

Exploring uncertainty in qualitative research

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Abstract:

Methodological uncertainties in qualitative research have changed in the wake in of recent pandemics, wars and political shifts. Social and physical restrictions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic meant researchers changed methods by moving data generation online, changing foci, or pausing or stopping projects, all of which affect qualitative research in different ways partly depending on the stage a project is in. Methodological uncertainties include, among others, epistemological, ontological, affective, spatio-temporal and relational dimensions. The workshop draws on three phases of a research project called: *Changing Research Practices: Methodological adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic*. The workshop is aimed at introducing different perspectives on uncertainty and articulating concepts and ideas with the experiences and projects of workshop participants. Following an introductory presentation detailing some of the findings of the project, such as the articulation of sensory ethnography in lockdown conditions, participants will sketch out their research projects, charting different points of uncertainty and consider how productive uncertainty is for their work. They will then work in smaller groups to discuss their sketches and projects, articulating what they do not know in regards to their methods. Participants should be able to adapt or develop research designs and develop a greater appreciation for how uncertainties are affecting their work and those of others, hopefully refreshing approaches to research design and methods. The workshop will last for two hours.

Keywords: Uncertainty, unknowns, research methods, research design.

Necessary resources: it would be useful for participants to have access to paper and sketching materials.

Biographical note

Robert Meckin is a research fellow in the School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester and National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM), UK. He led a stream of research in NCRM's *Changing Research Practices: Methodological Adaptations to COVID-19* project, which developed various resources through the pandemic (link: <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/research/socscicovid19/>). He has an ongoing interest in anticipation, time and promise in regards to sociotechnical communities and publics, and has published articles in *Sociology*, *Public understanding of Science* and *Engaging Science and Technology* on this theme, as well as developing an introductory course for NCRM.

