 Flexible working

Two questions were asked about flexible working. The first question looked if flexible working was offered to staff during the Covid 19 crisis and secondly, can flexible working be offered as an option in the future?

4.4.1 Flexible Working (working from home) during Covid 19

The fifth question asked “Did your organisation engage in flexible working (working from home) during the lockdown arising from Covid 19?” 115 responded to this question, with 103 stating that they engaged in flexible working practices and 12 stating that it was not applicable to their organisation. Given the level and type of restrictions imposed during Covid 19, in terms of travel and social distancing, many organisations were forced to introduce or extend the flexible working arrangements of their staff, in relation to being allowed work from home.

Figure 5

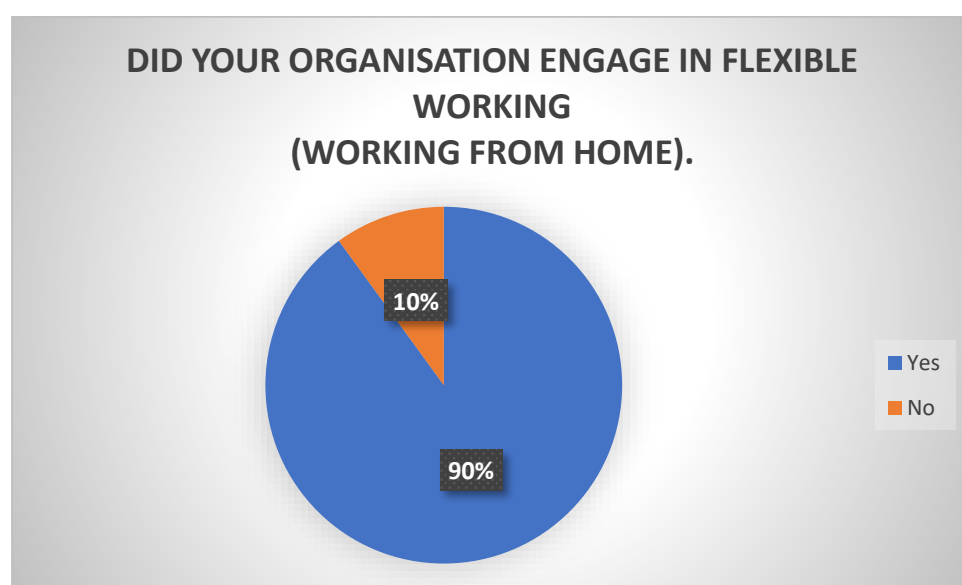


Figure 5 highlights that 90% of organisations engaged in this human resource strategy of facilitating their employees to work from home during Covid 19 restrictions. Most organisations where possible adjusted to the online working environment. Some organisations already had a degree of home working in operation, so they extended

it very quickly and efficiently. Respondents were offered the option of elaborating on their response and a total of 58 comments were made. The researchers were able to drill down to tease out the responses as to how organisations adapted immediately to remote working.

“Already had flexible work practices so just expanded to all staff very successfully”.

“Everyone quickly adapted to remote working”.

“We are 1.5WTE which made it easy to be adapted to this new way of working was working from home during the COVID-19”.

“All the volunteers moved to remote call taking as did the office staff”.

However, in some cases it was not possible to have complete home working for all staff, as the service demanded a physical presence.

“There was a mixture of working from home. Running groups and keywork sessions online. Offering families support by phone. But there was also a need for food deliveries and activity packs for children which were carried out within guidelines”.

Many respondents while their organisations adjusted to working from home in line with Government guidelines, they stated it did provide key challenges to their organisation.

“Everyone needed to readjust, change work styles, how we provided resourcing for our online shop had to be done from employees’ home which was a huge challenge. Unable to visit beneficiaries of our awards programme as no travel allowed outside the country”.

“As we are a frontline service we adapted where we could to allow staff that could work from to do so. This was to reduce ‘foot fall’ in the service as well as creating a backup plan if staff became ill or contracted Covid. As we have a very small team in our service this was an extremely important plan to ensure the effective running of the Supported Temporary Accommodation”.

In other cases, the organisation, and the services it provided was deemed essential and so remote working was not an option.

“This was only possible to a certain extent, and only for Management, who worked one day / week from home since spring 2020, in order to try and ensure continuity within the team if any of us got COVID. As we are a medical organisation, it was not possible for clinic staff to work from home and, as we were classified as an essential service, we kept going throughout the lockdowns”.

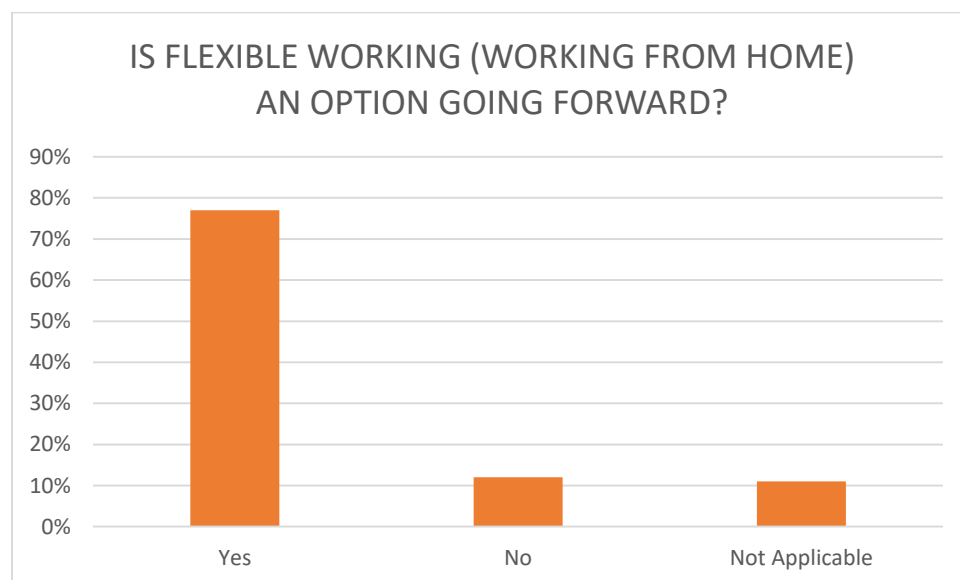
“Our services (deemed essential) continued throughout the pandemic. All staff worked from home throughout the periods of restrictions”.

In summary, while flexible working was an option for most of the organisation in the study, those service deemed essential could on operate flexible working partially or not at all, due to the nature of the services provided.

