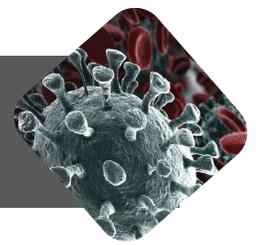




# COVID-19 Business Outlook Study 2020

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Trinidad, West Indies  
**April 15, 2020**



## THE LOCAL BUSINESS CONTEXT

Navigating the COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges to businesses around the globe. After the recording of our first case of COVID-19 on March 12, 2020, the Government began taking steps to mitigate the spread. The period March 16 to March 18, saw businesses, within the private and public sectors, taking their first hit with the closure of schools, bars and dine-in services.

There were announcements of a Pandemic Leave (March 15) as well as a Salary Relief Grant (March 23). The national borders were closed on March 23.

Practicing of social distancing and staying at home as a means of flattening the curve continue to be the resonating messages of the Government.

On March 30, further stringent 'stay at home' measures were put in place with the closure of non-essential businesses initially until April 15 and eventually extended to April 30.

Businesses deemed 'essential' were required to adjust their staff and work arrangements to have only their 'core' employees report for work. The decision was also taken for transportation services to operate at 50% capacity.

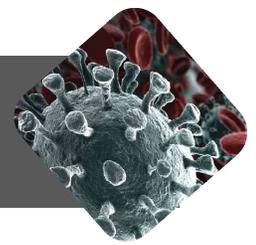
On April 7, all food services were closed while the operating hours of supermarkets and pharmacies were shortened.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is the first of two planned studies by MFO to gauge the national perceptions and sentiments about the impact of the disease. This report covers the first study which deals with the business community. The second report will detail the sentiments of the general public.

The main objectives of the business study are to determine:

- The perceptions of the economic and health concerns of the COVID-19.
- The level of confidence in the Government to treat with COVID-19 and to mitigate its spread.
- The concerns of and the challenges and measures taken by the business community in response to the possible impact of COVID-19.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Market Facts & Opinions (2000) Ltd, in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, conducted the COVID-19 Business Outlook Study over a two-week period (March 24 to April 8) via an online platform.

MFO provided a unique link to the businesses within its database and a universal link to the Chamber of Commerce for its members. A total of 168 surveys were completed (71 via MFO's unique link and 97 via the universal link).

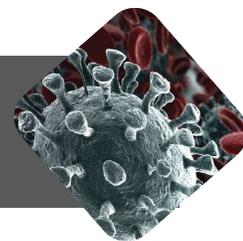
MFO considers this sample size with its characteristics to be adequate in providing a reliable indicative understanding of business sentiment at the time of the survey. It is expected that this sentiment will be subject to change as events unfold. It is possible that different results may be possible, should a complete census of the business community be done.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

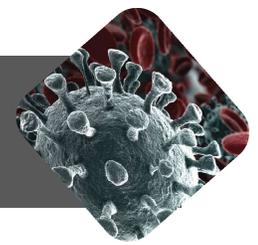
This report is a top line one, meaning that it is a summary with concise charts intended to help senior managers understand the broad sweep of the results.

We thank all the participants of this study for their contribution to make this study a success.

# KEY FINDINGS



- With the arrival of the novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-19) to the borders of Trinidad & Tobago, there have been **3 major business challenges** to be faced: maintaining **Financial Sustainability**, addressing staff's **Fears and Concerns** and adjusting **Business Operations**.
- While our respondents are uncertain about the survival of their businesses or their ability to keep the current employment levels, the **larger concern is the overall impact on the local economy**.
- **Curbing the spread of COVID-19 and keeping employees safe are their top priorities**. Measures put in place by companies include purchasing extra hygiene products, limiting meetings and the cancellation of business-related trips along with the implementation of work-at-home options.
- **Businesspersons have acknowledged the seriousness of COVID-19**. A vast majority are uncomfortable with using public transportation and/or attending a meeting of 10 or 5 people.
- Most respondents are of the view that their **employees are productive**. **At least a third** of the participating businesses indicated that they **have a committed workforce** and that they **can adopt remote work**. More than half of these businesses which hold this view are within the finance, retail, manufacturing and construction industries or are more likely to be categorized as those who have "Essential Workers".
- There is a **high level of satisfaction with the government's performance** in handling the pandemic as at the time of the fieldwork. 9 in 10 participants say they are either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied'.
- While satisfaction in the Government's performance is high, there is apprehension about the Government's ability to contain the spread of COVID-19. This is reflective of the strong view that **collective and personal social responsibility (the national effort to stay at home) affects the success of the Government efforts**.



