



Quality Improvement: The i-THRIVE Programme Teams' Remote Working Project

Background to the Remote Working Quality Improvement Project

Initiated by the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures for COVID-19, the majority of services within the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust moved at pace to remote working using virtual means of delivery; predominantly Zoom and/or telephone for meetings, conferences, learning and contact with service users. Teams across the Trust had dedicated time and resources to ensure the move to remote working was as seamless as possible. This included the purchase of additional Zoom 'Pro' accounts within each directorate, as well as the generation of guidance and top tips for the technicalities and logistics of using Zoom, which were developed and disseminated via the Daily Digest and the Trust Intranet alongside other remote working resources.

In response to the move to remote delivery, the Trust embarked on a Quality Improvement project based on improving the user experience of remote working at staff, student and service user level, using QI methodology. The outcome measure was patient/student/staff ratings of their experience of remote sessions or meetings, and the overall Trust-wide aim was to improve patient and student experience of sessions/meetings or learning delivered virtually, measured on a scale of 1-100, with 1 being poor and 100 being excellent, within a dedicated timeframe (Table 1).

Table 1: 1-100 session ratings

100 - 90	Superior	The experience was better than face-to-face appointments
90 - 81	High quality	The experience was at least as good as face-to-face appointments
80 - 71	Good quality	Some very minor difficulties but generally good quality and useful
70 - 61	Small issue	A small issue in just one area, such as sound quality or timing of session
60 - 51	Several small issues	Issues occurring in more than one area, such as finding a private space or occasional glitching
50 - 41	Bigger problem	Major impairment to success in one domain, such as not being able to hear or see properly or frequent talking over one another
40 - 31	Several bigger problems	Major impairment to success in more than one domain
30 - 21	Severe difficulties	Some contact was made but it was not sustainable and the contact had to end in an unplanned way
20 - 11	Extreme difficulties	It was not possible to start or continue the meeting
11 - 1	Impossible	It was not conceivable to work in this way

New ways of working within the National i-THRIVE Programme Team

Whilst the National i-THRIVE Programme Team do not generally work directly with service users, it was felt that it would be an interesting exercise to utilise this opportunity to reflect on the potential advantages and disadvantages for our work. This was particularly poignant given that our 10th National Community of Practice event due to be held in Greater Manchester in March, was cancelled due to the national lockdown, and necessitated an alternative mode of delivery.

Practical Considerations

There was an inevitable concern that the commissioning of support from the Programme team might reduce in line with a change in priorities across the children and young people's workforce to managing



the acute impact of COVID-19. Indeed the scheduled events and trainings were either cancelled or postponed to late 2020/early 2021, which had a significant implications on the team's funding. However, this did create capacity for new areas of work, including the development of the i-THRIVE Academy e-learning modules and the co-production of the THRIVE Framework Animation; all of which made significant progress in this time and were formally launched at the National i-THRIVE Community of Practice webinar on October 1st.

The National i-THRIVE Programme Team had Trust laptops to enable relevant network drives to be accessed, and enable efficient remote working. Zoom meetings were organised and attended within the team and also with external stakeholders, with little disturbance to an effective way of working.

Method

From the week beginning 4th May 2020 until the week beginning 24th August 2020, the National i-THRIVE Programme team jointly rated each remote meeting using the Trust rating scale (Table 1). Ratings and qualitative information for the preceding weeks were compiled at each weekly team meeting. In accordance to the Trust guidance, the sessions were rated with the following in mind:

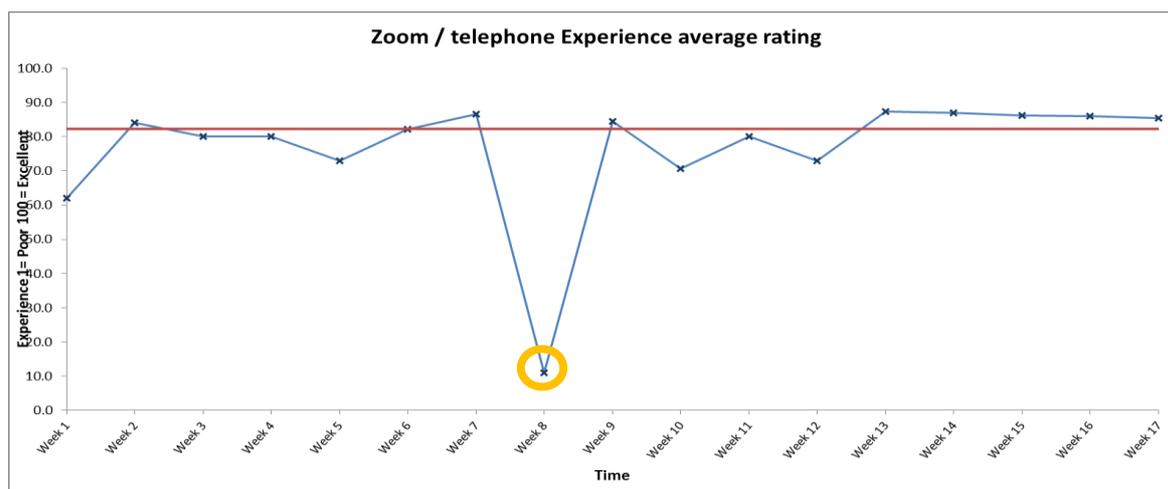
1. Technology (e.g. ease of using the computer, quality of connection, quality of sound)
2. Practical issues (e.g. having somewhere private to sit undisturbed, timing of the session)
3. Personal issues (e.g. relating to another person virtually, feeling connected)

It is important to note that although the Programme team embarked on this piece of work through the Trust-wide Remote Working QI Project, it was felt that the full toolkit of QI methodology was not needed at this time (i.e. creating a Driver Diagram, PDSA Cycles) as much of this work already aligned with that of the team, and the aim was to assess the advantages and disadvantages of remote working.

Key findings

In general, individual scores ranged from 11 to 95; whereas weekly scores ranged from 11 to 87.3, with a median of 82.3 (Graph 1), suggesting that meetings and virtual interactions were most frequently rated within the category of 'High Quality: The experience was at least as good as face-to-face appointments' (Table 1).

Graph 1: Run chart of the average of 1-100 ratings assigned across the 17 week period



The score of 11 in week 8 was one obvious outlier, and was due to an unplanned interruption to a scheduled meeting. The learning to take forward from this experience is to implement all measures to secure sessions in the virtual domain, as would be standard practice for face-to-face sessions.



General themes emerging from the data were that many meetings which might have previously been particularly resource-intensive regarding cost of venues, travel and additional resources, as well as travel time were facilitated more easily via remote means due to increased flexibility with diary management, whereby it was easier to organise meetings with a broad group of stakeholders who may have had conflicting schedules. For example, the quarterly i-THRIVE Partnership Board meetings, which would usually have been held in person at one of the partnership organisation locations, could be planned without booking additional resources such as meeting space, and travel time and cost.. Moreover, meetings could be arranged with shorter notice and resulted in higher attendance rates, which enabled rapid progression of projects. In addition, representatives from different implementation sites could easily be invited to attend meetings with new localities, thus enabling rich and increased dissemination of learning, and new opportunities to build supportive relationships between sites.

One enduring issue throughout the measurement period however was individuals' varying quality of technology. The team experienced a range of technological issues, from audio cutting out, to limited battery life on devices, to poor internet connection, which impacted the quality of remote meetings, as well as the general feeling of connectedness.

Top tips and key considerations

As a result of this work, the Programme team have identified a number of top tips and considerations for working remotely:

Consider the time and cost implications of travel

The positive environmental impact of a reduction in national and international travel is significant. In addition, arranging remote meetings increases productivity as there is reduced travel time and cost.