4.4.2 Flexible working in the future

Question 6 asked “Is flexible working likely to be an option offered to your employees going forward?” There was a mixed view from the 114 respondents on these issues, with 87 stating that they would offer flexible working, 14 saying no and 13 stating that it was not applicable.

Figure 6



77% of respondents reported that flexible working arrangement, in terms of working from home was a key option that their organisations were considering going forward. 11% of respondents stated given the nature of the charity, where face-to-face

communications and a physical presence was necessary it was not likely going forward. Respondents were offered the option of elaborating on their response and a total of 54 comments were made. The researchers were able to drill down to tease out the responses as to how they would try and facilitate the continuation of flexible working arrangement, but that discussions were ongoing at this time and nothing concrete had been decided.

“Yes, but is too early to say that this is definite or to know what form it will take, if any”.

“I am not in a position to make that decision but hope that it will be offered”.

“The organisations who stated that flexible working would likely to be offered to employees going forward, it was a blended or hybrid approach which was being considered”.

“A combination of working from home and in office is likely to be available to staff when we are fully opened”.

“Yes, there will be a mixed regime, we need to be able to return to office to support online shop facilities, stock management and logistics in one location rather than from home. Additionally, our intern project work needs to have a location for individuals to work together with support from executive team, online does not work as well for that type of work”.

There were a number of organisations who will not be able to consider remote working, due to the nature of the services provided and will not be able to offer flexible work arrangements moving forward into the future.

“We are a frontline service, and we did an evaluation with our students, and they absolutely want to return to face to face classes however we do think a blended approach for some classes would enhance the learning”.

“Our service is a support service and needs to be face to face. There may be some classes and webinars that remain virtual but the 'one to one ' supports will be in person”.

In line with the cost-cutting discussion above, one respondent stated that going forward they would re-examine the cost of office space and try and continue a hybrid approach to keep costs under control.

“We would look to hold our office space as it is less than €200 per month and we need a stockroom and meeting room space. We will then allow employees to decide if they want to be in the office FT or PT or work completely from home and attend the office for stakeholder and/or all hands meetings”.

In summary, the majority of respondents stated that their organisation was in favour of a continuation of flexible working arrangements, but when their comments were analysed further, this took the form of a hybrid model and was dictated by the services being offered to the client and many organisations are still in the discussion stages as to the form that this blended approach to working will take.

4.5 The impact of Covid 19 on innovation in the organisation

The seventh questions asked “Did the impact of Covid 19 force your organisation to be more innovative?” This relates to innovation in the mix of services delivered or the ways in which these services were delivered during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Figure 7

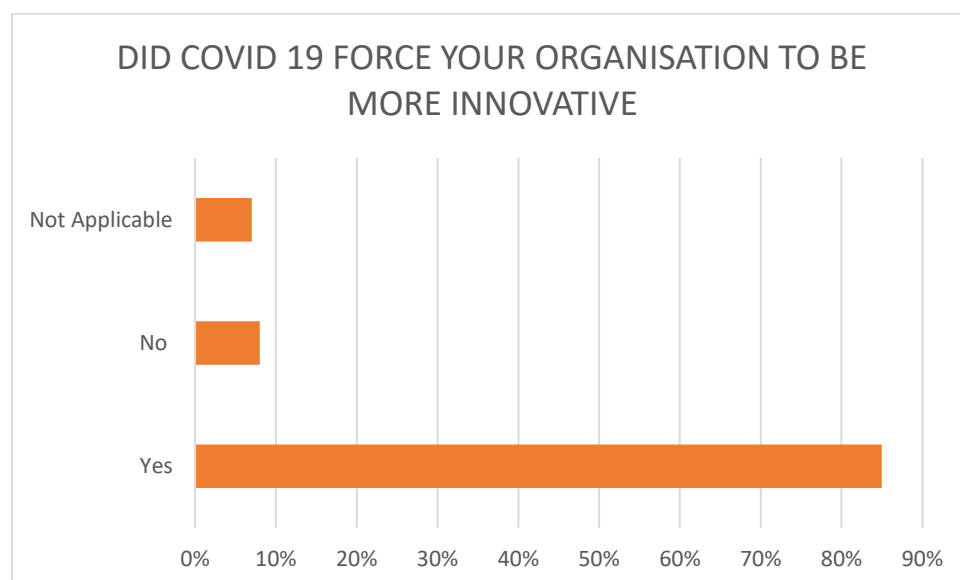


Figure 7 depicts the breakdown of the 114 responses, with 85% stated that their organisation did become more innovative and 8% stated they did not, with 7% stating

it was not applicable to their service delivery model. Respondents were offered the option of elaborating on their response and a total of 65 comments were made. The researchers were able to drill down to tease out the responses as to how the organisations became innovative, the key themes emerging from the data was the extensive use of online technologies, in terms of running the organisation and accessing and delivering services to clients.

Figure 8

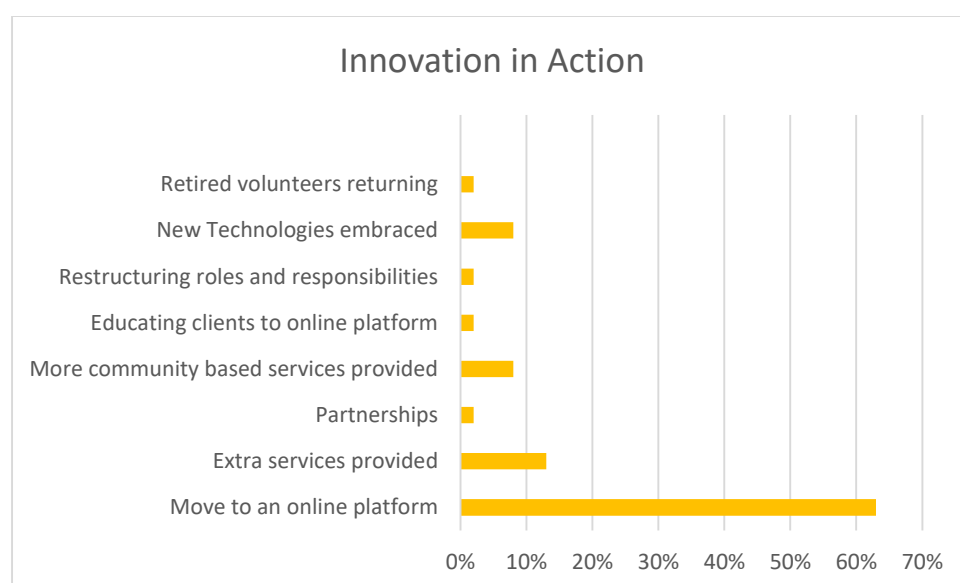


Figure 8 depicts the range and diversity of ways organisations adapted to the provision of services during Covid 19. In relation to the introduction of an online platform in running the organisation and providing services, a number of interesting comments emerged, firstly, in relation to the staff and then in relation to clients.