# IMPLICATIONS

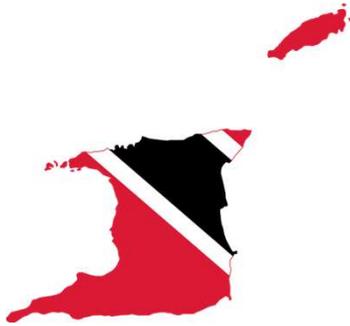
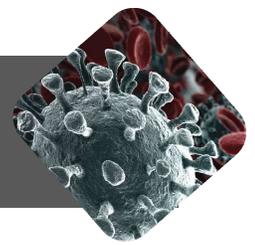
The study reveals that the business community is very aware of the dangers that lurk and believes that this is a matter that is weightier than the fate of their individual businesses. They perceive the major challenge as that of the survival of the overall economy. Their high level of satisfaction with the Government's actions confirms their willingness to accept that their interests represent only one piece in the larger picture. This augurs well for the preparation of life beyond the 'curve'.

While productivity is a more complex and nuanced concept than 'working remotely', it is refreshing to note that the business leaders are generally of the view that their employees are productive. This can remove the potential tensions of adversarial posture in the tough period in the immediate future. Business and labour leaders will need to negotiate the joint future but this report gives an encouraging outlook.

The times ahead, by the account of these business leaders, are filled with uncertainty. They are worried that it is possible that the potential economic consequences may be more damaging than the physical toll exacted. They are concerned whether the general public will be compliant with the protocols introduced to limit the effects of the COVID-19 virus. These leaders are of the view that should there be compliance, the country may be able to go back to work sooner. It is imperative that these business leaders do not, by their actions, separate themselves from the sacrifice needed to go through the pain that lies ahead. Navigating the uncertain shoals requires the conviction that should all the parties work together the pain would be shortened.

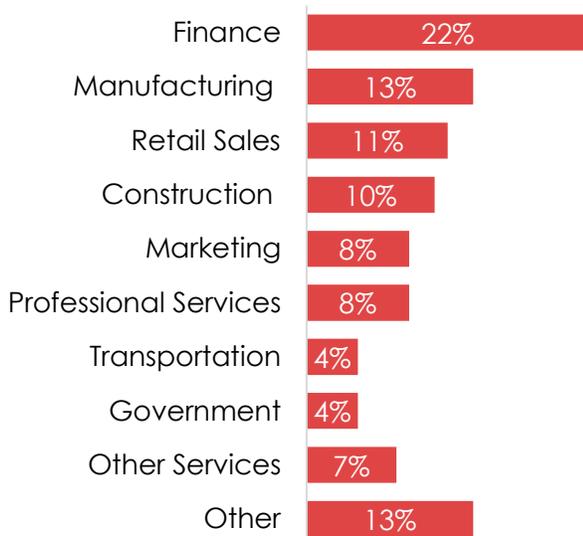
It is living out this conviction that will determine in large measure the attitude and productivity of the workers, on the other side of the 'curve'. It may well be that short-term thinking, in attempting to manage the economic risks, may create long-term negative effects. There is no obvious play book, these business leaders will need to create their own.

# DEMOGRAPHICS



**BASE: 168**

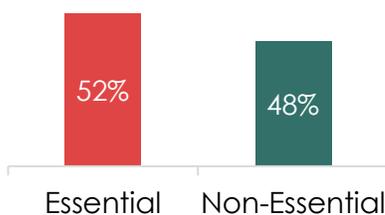
## TYPE OF ORGANIZATION



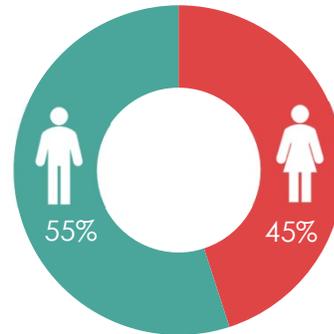
\*2 persons did not answer

Other includes: Education/Childcare, Gas/Oil/Energy, Utilities, IT, Protective Services and Culture/Arts/Entertainment.

