Adapt, evolve and repeat: Research in the time of COVID-19

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Objectives

- Discuss challenges and share experiences related to conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Understand the current policies and guidelines from the university that apply to our research projects

- Explore approaches and resources available to support adaptations to our research design

- Reflect on researcher responsiveness and ethical considerations in a time of global crisis

Let us know…

We'd like to know in what ways conducting research has felt different for you and your team during COVID-19:

- What challenges have you encountered?

- What adaptations were necessary for you to continue with your work?

- What have you learned in the process?

Go to www.menti.com and use the code 69 21 81 4

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How have DFM research teams adapted?

- Stop, pause, or postpone data collection
- Transition to virtual approaches
- Switch to data that is possible to collect virtually
- Creative uses of data that has already been collected
- Explore new opportunities or change the focus of projects
- Apply for permission to carry-on with in-person research

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Let us know in the poll…

During COVID-19, how was your team's research impacted?

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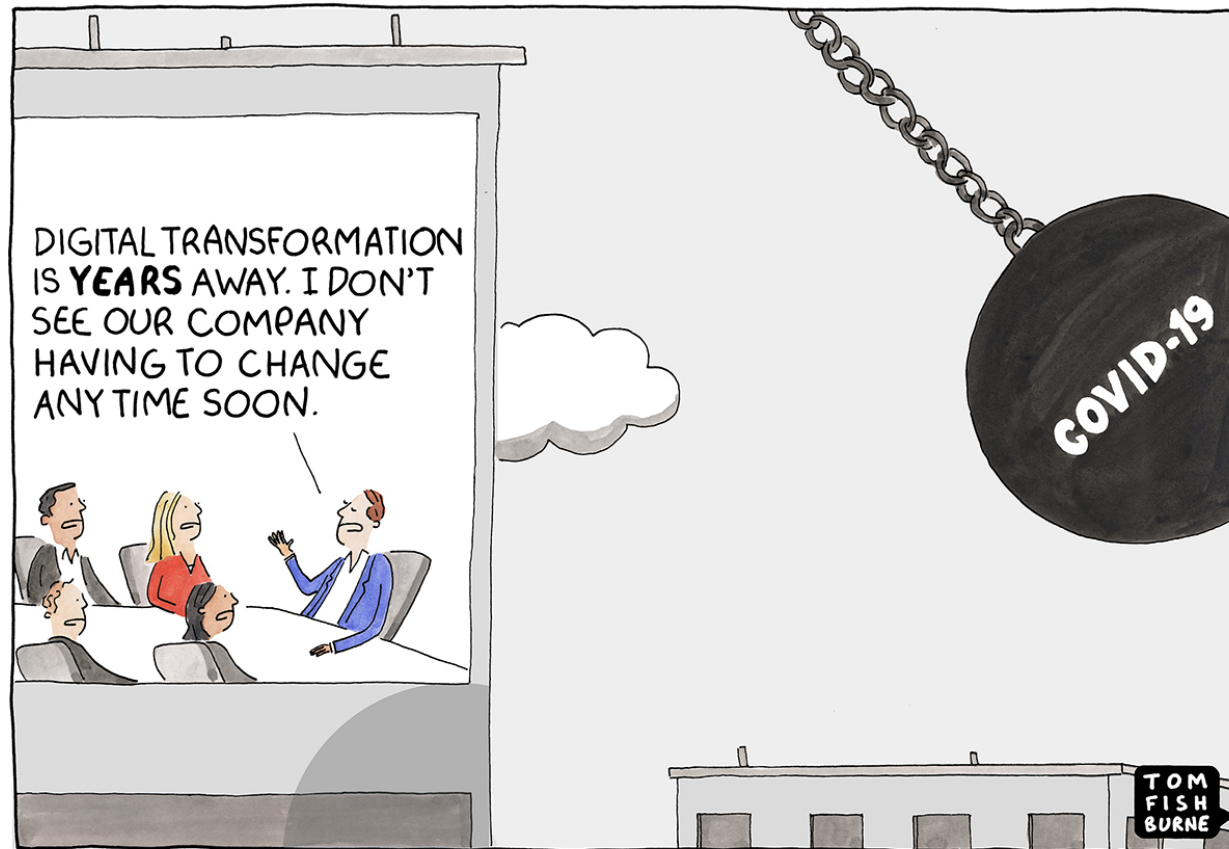
McMaster's Phased Return to Increased Research Activity