“It gave the organisation opportunities to adapt services as well as identify areas of development to create a more holistic service. It gave staff opportunities to upskill in areas as well as an increase in confidence in use of technology. As well as this it gave scope to increase team meetings, to maintain a sense of teamwork as needed, through the use of Microsoft teams and Zoom”.

“Yes, we have moved to telephone and remote work and staff have engaged in training in the delivery of remote support including by Zoom / Microsoft Teams”.

“Use of new technologies, change of working patterns and job descriptions”.

“We moved to phone support immediately during lockdown. We sourced relevant training for staff and volunteers. We reviewed our volunteer training programme and will move this to an online platform when we recommence our volunteer recruitment programme. Also, we engaged with Salesforce to explore the possibility of migrating our recording of data to the Salesforce application. This will be hugely beneficial and save time compared to our present procedures for recording our statistics. We facilitate a student on placement - during restrictions they could not physically attend so we worked with the college to agree that the student could carry out research for the duration of their 14-week placement. This was in line with our strategic plan and the college’s student placement objectives”.

“New services introduced, including new online engagement with clients and each other”.

“Yes, it forced us to think outside of the box. We can definitely see the benefits of electronic mails campaigns and social media to promote awareness of our association and promote the services we provide”.

“We, like everyone, became more adept at Zoom! We also tried as many ways as possible to stay in touch with clients, including sending out cards, letters and small packages to them at times”.

“We already had telemedicine implemented and we used this platform to enhance our service offering to patients/service users which also enables some staff to provide the services from home”.

“Moving programmes online, approaches to encourage engagement from young people online”.

It is interesting to note the new services provided by organisations during Covid 19, to respond to the changing needs of clients. These included, in particular, a change in service offering in line with the Covid 19 restrictions and developing a training aspect to the organisation.

“Providing extra services to families in need, adapting our model of Meals services, from cooking fresh and delivering hot to purchasing and delivering chilled meals”.

“We are developing a training aspect to our business, much of which can be done online”.

The forming of partnerships to continue to provide services was also an option used by organisations.

“Working in partnership with health services to deliver a range of therapy programmes online”.

Respondents also stated that their organisation moved to more community-based projects or service provision to respond to client needs during Covid 19.

“....more community focused”

“Responsive to the real needs in our community Greater networking with other community and voluntary organisations”.

In relation to the move to an online platform clients needed to be educated to be able to use and access services and resources had to be employed to make this happen.

“Getting older persons online so they could be involved with groups and indeed family”.

“For programmes where we work with people directly, we had to work with them to enable online supports, we had to develop packs to send to them to enable online baking, arts, and crafts, etc.”

It is interesting to note the change the impact of Covid 19 restrictions had on the roles and responsibilities of staff in the organisations included in the study. It was stated by some respondents that re-structuring of the work roles and responsibilities was necessary to ensure continuity of service delivery during Covid 19.

“We created an online shop, restructured how our board operates and reallocated more supportive work to the Board of Trustees. To help take some admin from the executive team who were all on reduced hours and pay”.

The respondents stated the ways in which new technologies were embraced as is evident from comments above also and that the benefit of this move to a more online platform was encouraged and supported.

“IT became a much greater resource, and we used these tools to our advantage. Online youthwork was a huge challenge, youth workers had to become very creative in the hope of maintaining long term engagement from our young people”.

“It gave the organisation opportunities to adapt services as well as identify areas of development to create a more holistic service. It gave staff opportunities to upskill in areas as well as an increase in confidence in use of technology. As well as this it gave scope to increase team meetings, to maintain a sense of teamwork as needed, through the use of Microsoft teams and Zoom”.

“We really embraced technology and pre-Covid we would not have believed what our very basic literacy students could do when they had to. Prior to Covid our students would have seen technology as a barrier but Covid forced them and us to see it as a tool for communication and learning”.

“.....got to use phone calls a lot, what's app, zoom and teams - saved a lot of staff/ volunteer time on travel service users got to participate in programmed online - they didn't have to travel to centres either. It suited more of them especially people with disabilities who had fatigue or transport issues. There were a few people who didn't like zoom - mostly those who lived near the centres”.

“Yes - all employees had to adapt with new technologies, zoom, Microsoft teams. All training moved online”.

“Many respondents referred to the one innovative practice adopted by their organisation that being the invitation of retired volunteers to return to the organisation during Covid 19, to ensure the provision of service to clients”.

“We had to train more volunteers and ask retired volunteers to return to the helplines along with a number of other innovations”.

“CEO initiated website upgrade, getting retired volunteers back, better communication via monthly meetings and newsletter”.

In summary, while developing an online presence was the predominant change in service delivery by these organisations included in the study, within this strategy various new ways of service delivery were developed and delivered to respond to the changing needs of the community as a result of the Covid 19 restrictions, depicting innovative ways these organisations responded.

4.6 Volunteering

Two questions were asked about the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on volunteers and whether the organisation had plans to retain the additional volunteers who had come forward.

4.6.1 The impact of Covid 19 on Volunteering in the organisation

Question eight asked “Did Covid 19 have an impact on the numbers of volunteers in your organisation?” 114 answered this question and it showed that 42% of the organisations had a decrease in volunteers, 11% of organisations showed an increase. 37% of organisations showed no change in the numbers of volunteers and for 11% of organisation volunteering was not applicable to them.