## ESSENTIAL VS. NON-ESSENTIAL

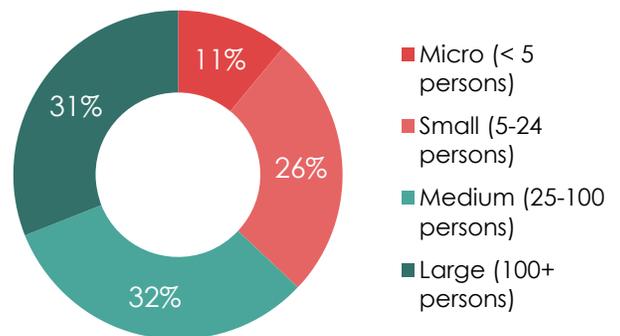


## GENDER



\*5 persons did not answer

## SIZE OF COMPANY



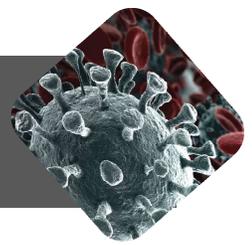
\*2 persons did not answer

## EMPLOYEE GRADE

Employee Grade	%
Executive/Senior Management	70%
Manager	17%
Professional	6%
Supervisor	4%
Admin/Secretarial/Clerical	2%
Technical/Operations	1%

\*7 persons did not answer

# ECONOMIC IMPACT



Almost three-quarters (71%) of all respondents are extremely concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy.

While a super-majority **(85%)** express concern about the impact on their business and/or their ability to maintain employment levels, it should be noted that a quarter are 'extremely concerned'.

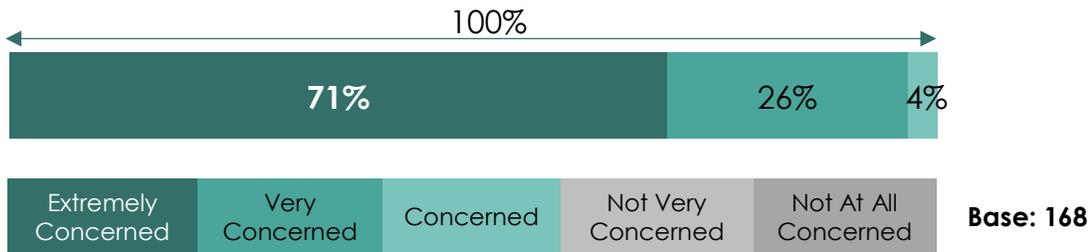


## RESPONDENT COMMENTS

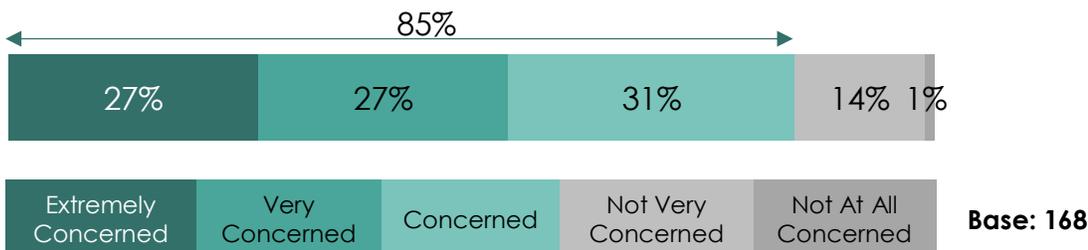
*"My real concern is when this is all over and the economy is ravaged and people are not working, how will we maneuver?"*

*"This is going to have a huge financial impact, especially on the more vulnerable members of society. I see the need for the government having to borrow money to help the economy."*

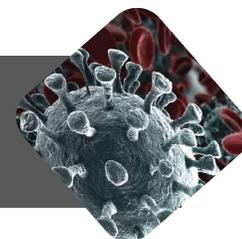
## LOCAL ECONOMIC CONCERN



## BUSINESS/EMPLOYMENT CONCERN



# TOP BUSINESS CHALLENGES



## TOP 3 BUSINESS CHALLENGES

### 1. Financial Sustainability

**Six in ten** respondents cited lost income or economic slowdown as a major financial challenge. **2 in 10** reported that their struggles with business adaptation to ensure continuity are the major financial issue.

### 2. Fears and Concerns

At least **4 in 10** respondents are concerned about personal and collective social responsibility. They are fearful whether the public is adhering to the protocols put in place.

