Interviewer: Okay. Let's try that again. So if you can just tell us about your experience at your institution trying to rapidly implement policies from HR during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Participant: Yeah we're kind of an anomaly. So it was pretty hard for us to rapidly implement them. We were actually doing a show the Saturday the world shut down. So we cancelled both of those shows, but we had had one Friday night. And then we all were sent home so we went home.

But the problem with our area of work, specifically, the Patron Services area is that we have to be PCI compliant. So all of the computers that we would have to do to refund patrons to do any kind of real work that involves patron facing interactions are on-site. So we all went home not knowing what, what would be happening.

And the policies from HR, it feels like, were changing frequently… I'm sorry, let me get rid of these… were changing frequently, so us implementing them, a lot of it involved us, well, my higher ups pushing back a little bit and saying, "But how are we supposed to do anything, if we can't be here?" But how are we supposed to, like, refund patrons if we can't be here? So we came back fairly quickly.

Interviewer: Yeah that makes sense. Wow, that sounds so tricky. Yeah. Participant: Yeah it was incredibly tricky.

Interviewer: So were changes made for staff about work arrangements? Or was it –? Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: – Just, kind of, a matter of you just have to be here?

Participant: Yeah so we, we worked with our IT to get our, our computer, like, our remote desktops and whatnot working. And we also were never on-site at the same time. So we rotated who, who was in the office and who wasn't. And and we all had our own offices so we separated so that nobody was sharing a workspace with anybody. Because we were down to, like, the bare minimum at that point.

As it was across most organizations, a lot of people went on furlough. So the people who were still here were the people who were necessary in order to, like, transactionally interact with patrons, the university, and each

other to payroll and whatnot. So so no one was on-site in the same area at the same time.

We were still doing work that involved, like, mailing letters, and brochures, and whatnot, but I would come, and I would get stamps, envelopes, whatever was needed. And I would drop them off on staffs' either front doors, or if they lived in apartments. Like, Jen specifically was putting down a little bucket, and we would put it all in the bucket. And then she would pull it back up to her, like, second or third floor apartment. It was –

Interviewer: Wow.

Participant: – Because no one knew what was going on. So it was total chaos, but we made it work. We had to adapt to, like, a lot of different environments, and and basically separate where everyone was.

Interviewer: Wow.

Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: So when those changes were implemented, did you feel like they were appropriately timed for the issues that needed to be addressed?

Participant: That's hard because I don't think there is an appropriate timing to a pandemic. Or we started hearing stuff about it in January, I would say when [REDACTED] hit about it in Utah. Where they were talking about this, this thing that might be coming. You heard about it more if you were paying attention to the news the previous fall. But really, really when it hit, hit, I think a lot of, I think a lot of everything was reactionary, and not proactive.

So, but I can't necessarily fault them because we made decisions in the pandemic that we were still dealing with budgeting, like, in January. And I was trying, I'm one of the few people who is still here who was here during the pandemic. So I was trying to explain to them when, why those decisions, those terrible decisions were made.

And it was because no one knew when we were going to come back. No one knew how long this was gonna last. So a lot of the decisions, yeah, they're, they're definitely reactionary. But I think everyone's were, so it's hard to fault them. But yeah it was –

Interviewer: Right.

Participant: – It was hard timing for sure.

Interviewer: Right, that makes sense. Who made those decisions about what policies to change and how to go about that?

Participant: I'm assuming the university, but I know that when we had policies specifically around masking. When people came back, specifically around what we could ask of the people entering our buildings, specifically around, like, the locking of our building, and whatnot, a lot of that came from [U1]. But I feel like a lot of that was dictated by the state because being a nonprofit, several things are beyond your control as far as your own, your own, own role, I guess, and in your work life. So we chose and still choose to mask here.

We literally within the last hour, I had one of my staff test positive. Because we're still testing because we have equity casts in the house. And so we're also dictated by Actors Equity rules. So it's like we're, kind of, like, the guinea pigs between equity rules, the state as interpreted through the university, and then to us.

So it's like we try and make it as safe an environment as possible, try and make it possible for us to all continue coming to work, and to interact with our patrons. And yet often those two things are at odds. So we were really, we were really at the, at the disposal of a couple of different entities, I guess.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, that's tricky. Were you or are you currently involved in planning those kinds of changes or just in implementing them?

Participant: Definitely implementing, but my boss, [REDACTED], is I would say involved in the planning of how it impacts us. But I think once again, it's kind of dictated to her through Actors Equity. And, and and we also suffer because we, I don't know how – I'm not gonna get too into the weeds – but we, we don't have, like.… We bring in Equity cast members, but we don't have understudies.