Figure 9

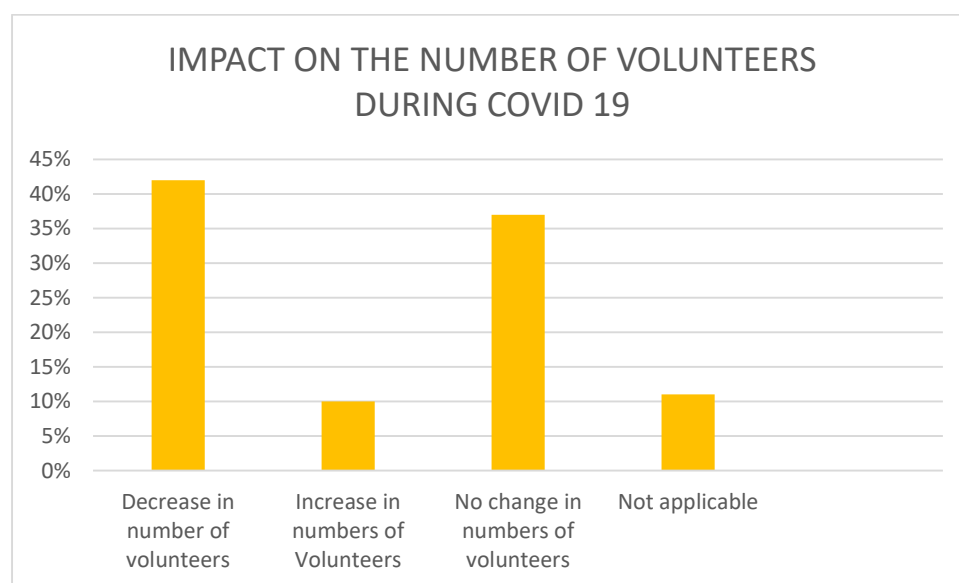


Figure 9 depicts this breakdown and relates to a point made above where efforts were made to try and get retired volunteers to return to the organisation during the Covid 19 restrictions. Respondents were offered the option of elaborating on their response and a total of 39 comments were made. The researchers were able to drill down to tease out the responses as to the impact on volunteers for the organisations.

The following core themes emerged, a change in the mix of volunteers, change in the role of volunteers, the inability to work at the organisation or carry out previous activities during Covid 19 and an overall interest in being a volunteer during the pandemic, which could not always be facilitated during the period of restrictions.

“Numbers decreased on the year-long programme (that had attracted people with an interest in international travel) but our numbers for our [] programme remained the same and, in some areas, increased”.

“...decrease in certain cohorts but an increase in new volunteers in different areas, also older volunteers dropped off and new unemployed came on board”.

“...there was limited opportunity to engage and work with volunteers when work from home and other restrictions were in place”.

“Our volunteers are “hands on” and it was not possible for them to engage in the normal way. For example, our volunteers could not attend the ... Centre. However, they did engage in other ways, for example, online fundraising”.

“We are normally supported by 25 volunteers per week and have not been able to have our volunteers in the Centres since March 2020”.

“During Covid-19 we saw an increase in interest to volunteer. This was however limited and impacted by Covid due to the nature of the work we do. We have maintained contact with volunteers to ensure that they are engaged, and we can implement opportunities when allowed”.

“Very difficult in our programme mission to have volunteers work on projects and support without having face to face interaction”.

“We found people called offering to help at the start of the pandemic”

“More people were available to volunteer...and we needed them all”

“As a small organisation our volunteers are very committed, and numbers were unaltered”.

“...there was limited opportunity to engage and work with volunteers when work from home and other restrictions were in place”.

“Couldn't take volunteers when closed”.

The volunteering policy of many organisations changed as a result of the Covid 19 restrictions and resulted in different approaches to volunteering by the organisations concerned.

4.6.2 Plans to retain new volunteers

Question 9 asked “Has your organisation developed a plan to retain new volunteers (if any) recruited during the Covid 19 pandemic?” In relation to the organisations having a plan to retain new volunteers recruited during Covid 9 the 115 respondents stated a very mixed response.

Figure 10

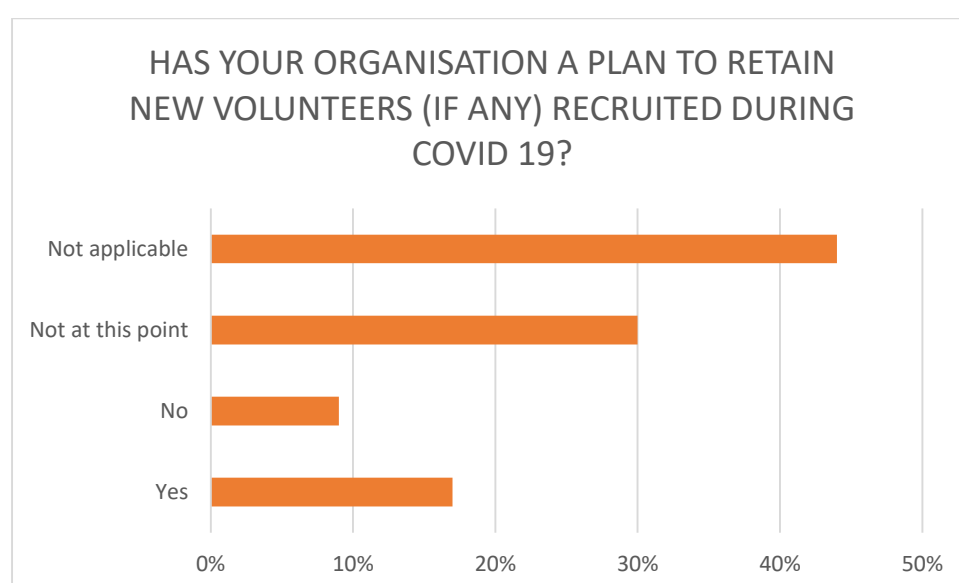


Figure 10 depicts the breakdown to this response, in terms of a plan in place to retain volunteers recruited during Covid 19. While 17% stated they did have a plan, 30% of organisations stated they have not at this point formulated a plan on how they will retain these volunteers. 9% stated their organisation did not have a plan and the question was not relevant to 44% of respondents.

Respondents were offered the option of elaborating on their response and a total of 25 comments were made. The researchers were able to drill down to tease out the responses as to the impact on the retention plan for new volunteers, these ranged from the difficulty in recruiting volunteers, the plan is part of the overall strategy of the organisation and the plan currently “a work in progress” with the need for a new volunteering strategy moving forward.

“We would love to get more volunteers on board but proving very difficult”.

“We are hoping to get some recent volunteers activated on CE schemes so that they can continue working with us”.

“....roadmap back to volunteering plan”

“We are currently examining this option (of a volunteering plan), but no firm decisions have been taken”.

“Organisation needs a whole new volunteer strategy - recruitment, induction, placement, retention and how to bring back existing volunteers after 15-month gap”

“Yes, but volunteer management already part of the strategy here”.

“We are forming a strategy”.

In summary, many organisations while they do not have a volunteering plan in place to retain new volunteers are in the process of examining this strategy option going forward.

4.7 The Key Strengths which helped the organisation during Covid 19

Question 10 asked “What would you see as the key strength which helped your organisation through the Covid 19 pandemic? “The 111 respondents stated a range and diversity of strengths and mentioned more than one strength in their comments. Therefore, in presenting the findings to this question it is presented in table form, highlighting the number of mentions across the 111 responses to this question.

