

Unlocking covid-19 for sustainable reconstruction and development

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Microscope, Telescope or Kaleidoscope? Research responses to a 21st century plague

Provocations

1. In the context of the year we've just had, why conference now?
2. What pitfalls should we be avoiding in academic conferences?
3. Do you need more data on sustainable development and reconstruction?

1. What if I could help you think differently about research, about conferences?
2. What if I could give you a formulae for getting concrete results from this conference?

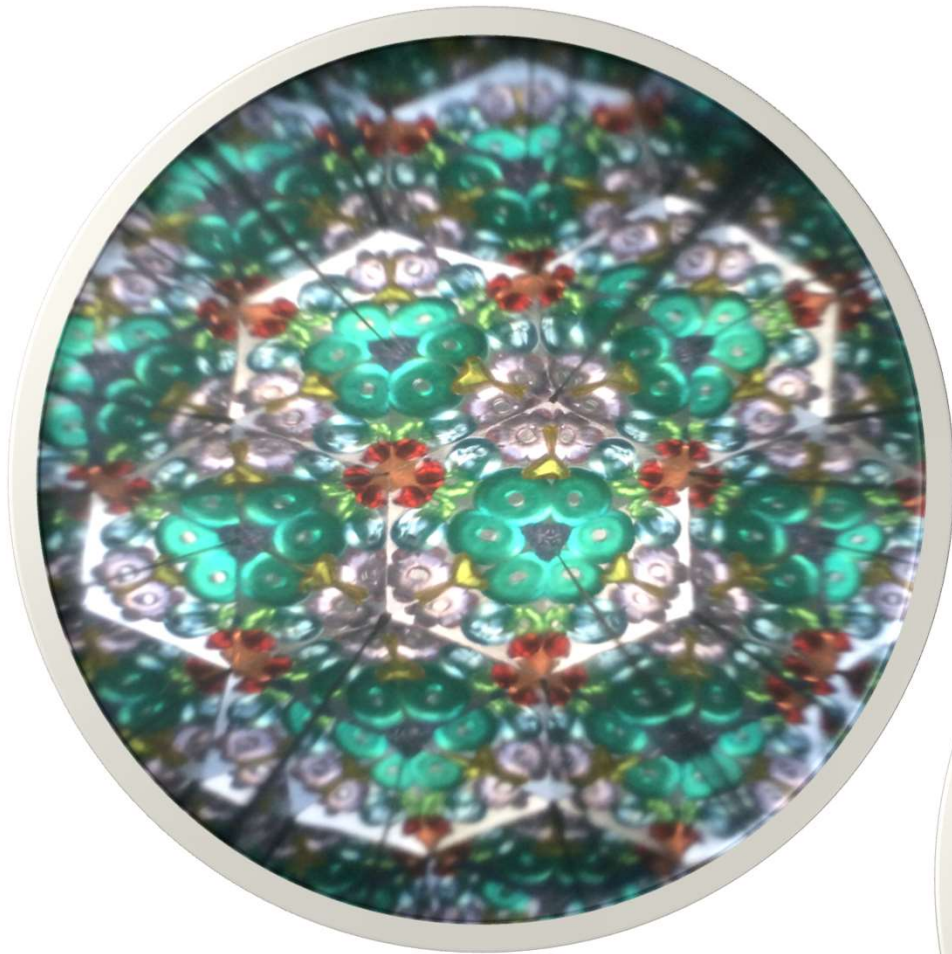
Outline

1. An enchantment, two stories and a picture
2. Recent Covid-related/inspired HSRC research
3. What we have learnt / what we have lost
4. A few tools to translate research into impact (and writing)
 - Elements of writing
 - Questions to answer
 - Approaches to research – the microscope, the telescope, the kaleidoscope