So, Equity on Broadway might be saying, "Yeah, we're not gonna require this anymore." But if one of our cast members gets sick, the entire show shuts down. So so we still try and be very careful, even, even if, even as, I guess, mandates are becoming a little more flexible. We're still pretty

inflexible about masking and testing because we need to make sure that everyone's healthy and safe so that it doesn't spread.

Interviewer: Yeah that makes sense. Are there other things? So obviously, those things have continued this whole time with masking and testing. Are there other changes that were made that were reversed or are you pretty much living still, all those changes that were made?

Participant: No. We're, we're we're definitely a little more flexible. It gets…. I'm trying to think of, like, specifics because, with the masking and testing still being in place. But it just feels a little freer around here. Like, we were ultra careful. We weren't gloving or anything. We were at one point when, when we first had patrons back the year after COVID. Because we wanted to make sure our ushers were safe in interacting with the ticket holders.

So we had gloves for them. But early on in the pandemic when the university hospital was asking for gloves, we donated all of ours. So so we weren’t, we weren't as strict about that anymore. We're, we're a little freer with that. But we had a lot of, a lot of things that happened involving, like, our, the the space where our box office agents interacted with the public, was never, never had that, like, plastic guard in place. Now it has that.

And we're not gonna go back from that because, I mean, besides COVID, there's like the flu and stuff. Like, it's just better. So we got microphones to go on that. So it's, like, we've had several changes that I think were for the better, honestly, that we don't want to go back on.

But after this season ends, we'll probably becoming more flexible about the masking and the, the testing for sure. Because the university has been like our partner in testing. And they, they're really good about testing on campus, period. So been able to be part of that. So once that goes away, we're gonna have to make some changes as well.

Interviewer: Yeah that makes sense. That's super helpful. Thank you. What challenges did you encounter with stuff in trying to implement these changes?

Participant: We didn't have any challenges that I'm aware of. We actually, when we had to furlough people, we took, we made sure to take really good care of them. So there was, there weren't, there weren't a lot of staff to challenge us. Like, it was very much everyone was a team and working together for it. Yeah I can't, I honestly can't think of any challenges.

We've had people who have not been vaccinated, which only represents a challenge with Actors Equity, not with the university. But that, that, there are steps in place to make them safe as well. So so, no, we, we've more adapted to, to what's going on than anything.

I would say one of the biggest challenges is our, sorry, our artistic director in an effort to keep, like, the costume shop and the, the backstage crew employed during the pandemic, she created a, a [REDACTED], is what I'll call it. Where they were repurposing, like. It was really cool, actually, but like we were making masks.

We were making, like, items from upholstery and from, from costumes, like bears and all kinds of things. And we were selling them. So I think one of the challenges would be how to turn a theater into a point of sell system when none of us are salespeople. We had to adapt our computers. We had to adapt our, we had to train our staff. So that was the biggest challenge, but it was also like a huge asset. And we were really proud of it because keeping people employed was amazing. So that's what that was –

Interviewer: Wow.

Participant: – That was pretty cool. Interviewer: That is awesome. That is very cool. Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you didn't have very many staff that were working from home, are, were there some that were able to work completely remotely?

Participant: Yeah. Our marketing person worked completely remotely. Our, our, I would say our company manager worked remotely. Our, so yeah, there were several that were able to work completely remotely. A managing director and artistic director could have worked completely remotely. But they, their offices are upstairs away from everyone, so they would come in and get some work done here.

But everyone, everyone was adapted to be able to work from home. And then we only had the one rotating box office person here to do the refunds

. Or whatever transactions needed to happen that day, we just traded off who was doing it.

Interviewer: Okay. Were there any issues or challenges that you saw with those people who worked from home? And specifically, I, I guess it's hard because you didn't have very many people working from home. But usually we ask, were there challenges that you saw differently, worked out differently for men versus women in terms of the shift to work from home?

Participant: No. There weren't. I think we had, we're, we have, we had at that point in time only a handful of men who would have been working from home. It was mostly women who were still working, so it's hard to say if they were more or less challenged. Because it's such a small group, like, group to kind of analyze. But I do know that there were a lot of – because I, I helped. I do the, I'm the IT person on-site here.

And there were a ton of challenges trying to get people remotely hooked up to their computers. Because as a very hard process to explain to someone without showing them or being on-site for them, so. And Zoom I mean, it's so common now, was not at all a thing that we used, especially here because we all work on-site, at all.

So so that was another challenge was getting, just getting everyone able to interact with each other from home was a challenge. But I think that was more a challenge of age than gender.

Interviewer: That makes sense. That makes sense. Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: Thank you. Was there any kind of evaluation of what staff thought about the changes that were made?