Table 2 Strengths of the Organisations during Covid 19

Strengths	Number of Mentions
Committed and motivated staff	24
Flexibility	21
Ability to deal with change	14
Leadership and strong Board	12
Well supported in the community	8
Resilience	7
Organisation suited to online delivery	6
High level of Trust	5
Creativity and Innovation	5
Responsive to Community needs	4
Ability to plan	4
Commitment of volunteers	3
Reserves	2

Two over-riding strengths were listed by respondents was that of committed and motivated and the flexibility of the organisation.

1) Committed and motivated staff

The commitment and motivation of staff is mentioned throughout the comments here and is attributed to the success of the organisation particularly during Covid 19.

“The commitment and creativity of our staff”.

“Hard work from a great team of workers”.

“Commitment reliability and flexibility of staff as well as being open to change and adapting the service to meet the needs of the customers. Being innovative and seeking positive opportunities during a very difficult and stressful year”.

The ability to deal with change was stated by respondents to be a core strength to many of the organisations included in the study.

“The ability of the staff and management to respond in a positive and proactive manner to change”.

“The leadership and the strong board in existence at the time of Covid 19, was stated by respondents as demonstrating a core strength in many of the organisations”.

“The strong Board and very willing and able CEO along with a great bunch of very loyal volunteers”.

“The support from the board of management to enable the centre manager to keep the facility open as much as possible”.

“Good leadership. Strong teams. Good reserves and a confident board”.

2) Flexibility

“We are a small and flexible organisation. We are not governed by funding contracts and were able to use our resources to optimum effect”.

“The organisation's flexible model which involves a substantial number of outsourced sole traders which are utilised as and when the organisation needs their expertise”.

“...flexibility & empathy”.

“A willingness on the part of the Board, the staff and volunteers to be flexible and to embrace new ways of working to ensure that services remain accessible to the community. Also, a willingness to work collaboratively with other agencies”.

The support of the community was also mentioned as a key strength by respondents in relation to their organisation.

“We are very well supported by the local community”.

The resilience closely allied to the adaptability of the organisation was mentioned by respondents as a key strength of their organisation during Covid 19.

“Resilience is achieved through welcoming change, challenging the status quo, and setting priorities. Learning that we cannot do everything and cannot respond to everything has been a big challenge for the team to accommodate as a small social

enterprise. It has helped structure work and focus team on deliverable with Board oversight to guide on when to take on more work, only when priorities are achieved”.

“The ability to change to online delivery and that service provision was possible in this online environment was deemed a key strength by respondents”.

“Adult educators are problem solvers and always willing to learn and they really embraced the challenge of teaching the students online. We also had a good relationship with our students, and they also had relationships with each other, so they really valued the connections when they were in lockdown”.

Additional strengths were mentioned, (as depicted in Table 2 above) to a lesser extent, but these still had a positive impact on the organisation and assisted it to ensure the organisation still remained open and provided services during the restrictions imposed by Covid 19 restrictions.

4.8 Weakness

Two questions were asked in relation to weaknesses, the first asked about weaknesses which emerged during the Covid 19 crisis and, the second asked whether the organisation was able to overcome these weaknesses.

4.8.1 The Key weaknesses which emerged during Covid 19

Question 11 asked “What would you identify as the key weakness that emerged during the Covid 19 pandemic?” The 70 responses outlined a range and diversity of weaknesses, with some mentioning more than one weakness in their comments and these responses are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Key Weaknesses of your organisation during Covid 19

Weakness	Number of Mentions
Information Technology (IT)	18
Lack of funds and fundraising ability	16
Connectivity and Broadband issues	13
Staff well-being and burnout	7
Fully dependent on face-to face communications for service provision	7
Short supply of staff and volunteers	7
Increased time to work with clients	5
Fear of staff getting Covid 19	3

Table 3 depicts the range of weaknesses, with Information Technology (IT) having the most mentions. In analysing this weakness, the meaning of IT meant a number of different things to different respondents. For example, this reflected the outdated technology of many organisations, lack of technical know-how, lack of IT supports and difficulty in working remotely.

“Members who did not have access to technology or had very old phones that do not support apps to help communicate”.

“Outdated IT systems”.

“Technology needed to be upgraded and additional items required to work from home”.

“Initially a lack of devices / phones etc. and general lack of expertise in delivering a remote service and engaging on platforms such as Zoom”.

“Lack of Online capabilities”.

“Weak IT skills for some staff members”.

“The lack of IT support”.

Closely allied to the IT issue outlined above and remote working was the lack of connectivity of broadband for both staff and clients.

“IT as in some places still have very poor internet connection”.

“Lack of broadband in our area. Difficulty getting people online”.

The respondents did state the lack of ability to fund raise and the impact of Covid 19 restrictions during the different levels of lockdown did adversely impact their organisation’s ability to schedule fundraising events and so put pressure on the organisation in terms of their ability to continue to deliver services.

“Our drop in funding made everything more difficult as we couldn't bring in paid support and/or interns”.

“Our funders and customers within government were focusing on the pandemic and have lost focus on normal business”.

“How much our members were dependent on local fundraising which fell off a cliff in 2020”.

Given the change in working arrangements and the move to online service delivery, many respondents reported the impact on staff well-being and burnout as a result of the Covid 19 on their work environment.

“...all working remotely requires a huge focus on staff engagement and communication; the work during COVID was full on and put a lot of pressure on people; this is all not sustainable”.

“...we find it difficult to say no to work and often the staff feel overworked... that is very evident now with many signals of burnout”.

“Mental health and well-being of staff”.

The dependency on face-to-face communication, in terms for service delivery made it very difficult to maintain the level of service given pre-Covid 19.

“Difficulty in lack of face-to-face talks”.

“The need to see people face to face for a great deal of what we do - a human service”.

“Working remotely for client care is a big challenge. Things (i.e., helping with filling out forms or liaising with another service) that would have taken 20 minutes

previously now took hours. Also, not every issue was disclosed over phone calls so as we are meeting people in person, we are seeing even more the trauma they have experienced over the past year +”.

Other weaknesses were mentioned by respondents, but these were less frequently mentioned, for example, given the challenges of online service delivery respondents stated that their organisation was finding that longer time needed to be spent with clients in the online environment. In addition, as mentioned in relation to strengths above, most respondents mentioned more than one weakness.

4.8.2 Addressing the weaknesses

Question 12 asked “Were you able to address this weakness during the Covid 19 pandemic?” Table 4 highlights the responses to this question.