Balance face-to-face work with remote meetings

Not all meetings are suited to be held remotely. The team benefited from working from within the organisations main building on the days team meetings are scheduled, as this contact was crucial for maintaining the relationships between team members, supporting team members mental health and wellbeing, and facilitating creative thinking and planning which can sometimes be hindered by the limitations of remote platforms.

Prioritise security

Zoom has a number of safety features to ensure that uninvited attendees cannot access meetings. Ensure the 'Waiting Room' and 'Password' functions are in use for all meetings, particularly those which may include sensitive information or involve service users, and 'Lock' the room once all invited attendees have entered.

For sites using other methods of remote delivery, such as 'Microsoft Teams' or 'Google Meet', the same guidelines would apply. All systems have their own security features, and so it would be advisable to ensure compliance with this and wider organisational guidance before long-term use of remote means.

Choose your remote working account type

In terms of hosting webinars or virtual events, the 'Pro' version of Zoom has extensive features which better facilitate this, such as the option of creating 'Break-out rooms', i.e. smaller groups for discussion, as well as poll features, no time restriction, and the ability to host up to 100 participants. For our larger events however, we have utilised the Trust's 'Zoom Video Webinar' account, which additionally offers panellist features, a Q&A function and the ability to host to up to 500 attendees.

For those using Microsoft Teams, there are also differences between regular Teams and the free account. The licensed account offers additional features such as phone calls and audio conferencing, increased capacity up to 10,000 for online events and meeting recording.



Breaks

It is crucial to schedule regular breaks when working remotely, in order to reduce 'Zoom Fatigue' and any detrimental effects on physical and mental health and wellbeing. It can be tempting to organise back-to-back remote meetings due to how easy and accessible it is to do so. However it remains important to give yourself time to rest, re-energise and gather your thoughts before joining another remote meeting or undertaking a piece of work. One option would be to assure that meetings are scheduled to finish at 25 and 55 minutes past the hour to factor in comfort breaks, or to consider mandatory comfort breaks for meetings exceeding 90 minutes.

Consider potential technological Issues

It is likely that technological issues will be experienced at some point during remote working. Most organisations will have created and published guides to mitigate as much as possible. It is important to consider however that internet connection can vary according to your broadband plan and location, and there may be other issues depending on the quality of your device or circumstantial barriers, i.e. environment, number of people using the broadband connection at any one time, and wider provider connection issues.

If you experience connection issues whilst on a remote meeting, it can help to turn your video off and stay connected by audio only. If you are connected via laptop, this will usually have an integrated webcam and microphone. Desktop computers usually require a separate webcam, some of which do not have integrated microphones. If this is the case, a solution is to connect headphones or earphones with an in-built microphone. Doing so can improve the quality and volume of the sound as not all device speakers are able to amplify volume to the needed level.

Another issue flagged at our National i-THRIVE Programme Community of Practice webinar: [Digital Innovations through COVID-19](#) was the issue of sharing; in that the quality of documents and videos can be compromised if broadcasted via screen share, and so it may be advisable to circulate this content to meeting attendees in advance.

Be agile

In this time, much of the work planned had to pause due to the limitations imposed by COVID-19 and the restrictions on face-to-face engagement. Although this posed many challenges, being agile enabled the team to focus on important areas of work such as the development of the i-THRIVE Academy [e-Learning modules](#) and the continued co-production of the [THRIVE Framework Animation](#).

Get creative

Crucially, the THRIVE Framework Animation was co-produced with service users. An initial face-to-face workshop with the animators and a young person's participation group was held in January, with the intention that further groups would be held throughout the co-production process. However the IPC measures for COVID-19 meant that face to face meetings in person were not safe and this work was instead held via remote means. We were impressed by how well remote co-production worked, ensuring that the work could progress to completion.

If you would like more information about this project or would like guidance about how to embed Quality Improvement methodology to support local implementation of the THRIVE Framework contact us at ithriveinfo@tavi-port.nhs.uk.