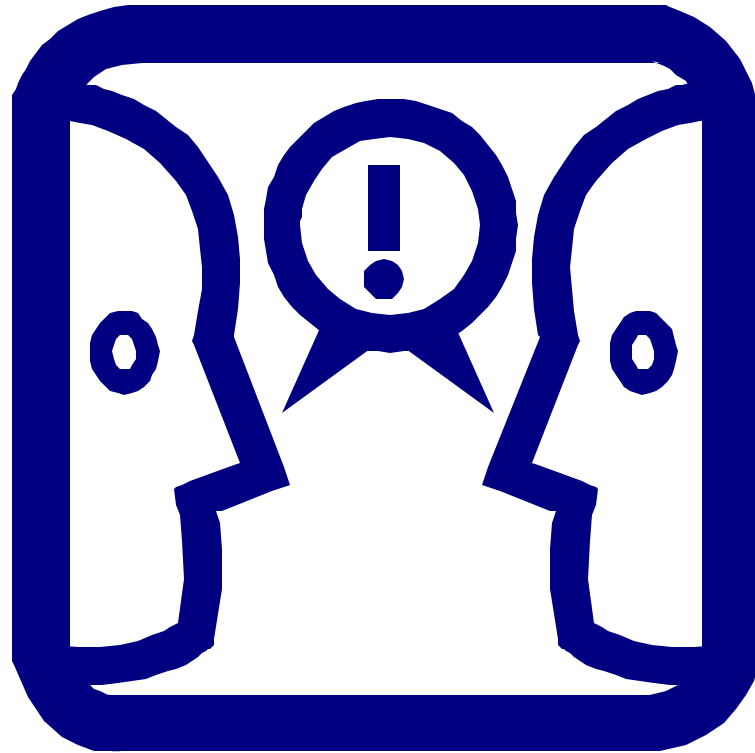


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COALITION DES ORGANISMES COMMUNAUTAIRES QUÉBÉCOIS DE LUTTE CONTRE LE
SIDA

Creating the tools we need



A model for appropriating knowledge, adapting community organising interventions, and developing expertise in community research using the results of scientific research and project evaluations

A project of the “Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida” (COCQ-Sida) from 1998 to 2000

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Introduction

This tool for appropriating knowledge and adapting community organising interventions was developed as a three-phase project over a three-year period.

The objective of the first and second phases was to create an “interface” between the researchers from the **OMEGA Cohort**¹ and community organisers from both non-governmental and governmental organisations.

The objective of the third phase was to improve the health of the gay male population in Quebec and Canada by encouraging the transfer and appropriation of community research expertise to community organisers working in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention. The goal was to allow the community workers to adapt their direct interventions using new knowledge coming from research and, at the same time, influencing that research.

The global project resulted in a variety of different experiences, some more successful than others. The final result presented here is a simple and flexible results-oriented tool. We hope it will be useful for others.

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- 1 The OMEGA Cohort is a Montreal research project, funded by NHRDP, which is studying the sexual and psychosocial behaviours of 2 000 men who have affective and sexual relations with other men. The project started in 1997

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STRUCTURES : THE MODEL

The proposed model is intended:

- 1] To transfer to community workers knowledge about the analysis of the research results;
- 2] To assure the appropriation of this knowledge by the community workers by permitting them to identify the implications it could have in their daily practice;
- 3] To permit community workers to propose themes for future research that will permit them to better play their role;
- 4] To develop among the community workers an interest in, and skills for, community-based research;
- 5] To create a simple form for evaluating the process and how the objectives were achieved in order to communicate the results to other community groups working on the question of HIV/AIDS in Canada.

The basic concept of the model is to organise a series of three-day province wide meetings for community workers who specialise in the prevention of HIV transmission. Each meeting is composed of a series of presentations by the researchers in plenary sessions, followed by discussion workshops.

A) The researchers present the results of their research analysis

During the first part, in the plenary sessions, the researchers explain the analysis they have made of the epidemiological and social/psychological research. At the same time, they open the possibility of interpreting these results in relation to existing grassroots prevention programs. They also present the elements of the research analysis on which they are presently working. The basic format is:

Steps	Activities	Important considerations:
Before the meeting Choice of themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group of community workers with field experience determine the themes to be chosen. • The choices should be made based on the expressed needs of community workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particular attention should be given to the selection of members of the group: they should have a commonality of interests and experience. • Themes should be chosen according to the expressed needs of the group.
Before the meeting; Information coming from scientific research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in collaboration with the researchers during the whole process • Collection of research outputs, collection of the results, evaluation of pertinence based on needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particular attention should be given to the potential for transferring information into effective interventions or for adapting existing activities.
During the meeting Plenary sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researchers present the results in a clear, simplified fashion addressing activities at the grassroots level. • The participants intervene in the process by posing questions aimed at clarifying the meaning of the results presented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The choice of participants is essential at this point: it is important that there is a certain homogeneity of knowledge and expertise. Discrepancies on these points result in questions that are either not pertinent or too advanced for some participants. • More than sixty participants limits opportunities for participation.