Figure 11

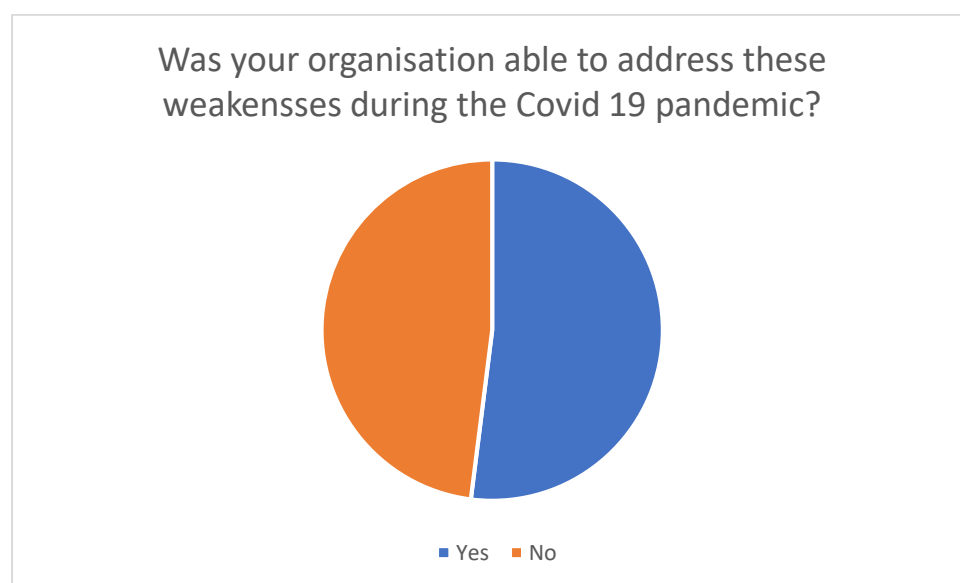


Figure 11 depicts the breakdown of organisation who were and were not in a position to address these weaknesses. 48% of organisations were not in a position to address the weaknesses identified.

“Not within our gift”.

“Still looking”.

“Unfortunately not, it made the situation worse”.

“Not really: still working on this. Attempting to put fire in the belly of senior mgmt. to take on a stronger leadership”.

The above organisations lived with the weaknesses and the respondents reported their organisation was not in a position to address them.

On the other hand, in relation to the 52% of respondents who stated the ability of their organisation to address these weaknesses, the responses were diverse and varied and most respondents stated that while not all the weaknesses were addressed, as it was beyond the scope of the organisations, many reported a partial addressing of these weaknesses.

Table 4 depicts the key types of responses in relation to the weaknesses highlighted above. On a more general level respondents reported that in going forward the organisation highlighted the need to have a firm plan or strategy to deal with these weaknesses which will they state in certain situations may still exist beyond Covid 19 restrictions.

“....however still a work in progress to ensure "noise" doesn't distract or remove from the fundamentals of a focused strategy”

“We have longer term plans to deal with this”.

In dealing with these weaknesses one respondent summed up the impact of the weaknesses in terms of the cost involved.

“Belatedly and at a cost. We got some IT equipment donations early on, but it was only in December that we leveraged in funding from the ETB MAEDF for the level of support required. However, this support included no admin support and we had to pay a €400 charge for audit. In a not-for-profit company, these costs are a big issue”.

Table 4 The keys methods in which these weaknesses were addressed.

Weakness	The key methods mentioned in addressing the weakness
Information Technology (IT)	<p>Providing training courses online</p> <p>Learned new skills</p> <p>Increased use of Zoom</p> <p>Provided laptops to staff</p> <p>Got IT equipment donations</p> <p>Formed a partnership with a software company</p> <p>Looking for a trustee with IT expertise to join the board.</p>
Lack of funds and fundraising ability	<p>Assessing State grants</p> <p>Corporate sponsors came on board</p>
Connectivity and Broadband issues	<p>Staff called to check in where families out of reach</p> <p>Priority given to those living alone</p> <p>Hired hot desk space for staff with connectivity issues</p>
Staff well-being and burnout	<p>Online training</p> <p>Specific supports for staff</p> <p>Regular meetings with staff online to deal with concerns as they arise</p>
Fully dependent on face-to face communications for service provision	<p>Arranged one staff member to be in the office each day after first lockdown</p> <p>Skeletal service for urgent cases</p> <p>Therapists had access to online courses to help them provide service remotely.</p>
Short supply of staff and volunteers	<p>Hired new staff where possible</p>
Increased time to work with clients	<p>Tried to deal with this by increasing staff numbers where possible.</p> <p>Increased connectivity of staff means more resources are available to give to clients.</p>
Fear of staff getting Covid 19	<p>Communications entailing regular meeting and updates seen as the key response here.</p>

Therefore, the responses by organisations were varied and diverse which was dependent on their ability to deal with these weaknesses, increase funding and partnership with IT companies were among the key reasons why organisations were in a position to address these weaknesses encountered as a result of Covid 19.

4.9 The Key Lessons Learned

Question 13 asked “Looking back at how your organisation coped during the Covid 19 pandemic, what do you see as the key lessons learned?” Many and varied responses were elicited from this question in relation to the key lessons learned in managing the organisation during Covid 19. These responses varied across different business functions and processes such as planning/strategy, human resources, finance, and stakeholder engagement. In addition, these responses provide a rich array of advice to organisations on how to formulate and implement strategy post Covid 19 and so to build on the resilience displayed by these organisations to date.

The extensive list of lessons learned extrapolated from this question inviting respondents to state the key lessons they learned during Covid 19 were divided into five core themes and are depicted in Table 5. These key lessons learned set out clear advice to other organisations in building and maintaining resilience post Covid 19. The themes very much reflect a positive attitude to staff, engagement of stakeholders, developing listening skills and the critical need to be flexible and to change direction when required. These lessons focus to a large extent on the soft skills of managing but also entail, in particular, a future focus of business strategy formulation, crafting a volunteering strategy, building up reserves and building an efficient and effective organisation.