My enchantment with kaleidoscopes



Image credit: istockphoto.com



The Splendor of Color Kaleidoscope Video v1.1 1080p

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Two research stories

1. An “accepted” paper rejected
2. The Oxford Handbook of Global South Youth Studies

A picture

1. What do you see?
2. As a researcher how might you go about seeing/investigating/interpreting this picture?



Image credit: istockphoto.com



- Moons multiplying
- Sea of light
- Man rowing boat
- Harvesting moons
- New fishing technique

What we learnt/lost

1.Pivoting

Timing

Importance/Impact

Policy

LEARNT

1.W-L Balance

Travel

Culture

Collegiality/Creativity

LOST



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Microscope, Telescope or Kaleidoscope? Research responses to a 21st century plague

Recent HSRC Research (1)

1. **Economics:** A comparative history of **economic stimulus packages** – 2008 v. Covid; working from anywhere
2. **Inequality and social cohesion:** Social solidarity; race and racism parallel to Covid
3. **Education:** **Learning losses**; social protection function of schooling; **school readiness for return**; remote learning; epidemiology of disease amongst children

Recent IED Research (2)

4. **People's science and spatiality:** People's experiences and strategies to cope with lockdown, migration, death and funerals. More granular approaches needed, heterogenous policies.
5. **Health: 4 surveys**
 - Food security with FAO and DAFF
 - Unemployment
 - Knowledge
 - Lockdown compliance

Good academic research

1. What's the problem? (Introduction)
2. What has been said about it before? (Lit. review)
- 3. *What's the research question?***
4. What's the theory you are using? (Conceptual framing)
5. How did you try to answer it? (Methodology)
6. What did you find? (Findings)
7. What does it mean? (Discussion)
- 8. *What's your argument?***
9. What should change? (Recommendations)

Critical elements of academic writing

1. Discipline
2. Structure
3. Logic
4. Detail
5. Importance
6. Audience



The microscope

1. Why are you looking so deeply here?
2. What are you looking for?
3. Why does it matter?
4. What are you missing by only looking so deeply?
5. Is your microscope powerful enough?



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The telescope



1. What did you see?
2. What does it mean?
3. Why did you look there, and not elsewhere?
4. What did you miss by looking only there?
5. What are the chances that you are colour blind, or short sighted?



The kaleidoscope

an optical instrument
consisting of mirrors
that reflects light off coloured glass
through a viewer
new pictures emerge
as the viewer is rotated
and light illuminates various shards
and produces new patterns.

“ There is no such thing as a new idea. It is impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope. We give them a turn and they make new combinations. We keep on turning and making new combinations indefinitely; but they are the same of pieces of coloured glass that have been in use through all the ages ”

- Mark Twain -

“ [Research under Covid] ...is a lot like looking at the world through a kaleidoscope. You look at a set of elements, the same ones everyone sees, but then reassemble those floating bits and pieces into an enticing new possibility ”

- Rosabeth Canter, Harvard Business School -

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The kaleidoscope

1. What's the problem?
2. What has been said about it before?
- 3. *What important question are you asking now?***
4. What's the theory you are using? Are there others?
Multiple theories? From different disciplines?
5. How did you try to answer it? Only one way? Why?
6. What does it mean? What alternative explanations?
- 7. *What's your argument?*** What should change?



The kaleidoscope

From a recent Wits ad for postgraduate students:

“The imperative to wear many ‘hats’ to solve problems and advance in every field needs a multi-disciplinary approach, often in one turnkey role,