Phased Return to Increased Research Activity

We are currently in Phase 2

- Remote work is still the preference

- Return to campus is on a voluntary basis

- Application process to resume in-person work ("Research Activity Plan") for studies that cannot be done remotely

- No details or dates yet about Phase 3

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Resuming In-Person Research:
The Research Activity Plan

Research Activity Plans must:

- Justify why the work cannot be done remotely

- Not involve "high risk" individuals, except for COVID-19 research

- Outline detailed safety protocols

- Provide training for all research personnel

- Have plans for rapid shut-down

- Use a standard COVID-19 letter for participants outlining the risks of participating in the face-to-face activity

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Ethics Guidelines

McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB)

- Changes to Ongoing Projects:
    - *Amendment Sub-form:*
        - If adjusting study procedures affects other parts of your approved protocol.
    - *For information only:*
        - Minor changes e.g. If you are only delaying your study or making another minor change that does not substantively change the protocol or documents.
    - *Immediate changes:*
        - Make necessary changes to eliminate an immediate risk to participants and there is no time for an amendment review. Such changes may be implemented but must be reported to the REB at the earliest opportunity (ideally within 5 business days).
    - ## What about HiREB Projects?

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For more information visit: MREB and HiREB

New COVID 19 related research

- Expedited review

- Do not need to wait for deadline and committee meetings

- Rapid turnaround

- Same for COVID related amendments

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Adapting Research Methods

Site and participant recruitment

- Participants recruitment from a distance
  - Online advertising
  - Social media
  - Email and telephone
  - Network based online referral or snowball sampling

- Recruitment through other platforms
  - Research participant database (e.g. S.H.A.R.E Group)

Limited access

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Screening and Enrollment-Online

- Study Website
  - Pre-screening/ Eligibility
  - Letter of information
  - Collect consent to contact/contact information
- Online consent
  - REDCap
  - Limesurvey
- Barriers
  - Deter potential participants
  - Increase inappropriate participation

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Intervention

- Self-serve
  - Mail

- Technology based
  - Text messages/IM
  - Telehealth (e.g. STOP-Smoking cessation study)
  - Health Apps
  - Computer or internet-based programs (e.g. Plan well guide for ACP)
  - Social media based[+]

[+]Haley MacLeod et al., Asynchronous remote communities (ARC) for researching distributed populations. In Proceedings of the 10th EAI International Conference on Pervasive Computing Technologies for Healthcare (PervasiveHealth '16). 1-8.

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Data collection methods

- Virtual data collection
  - Online surveys or administered over telephone
  - Audio or video recorded surveys
- Change data sources
  - Pre-recorded data (e.g. EMR data)
  - National/international data repositories (e.g. OsteoArthritis initiative, ICES)
  - Qualitative member checking
  - Self-reported outcomes

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Virtual interviews and focus groups

- Set ground rules

- Sample Size (suggested to cap around 6 participants)[*]

- Accessibility and inclusivity

- Privacy and confidentiality

*Reference
SOP for virtual interviews and focus groups: dfmresearch\Training and Resources\Research Resources\Qualitative\Conducting Interviews and Focus Groups

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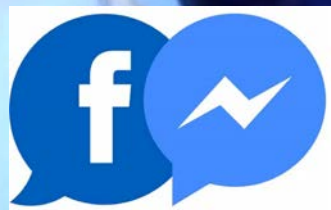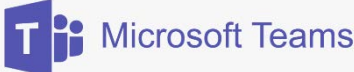
Video Conferencing Tools

Privacy tips for virtual data collection

- Choose a more secure option for high-risk studies

- Be clear with participants about risks of online meeting platforms

- Get to know the host controls available to you

- Record to your hard drive instead of the cloud

- Stick to audio whenever possible

- Let participants choose how they prefer to connect

"This study will use the X platform to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. A link to their privacy policy is available here (LINK). While the Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board has approved using the platform to collect data for this study, there is a small risk of a privacy breach for data collected on external servers. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please talk to the researcher if you have any concerns."