Table 5 The key lessons learned

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Lesson Learned</i>
Human Resource Management	<p>Believe in your team - they can deliver.</p> <p>The need for a clear structure and volunteering policy going forward.</p> <p>Staff engagement is critical.</p> <p>People are creative and adaptable when given the option to find new ways in making things work.</p> <p>An agile mindset is a critical enabler.</p> <p>Trust staff and be very open with communications.</p> <p>Survival is about commitment to your charity and your members trusting that you are doing the best for them.</p> <p>You can still get the same amount done if you adapt and work together as a team.</p>
Future Training Strategy	<p>Blended learning is the way forward.</p>
Engagement with stakeholders	<p>The importance of clear communications with all stakeholder groupings.</p> <p>Listening skills are key when engaging with stakeholders.</p>
Strategic Focus and adaptability of the organisation	<p>Expect nothing and make the most of what you have with a firm plan.</p> <p>Plan, reflect, adapt and change.</p> <p>Always have a plan B.</p> <p>The need to diversify our income base to make us more resilient.</p> <p>Great crisis can present great opportunities.</p> <p>The importance of financial reserves.</p> <p>A flexible working model that allows adaptability in changing circumstances is key.</p> <p>Make decisions more quickly when faced with the unknown.</p> <p>People are resilient, change can be good and there is nothing like a crisis to focus a Board.</p> <p>Have a plan and be prepared to change a plan.</p> <p>Need for emergency readiness.</p>

4.10 The way forward for the organisation post Covid 19

Question 14 asked “Going forward, what new ways of service delivery or managing your organisation as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic would you keep and develop?” The responses elicited by respondents varied across a number of themes, with the common thread on continuing to work some type of hybrid online service delivery or aspect of working in or management of the organisation through an element of working from home continuing to some extent.

The key themes demonstrating this way forward are highlighted in Table 6 below.

Table 6 The Way Forward

Theme	Ways of working/ benefits
Future training needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered online. Staff development through online platform. Leadership and Management development through online platform.
Increased efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online hybrid environment. Decrease costs in running the organisation. Greater geographical reach to clients. More efficient use of time in assessing clients via online platform. Online delivery of service suits some clients. Lower costs in attendance at meeting via online platform. Streamlining operations. Extend the reach of online services that have lower costs.
Innovation and Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to use chilled meals in terms of greater efficiencies and greater reach. Develop the list of supports offered online as a core service not just a back-up during Covid 19. Enhance the telemedicine platform developed during Covid 19. Reviews of some clients possible, in terms of an online consultation rather than a hospital visit, develop this service. Continue to look at new way of service delivery. New and innovative ways of motivating staff remotely are required going forward.
Fundraising Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Sponsorships. Social Enterprise development. Use of online and social media for fundraising.

Human Resource Strategy	<p>Use online platforms for staff development.</p> <p>Facilitation of home working.</p> <p>Upskilling of staff on online working.</p> <p>Reinventing training strategy to help our staff cope with change.</p> <p>Better structuring of how executives report to trustees and how trustees take responsibility for committee and board administration.</p> <p>Continued investment in Management and Leadership development.</p> <p>Continued upskilling of staff in new ways of working.</p> <p>Endeavouring to have company policies on a wider range of issues and updating of current ones in line with new ways of working and service delivery.</p> <p>Closer and more involved connection with the Board.</p> <p>Reach out to volunteers and develop a strong volunteering policy.</p> <p>Review of staff roles and volunteer expectations.</p>
Information Technology	<p>Continue to build on the IT systems developed during Covid 19.</p> <p>Development of new IT solutions to better help some of the key business processes.</p> <p>Continue to develop and improve the online offerings.</p> <p>Upskilling staff.</p> <p>Improving information architecture to facilitate better decision making across the organisation.</p> <p>Ensure the availability of a hybrid system in terms of working from home and service delivery.</p>
Adaptability of the organisation	<p>Ensure clients' needs are met in a flexible way.</p> <p>Move away from a "one size fits all" in terms of service delivery.</p> <p>Adapting the business model to facilitate remote working and, in some cases the dual delivery of programmes (in-person and using IT).</p> <p>Ongoing adaptations to ensure the needs of the service users are continuously met.</p> <p>Optimise staff flexibility.</p> <p>Innovation and creativity driving the way forward through a flexible approach.</p>

Table 6 depicts the keys ways stated by respondents that their organisation will continue to use and develop going forward. These are highlighted across seven pillars or themes, while there is a small degree of overlap, they do highlight the array of positive ways in which the organisations plans to develop and implement post Covid 19. These themes reflected issues that occurred throughout the research study and

were built from the experiences of respondents in their organisation throughout the Covid 19 crisis, identifying areas that needed to be developed from human resources, finance, information technology, innovation, and the critical need to be an adaptable and flexible organisation going forward.

5.0 Conclusions

The above findings of this research study highlight the resilience shown by the organisations included in this study. Many initiatives were put into practice to ensure continuity of service delivery by these organisations or in some cases an increase in service delivery in line with the increased needs of clients during the Covid 19 pandemic. For example, in relation to vulnerable clients, the restrictions have had a huge impact on these clients especially those with mental health difficulties, particularly anxiety among students, and also help needed for job seekers, with organisations endeavouring to reach the needs of this increasing client base.

So, returning to the first objective of this research study, to gain an understanding of how managers defined organisation resilience as it applied to this organisation a vast array of initiatives, in terms of scope and diversity were outlined. Given the definition of organisation resilience presented to respondents 94% stated their organisation was indeed resilient and when these figures were analysed further the respondents stated the areas they felt they were most resilient in. The move to an online platform presented the biggest challenge to organisations, the ability to stay connected with their staff, clients and wider stakeholder groupings and keep their organisation functioning. The speed and efficiency of this move to online working given the IT issues encountered by many organisations put their resilience to the test from the outset of the Covid 19 pandemic.

In addition, the respondents stated how they used the time during the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown to upskill their staff and connect with volunteers, endeavouring to build their resilience to keep connected and develop their volunteer base. The organisation's ability to adapt and be flexible, in terms of home working and service delivery was also tested. For example, being able to change the service offered from hot meals to chilled meals, online counselling and telemedicine gave greater coverage and reach and demonstrated creativity and innovation in action. In

addition, for the organisation that could not open, the renting out of their premises demonstrated innovative funding opportunities taken on board.