**2 in 10** reported the need to manage their staff's fears and uncertainty about their employment.

### 3. Business Operations

About **2 in 10** persons noted the uncertainty around planning and events, the possible cessation of trading, closure of sites/businesses and organizing/monitoring people for remote work.

## RESPONDENT COMMENTS

*"Persons need to be more serious about this pandemic and understand that they are not only risking their lives but others as well when they do not practice social distancing or staying at home."*

## TOP WORKPLACE MEASURES



**94%** of respondents reported 'Purchasing of extra hygiene products' as their main workplace measure.



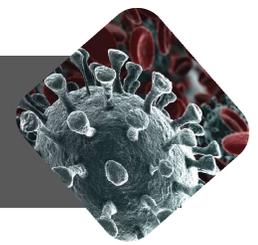
**85%** reported the minimization/cancellation of client meetings.



**84%** have had to postpone/cancel work trips.



**80%** of respondents also noted that they have implemented work-at-home options where possible.



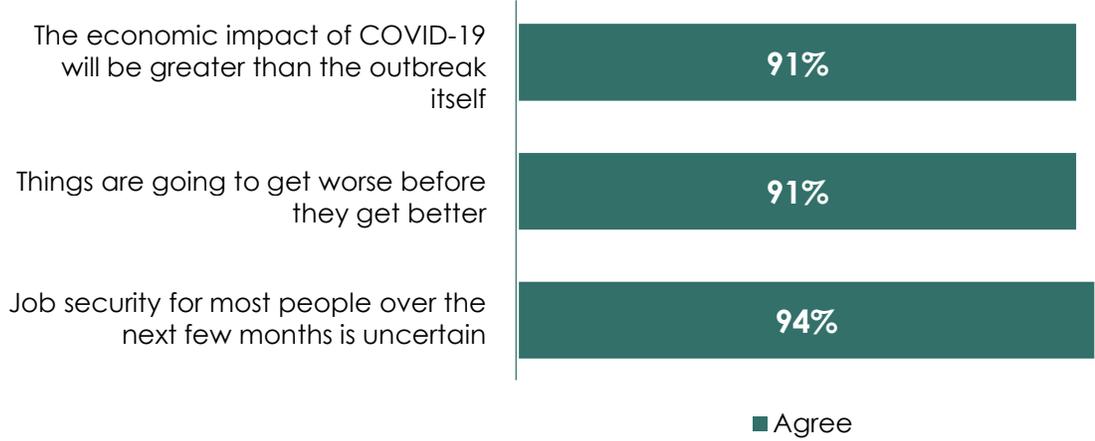
# COVID-19 PERCEPTIONS

Most respondents (**9 in 10**) believe that the economic impact will be greater than the outbreak itself, that things are going to get worse before they get better and that job security is uncertain. A similar proportion also acknowledged the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Only about **a half** of the respondents believe that their family's health is at more risk than their business/job. While **9 in 10** persons noted that they are uncomfortable using public transport, just under **7 in 10** are uncomfortable attending a meeting of 10 or 5 people.

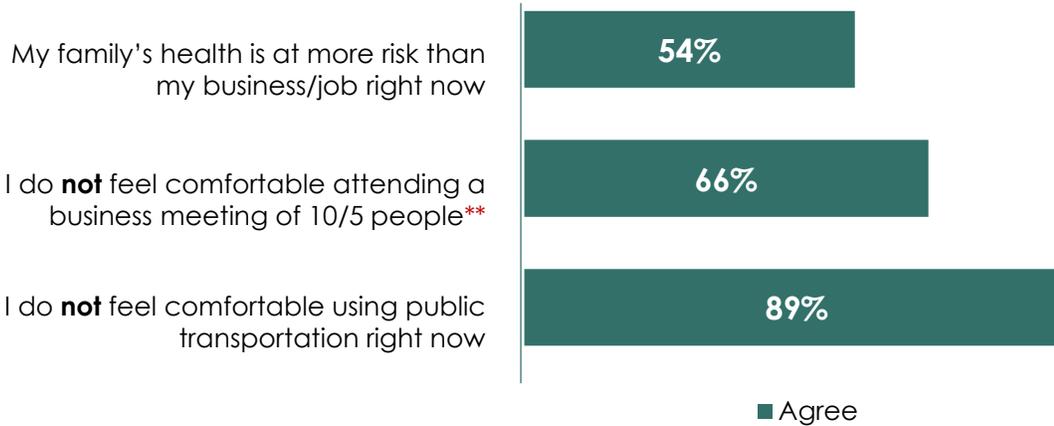
**93% disagree**  
**'The seriousness of COVID-19 has been exaggerated'**