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McMaster's Video Conferencing Licenses

Features	zoom	Cisco webex	Microsoft Teams
Max Capacity	300	250	1000
Screen Sharing	Yes	Yes	Yes
Breakout Rooms	Yes	Yes	In development
Chat	Host can save chat, Participants can send private messages. Chat ends after meeting.	Host can save chat. Participants can send private messages. Chat ends after meeting.	Chat auto saved in app. Conversation continues after meeting ends.
Polling	Within the meeting	Within the meeting	Via Microsoft Forms
Join by phone	Yes	Yes	No
Host Controls	Mute, stop video, remove participants	Mute, stop video, remove participants	Mute, stop video, remove participants
Recording	Save to cloud or computer, host can download and share	Save to cloud or computer, host can download and share	Save to Microsoft Stream and posted in meeting chat

A more complete comparison of features available at: https://uts.mcmaster.ca/mcmaster-web-and-video-conferencing-guide/

Configuring a more secure online meeting

When scheduling the meeting:

- Don't post your meeting URL in public forums

- Require a password to join, and/or require registration

- Use the waiting room feature

- Set the video to "off" at first

- Set the audio to "mute participants upon entry"

- Enable the dial-in telephone number, if available

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Configuring a more secure online meeting

When hosting the meeting:

- Enlist the help of a trusted co-host

- Lock the meeting after attendees have arrived

- Disable screen sharing by participants

- Disable private chat, annotation, and recording by participants

- Learn how to remove disruptive participants

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Configuring a more secure online meeting

When recording the meeting:

Feature	Recommended Setting
Local recording	ON
Host can give participants the permission to record locally	OFF
Cloud recording	OFF
Automatic recording	OFF
IP Address Access control	OFF
Require password to access shared cloud recordings	ON
Auto delete cloud recordings after # days	ON; no more than 7 days
Recording disclaimer	ON
Ask participants for consent when recording starts	ON
Ask host to confirm before starting a recording	ON

Language above is from the Zoom configuration menu, but similar features exist for other platforms.

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Additional Resources for Video Conferencing

- Using Video Conferencing Platforms for collecting data from Human Participants

  - See individual pages with tips on how to configure each platform to optimize security:

  - Zoom

  - WebEx

  - Teams

- McMaster Privacy Office: Best Practices for Zoom

- Interpreting PHIPA in light of COVID-19

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Signal
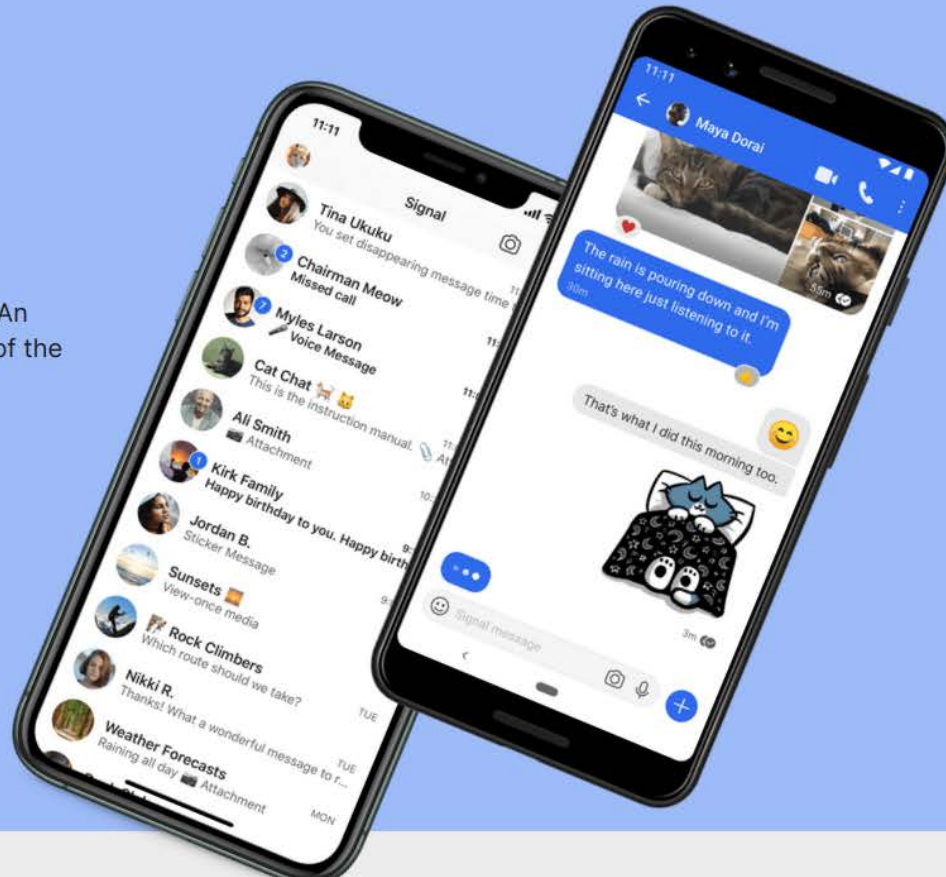
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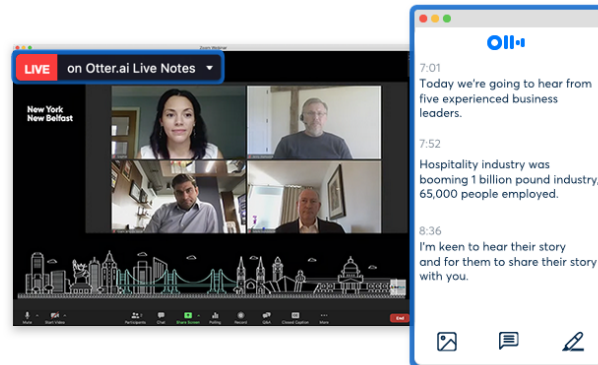
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Nvivo Transcription: Click here

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File Storage & Transfer Tools

Options for secure file storage and transfer

File Storage
- Network Drives
- Sharepoint

File Transfer
- Secure FTP
- MacDrive
- REDCap

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Other methods for data collection

Get creative!

- Synchronous interviewing via text messaging, WhatsApp

- Asynchronous interviewing/focus groups
  - Email, google sheets, Facebook group, Microsoft Forms, chat-based focus groups, online discussion forums,
  - Photo/video/voice elicitation
  - Diaries/journaling

- Other apps-based methods

Ethical Stance during Global Crisis

Trauma-informed methodology

- Cultivating a research environment comfortable to those who've experienced stress and trauma

- Recognizing the resilience and resources of individuals and communities who have experienced or are experiencing trauma

- Stress and trauma can influence behavior and responses in interviews and focus groups.

