



Special Session: Rapid or slow? Pragmatic or rigorous? Practical or theoretical? Where to go with qualitative implementation research?

Facilitators: Bianca Albers¹, Esther Bisschops², Natalie Blackburn³, Leah Bührmann⁴, Sheena McHugh⁵

Discussants: Pauline Goense⁶, Tim Rapley⁴, Melanie Barwick⁷, Katie Burke⁸

¹University of Zurich, Switzerland, ²Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, ³Comprehensive Health Research Centre, Lisbon, Portugal, ⁴Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK, ⁵University College Cork, Ireland, ⁶ZonMw, The Hague, Netherlands; ⁷The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Canada; ⁸Independent Consultant & Facilitator

Qualitative methods for data collection and analysis belong to the toolbox of many implementation researchers. Interviews, focus groups, ethnography, and thematic analysis are among the standard approaches implementation researchers use to explore the social realities of study interest-holders.

In recent years, the use of these methods seems to have been impacted by a love for the “rapid” and the “pragmatic”. In efforts to manage short study time frames and resources, speedy context assessments, accelerated interest-holder engagement, and fast-paced data analyses have been normalised. Speeding things up appears to be a new imperative.

This raises the question of how far we can go before things become too “quick and dirty” and whether we should go at all.

Critics of the turn towards rapid qualitative research point to a lack of knowledge about the reliability of the more hasty approaches to data collection and analyses, especially when technological advancements are involved. They also raise concerns about ethical uncertainty in using rapid methods and question the relevance of shallow research findings that can be derived from speedy investigations.

In this session, we will discuss the future of qualitative implementation research, starting with three main questions:

- Is qualitative implementation research taking the wrong turn by embracing the turn toward the rapid? What do we gain, and what do we lose?
- How can qualitative implementation research adapt to novel technological solutions and evolving methodologies while maintaining rigour and depth?
- What are the characteristics of relevant qualitative implementation research helpful in real-world problem-solving, and how do we do more of it?

This session is for those whose hearts beat for qualitative inquiry of implementation processes. If you have experience with rapid qualitative research, bring it to this session. If you believe in slow science, come and make your case. If you practice action research, conduct case studies, or apply grounded theory, share your experience. If your work is rooted in sociology, ethnography, or anthropology, join our discussion.

We will hold this session as a **fishbowl discussion**, providing ample opportunity for you to influence and participate in the conversation. This session is brought to you by EIC-QIR, the qualitative implementation research working group of the European Implementation Collaborative (<https://implementation.eu/eic-working-groups/>).