Participant: Not an evaluation of what they thought, but we did, we did vote on whether we wanted to mask or not. So I guess it was kind of like a democracy. But, but we did. And it was, the consensus was that we wanted to. So we were part of the, I guess we were part of the discussion of how to proceed.

So as far as I know, there haven't been any challenges because it's, kind of, once again, it's, kind of, beyond our control. Actors Equity, kind of, dictated what we were allowed to do. So you had to do it. And nobody was the bad guy or a good guy.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah that helps.

Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: So did you perceive that people were pretty happy with those changes that were made? Was there any pushback or if you, how do you perceive people felt about all that?

Participant: I'm gonna try and be delicate. But in an arts environment there's, kind of, a mindset that is supportive of the help of all the people involved in, in producing the art. And so, so so there, there really wasn't. Even like, we all come from all different walks of life. I'm native Utah, and, like, we're, we're all all over. But universally we wanted to make sure because once again, early on, it was a lot more terrifying.

And now it's people seem to have forgotten that people are still dying. And that it's still really scary for a lot of people, especially if you're suffering from pre-existing conditions, which a lot of people here are. So we, we were, kind of, all on board to take care of each other, I guess, is the way I would put it. It's kind of a communal environment in the arts.

So that's how it was approached was best can we make sure we're all taking –? I mean, we still have people here who haven't caught it. And the reason, the like, mostly how it happens or the people who are catching it are the students who work for us. Because they're out, so.

Interviewer: Yeah yeah.

Participant: So yeah.

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Participant: It's, it's been really fascinating.

Interviewer: That's cool. I love that you have that kind of environment.

Participant: Yeah, and I'm sorry, yeah, they're…. I, I know a lot of the answers are probably not the norm or what you're looking at, but we really didn't have a lot of pushback.

Interviewer: Yeah, no I actually feel like it's really helpful and fascinating. Because you had a unique experience of having to keep most people on campus still working, and and yet figuring out, how do we, how do we make this work? So I feel like that's a really helpful point of view to get.

Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: [Researcher] and [Researcher], do you have any questions that you want to add? I feel like some of these last questions may not apply as much in this situation. But I want to check with you to make sure.

Researcher: So [REDACTED], thanks. This has been super helpful. And I, I think the one question that we always, kind of, wrap up with is, are there things that you wish we had asked about that we haven't yet that you want to make sure we know about what happened at your worksite?

Participant: Yeah I would say that, probably, I've been – and this is probably more my answers than your questions. But I've been speaking a little bit more toward how we interacted with each other at [REDACTED]. But being on the campus and having to like work with development to get donations - SO many donation issues - processed, and work with, besides IT, like, payroll and whatnot, there were a lot of adaptation, a lot of adaptions –

Researcher: Adaptations?

Participant: – Adapting we had to do. Yeah. Because they went home, so there, there was quite a bit of a learning curve on, on how to newly interact with each other that, kind of, still exists. Because a lot of people are still on a rotating work from home schedule, and we're just not. And so I think that that was a challenge. But in the long run it seems so minor when you look back at everything that everyone went through.

But yeah, I would say, I would say working on, in, in a situation where a lot of the necessary things to keep your business running are off-site was challenging. But everyone got paid and everything happened. So that, that worked out but it was definitely challenging.

Researcher: Did you end up with most of the people being brought back on –? I, I know you talked quite a bit about furloughing people. Did you get most people back? Or are you still, sort of, dealing with that rebuilding phase?

Participant: We're definitely still dealing with some rebuilding. A lot of what, it's just interesting where people went. But we got, I would say we probably…. There's a difference, I guess, between people in roles. And we're still missing roles, but a lot of the people did come back.

And the, the people who didn't come back weren't replaced. And that's where the problem is. We were able to get a lot of people back, yeah, but now it, a lot of people we’re just carrying more load.

Researcher: No.

Participant: And there was, like, that hiring freeze at [U1]. And that was hard because we actually, our business manager left, I want to say a week, but it could have been ten days before, before we were shut down. And so we couldn't hire a, a business manager, which is everything.

So we were reliant on some other university employees to help us, which was huge. But that was a really hard role to get hired back. So yeah that was, that was definitely a massive challenge, was when people could come back and when we could hire people back. That's a great question [00:20:26].

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much, [REDACTED]. This has been super helpful.

Participant: Yeah, no problem. If you have any follow-up, you can just hit me up. I'm always around.

Researcher: Great, thank you.

Researcher: [00:20:38].

Researcher: That was great.

Participant: Yeah, no problem. Thanks for reaching out. Researcher: Okay.

Interviewer: Have a wonderful night.

Researcher: Have a good day.

Participant: You too.

Researcher: Bye, thanks.

Researcher: Bye.

Interviewer: Bye.

[END OF TAPE]