- Need to attune ourselves to this collective trauma

- Affects everyone differently

Resource: Best laid plans

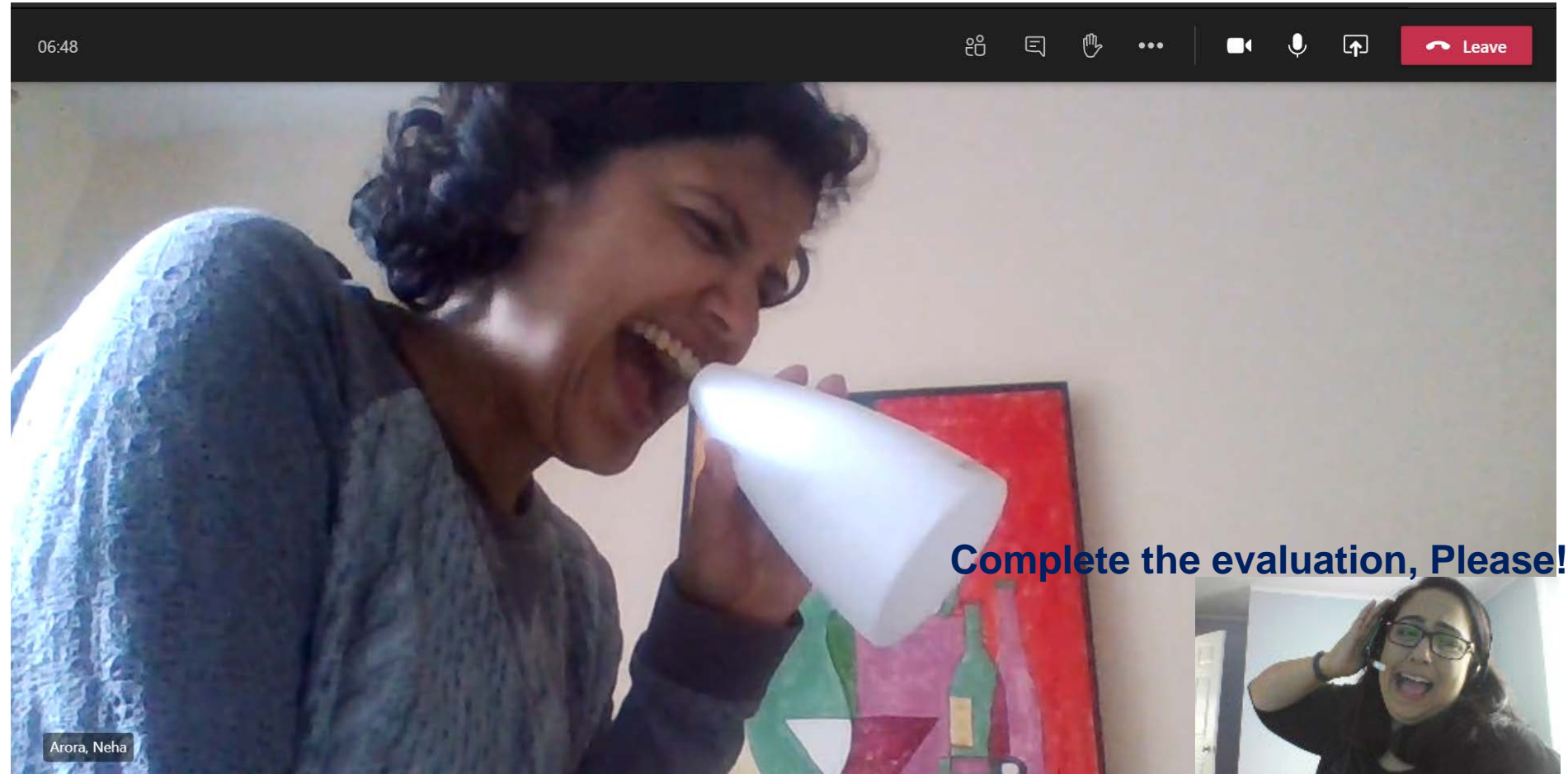Family Medicine | McMaster University

Vulnerability

- Raises the baseline of vulnerability for all people

- Emergencies can threaten autonomy and physical, emotional, institutional and social welfare or safety.

- May already have trauma histories separate from COVID-19

- Intersection of trauma with aspects of social identity and structural inequity including culture, gender, ethnic, race, social class and caste, religion, immigrant status.

- Vulnerable populations at higher risk

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Consider

- 'Affective atmosphere' for participants
- Risks and potential benefits posed by any proposed research
- Build methods for approaching participants with care
- Greater than normal attention to risk
- Look for possible signs of stress/trauma during interview
- Proceed with respect, humility and authenticity in these challenging times.

Chronic Illness Methodology (2016)

Questions?

Complete the evaluation, Please!

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