which makes **multi-skilling**

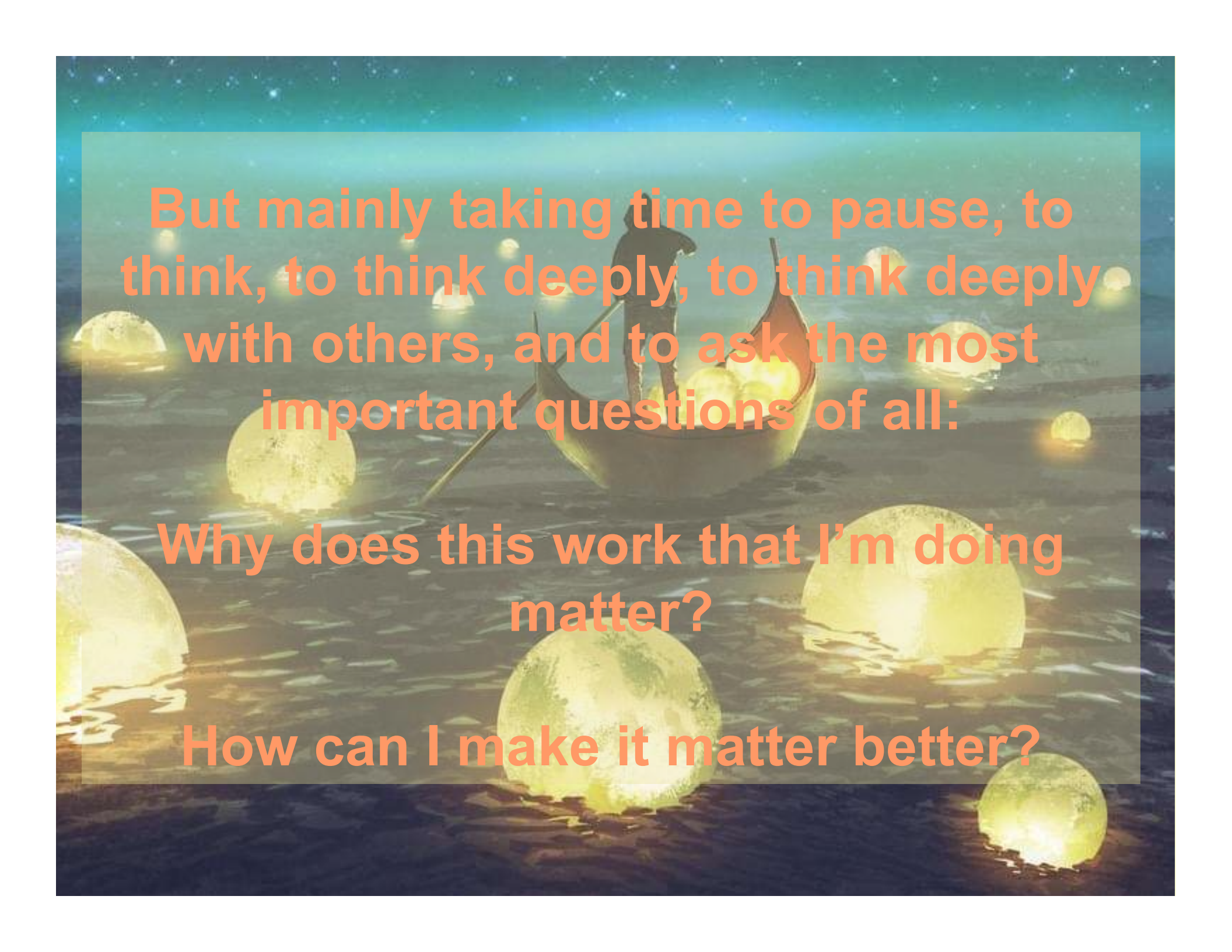
the new **multi-tasking**

in a **multi-role** workplace.

“The silos need to be broken down”.



A new way of seeing change,
not as a single reflection but rather,
as a series of opportunities to be harvested,
by changing our perspective,
adopting new lenses (and scopes),
working together across silos,
until new patterns emerge.

A person in a small boat is seen from behind, navigating a dark sea under a starry night sky. The water is filled with numerous glowing, spherical objects that resemble moons or planets, creating a surreal and dreamlike atmosphere. The text is overlaid on this scene in a bright orange color.

But mainly taking time to pause, to think, to think deeply, to think deeply with others, and to ask the most important questions of all:

Why does this work that I'm doing matter?

How can I make it matter better?