## ECONOMIC CONCERN



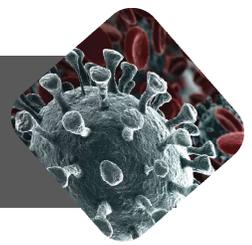
Base: 168

## HEALTH CONCERN



Base: 168

**\*\*NOTE:** At mid-study, this statement was adjusted to reflect the Government's new recommended gathering size of 5 persons.



# EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

Just about **6 in 10** respondents believe that their company's employees are productive. On the other hand, almost **2 in 10** persons believe this not to be true.

## RESPONDENT COMMENTS

*"The company has a robust remote working infrastructure which has assisted in allowing staff to remain productive."*

*"While those who are able to work-from-home are very productive and have been adapting very well and being innovative and engaged, those unable to deliver work from home are less productive."*

## REASONS FOR POSITIVE RATING



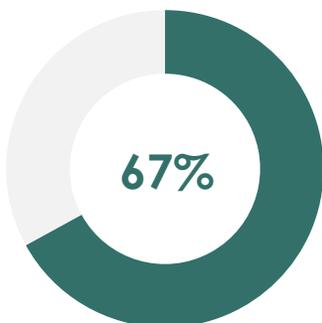
About **4 in 10** of the business community believe that 'Staff understands the importance of their role in the company and remain productive' while **a third** noted that 'Having the ability to work remotely' enables their staff to be productive.

## REASONS FOR NEGATIVE RATING

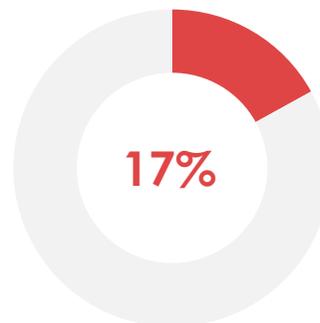


The business respondents that do not believe their employees are productive noted that the main reason for this is due to the lack of business during this time. **Half of these persons** noted that their business was closed at the time of the survey.

## EMPLOYEES' PRODUCTIVITY RATINGS



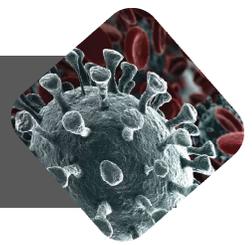
■ Productive



■ Not Productive

Base: 168

# GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE



Almost **9 in 10** respondents noted their satisfaction ('Very satisfied' or 'Satisfied') with the Government's response to treating with COVID-19 in T&T. 4 of ten are very satisfied.

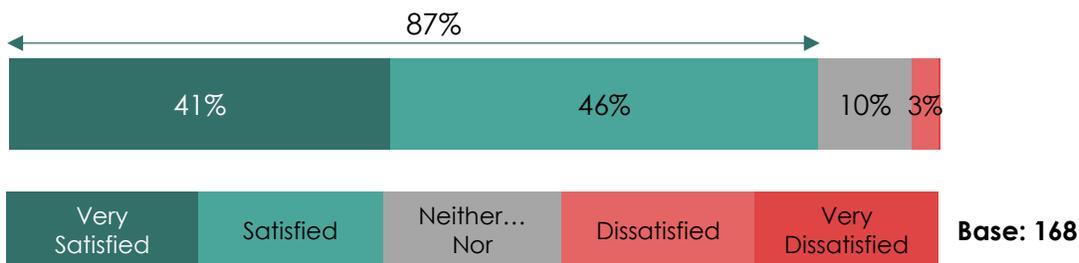
However, just about **two thirds** expressed confidence ('Very confident' or 'Confident') in the Government's ability to keep the spread of COVID-19 under control. It appears to be limited confidence that the population will be responsible.

## RESPONDENT COMMENTS

*"The Government is doing all that it can. It is up to the citizens to listen and heed the call for social distancing and as businesses start planning post COVID-19."*

*"I commend the Government of T&T for implementing precautionary measures to be ahead of the curve in a decisive, calm and communicative manner to keep citizens of this country safe."*

## GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE - SATISFACTION



## GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE- CONFIDENCE