Moving to the second objective of the research study outlined above - to examine the role of employees, innovation, IT and leadership in achieving the strategic objectives throughout the Covid 19 pandemic, the findings highlight an array of initiatives demonstrating how these roles were pertinent in emphasising the resilience of organisation. Employees were noted by respondents as showing strong cohesiveness as a team and responding to the needs of the organisation and their clients. The working conditions of the staff changed overnight (in many cases) to a home working environment and respondents referred to the staff, in terms of their commitment and motivation as being a key strength of the organisation during this time. Despite the fact that many staff members did not have IT skills, they embraced the home working and online provision of service to clients and showed high levels of flexibility and adaptability from the outset. Innovation was very much evident from the initiatives undertaken by organisation from the delivery of services through an online platform, the change in the mix of services delivered as outlined above and a move to online fundraising initiatives and also introducing new ways to increase efficiencies and decrease costs overall for the organisation. IT represented the backdrop of the new working environments for the organisations included in the study. This presented the greatest challenge for many organisations given their size, lack of IT skills and in many instances outdated IT systems. The key point being that despite these challenges, these organisations did overcome these challenges in a speedy manner and operated from the online platform from the outset, demonstrating their resilience from the outset. Leadership played a key role for many organisations included in the research study, in terms of the hands-on-approach of board members to increase their roles and responsibilities, in providing direction and increasing their communication with staff to work as a team and increase the cohesiveness of the organisation, given the dispersed nature of work (home working) during the Covid 19 pandemic. The role of resilience capacity and resource management represents the third objective of the study as outlined above. This concentrated in the main on organisations who had a reserves fund, and those organisations who endeavoured to increase their efficiency through management of costs. In addition, the management of funding and endeavouring to maintain or

increase funding, applying for support grant or project supports to supplement their income streams. An interesting point in reviewing the future focus of these organisations, much attention is being paid to this resource management piece. This is demonstrated in the move more towards increased efficiency, more robust human resource strategies, a clear fundraising strategy and IT strategy, very much operating in an innovative and creative culture and maintaining and building on a flexible and adaptable organisation.

For many organisations, Covid 19 has shone a light on the vulnerabilities of their organisation and tested the stretch of their organisation, given their current resources and objectives. It highlights the gaps between the strategic focus and their means to attain it. For many organisations it has given them confidence to show how much they can achieve give the resources they have and highlighted in stark terms the value of the resources they have in terms of staff and funding partners, to achieve their objectives and helps to focus on a way to build a way forward.

6.0 Recommendations

A number of key recommendations are outlined in response to the findings of this research study. These are broad in nature and address the key areas covered in the research study spanning across all three research objectives. They will apply in varying degrees to the different organisations included in the study and across different business functions and processes.

Many of the organisations would benefit from the establishment of a **reserve policy** to have a “rainy day” fund going forward. The speed in which Covid 19 impacted the organisations from their fundraising capability, their demand for service and the mode of delivery of these services highlighted the need to have a reserve fund to be in a position to react to these changing internal and external variables that confronted the organisation.

The need to **build innovation and creativity into the culture** of the organisation and perhaps have more brainstorming sessions in terms of solving old problems in new ways so they do not reoccur. It is recommended that organisations formulate a suggestions system policy into their culture where new ideas in terms of service

delivery or increased efficiencies can be built into their strategy and become part of the “way we do things around here”.

The necessity to examine *the new ways tasks were completed* during Covid 19 and examine increased efficiencies that were established, in terms of the continuation of the use of some practices, such as home working or service delivery elements and build these into a new or modified business model.

It is an opportune time for organisations *to review their approach to fundraising*, examining, in particular what worked and what did not work during Covid 19, in terms of strengthening this going forward and having a robust funding strategy also benchmarking against best practice with other organisations.

The need for the organisations to *build and strengthen its level of adaptability* to respond to changing internal and external variables that may impact their organisation in the future.

The need to *review the communications policy* within the organisation and with all stakeholder groupings. This will ensure the ability of the organisation to respond to changes required in a speedy and efficient manner.

Training and upskilling were key areas highlighted in the research study as areas that needed to have a *clear and focused training and development strategy* going forward to deal with weaknesses encountered during Covid 19 and to build on the strengths displayed by organisations during this period. Therefore, building on the lessons learned from the Covid 19 pandemic, in terms of managing the organisation, a comprehensive training strategy would help define these training requirements going forward.

At the time the study was undertaken only 17% of organisations had a volunteering plan going forward. It is recommended that *a volunteering strategy* should form a key component of the organisation’s overall strategy going forward to ensure the organisations recruitment and retention of its volunteer base.

The necessity *to redefine the business model* used by the organisation in terms of service delivery. Covid 19 introduced many organisations included in the study to rethink their routes to delivering service, for example the online delivery of some services. Going forward this mode of service deliver may work best for some clients

and could be built into a more permanent form of service delivery and so increase the reach of organisations and enhance efficiencies. This might require additional funding at national level to facilitate the greater use of technology to enhance service delivery.

Examining *best practice of other organisations* may help organisations examine what might be considered to address weaknesses highlighted by their organisation during Covid 19. 48% of respondents stated their organisations were not in a position to address weaknesses highlighted. Taking a step back and learning and copying from other organisations might help the organisation find ways to address these weaknesses by highlighting small changes even that would convert their weaknesses to strengths.

7.0 Contribution of the study

The study will contribute to increasing awareness of the readiness of NPOs in dealing with change and adaptability in the face of changing internal and external environmental changes facing organisations. The turbulent changes brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic are used as the backdrop, to assess the approaches used to deal with these required changes by these organisations and assess their overall resilience.

The outputs of the research can also lead to the formation of a Master Class to outline guidance and tips on how to increase these organisations resilience in a time of change.

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APPENDIX 1
Copy of the Questionnaire

CARMICHAEL/TU DUBLIN COVID 19 QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Our organisation could be defined as a resilient organisation

Yes

No

Please elaborate

2. Covid 19 had an impact on the demand for our organisation's services

Substantial decrease

Moderate decrease

Large decrease

No Change

Moderate increase

Large increase

Substantial Increase

3. Covid 19 had an impact on funding for our organisation.

Substantial decrease

Moderate decrease

Large decrease

No Change

Moderate increase

Large increase

Substantial Increase

4. What key actions did your organisation take to alleviate the funding shortfall(if any) as it emerged during Covid 19?

5. Did your organisation engage in flexible working (working from home) during the lockdown arising from Covid 19?

Yes

No

Not applicable to my organisation

6. Is flexible working likely to be an option offered to your employees going forward?

Yes

No

Not applicable to my organisation

7. Did the impact of Covid 19 force your organisation to be more innovative?

Yes

No

Not applicable to my organisation

8. Did Covid 19 have an impact on the number of volunteers in your organisation?

Increase in the number of volunteers

Decrease in the number of volunteers

No change

Not applicable

Please elaborate

9. Has your organisation developed a plan to retain new volunteers (if any) recruited during the Covid 19 pandemic?

Yes

No

Not yet

Not applicable

Please elaborate

10. What would you see as the key strength which helped your organisation through the Covid 19 pandemic?
11. What would you see as the key weakness that emerged during the Covid 19 pandemic?
12. Were you able to address this weakness during the Covid 19 pandemic?
13. Looking back at how your organisation coped during the Covid 19 pandemic, what do you see as the key lessons learned?
14. Going forward, what new ways of service delivery or managing your organisation as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic would you keep and develop?