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B) Workshops on the significance of the research results on prevention work at the grassroots level and discussions of the possibilities for modifications based on new information

The community workers form workshops where they discuss the research results and the possibilities for interpretation presented by the researchers, analysing the implications of new information in their regular work and determining the possibilities for modifying their activities based on this input. This approach is interesting because it assures that, at the end of the meeting, the community workers will have already understood the real implications of the analysis presented. A suggested model follows:

Steps	Activities	Important considerations
Preparing the workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing the facilitators for the workshops • Preparing the pertinent documents • Involving the researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A preparatory meeting for the researchers, the research coordinator, and the facilitators is necessary so that the facilitators have a solid grasp of the data/analysis. • A summary of the information to be presented should be prepared for each participant. • The presence of the researchers at this step is essential.
Holding the workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participants are divided into workshop groups at the end of each presentation to discuss, appropriate, and comment on the contents of the presentation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop sessions should be at least two hours. • Each workshop should be limited to 10-12 participants. • Workshop participants can be grouped together by territory, common interests, skills, etc.. It is important at this point to assure that all the participants in a workshop have the same knowledge base.
Appropriating new information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop facilitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At this point, the facilitation should orient the workshop to the use of the new information for programs to be developed or modified. • The presence of the researchers at this step is essential.

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C) Using the workshops to determine research questions to be developed

In the workshops, the community workers determine the questions that remain unanswered after analysis and discussions. These questions take five forms :

- 1] Questions directed at a better understanding of the presentations and the analysis that was made; these questions are answered by the researchers in each workshop;
- 2] Questions that require a deeper analysis of the information presented; these questions are handed over to the researchers for more complete analysis;
- 3] Questions that require a deeper analysis of the information based on data which already exists but is not yet analysed; these questions are returned to the researchers for additional analysis;
- 4] Questions concerning a new area to be explored following the research presently underway; these questions are returned to the researchers for integration into the existing research;
- 5] Questions concerning new areas to be explored by new research; these questions require new requests for community research financing.

The community workers are now in a position to influence research directly. Some of them will probably decide to develop their own research projects, according to their interests, starting with the questions raised by their peers. At this point, the importance of creating a community research infrastructure capable of providing expertise in research and of developing the research capacities of community workers should be pointed out. The approach is as follows:

Steps	Activities	Important considerations
Proposals and suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• During the workshops, the participants provide indications of research to be made and suggestions for en-	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The presence of the researchers at this step is essential.

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D) Returning to the plenary session

Once back in plenary session, each workshop presents the results of its deliberations; recommendations are made, either at the level of modifications to existing field activities and the creation of new activities, or at the level of new areas for research.

Steps	Activities	Important considerations
Plenary Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presenting the results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care should be taken that the plenary session does not become a “replay” of the workshop and its discussions.

E) Evaluation of the process and the results.

During the workshop and the plenary session, a quantitative evaluation is made as follows:

Steps	Activities	Important considerations
Analysis and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribution of an evaluation questionnaire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At this point, the quality of the work can be evaluated, if only for the present (number of participants, degree of satisfaction regarding the organisation, the facilities, the location, etc.) At the follow-up meeting, a qualitative evaluation can be done concerning the actualisation of the recommendations that were made, either modifications to existing activities or the creation of new activities.

F) Follow-Up

After the meetings, it is important to have a follow-up for each of the participants, to verify the implementation of modifications to activities as planned, to help the participants create new activities, to help with fund raising, etc.

This follow-up should assure the integration of the necessary modifications at the grassroots level based on the new information obtained. This step should also insure that the community workers have the support necessary to make the required changes, changes that could be, in some situations, structural in nature

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SUMMARY DEFINITION OF TASKS

Research co-ordinator: half-time position.

Qualities:

- capacity for research and intervention in HIV prevention in the gay men's community
- excellent knowledge of homosexuality and the gay male community
- understanding of the concept of Gay Health.

Description of tasks:

- supervise the organisation of the meetings
- prepare the reports for each step
- assure interface between the researchers and the participants
- support the transfer of expertise in Quebec and Canada
- prepare and present the final report on the model for transferring expertise, appropriating knowledge, and influencing research.

Evaluation co-ordinator: half time position.

Qualities:

- skill in quantitative and qualitative evaluation
- excellent knowledge of HIV prevention work
- excellent knowledge of homosexuality and the gay male community.

Description of tasks:

- prepare evaluation tools
- prepare the reports for each step
- support the transfer of expertise in Quebec and Canada
- prepare and present the final evaluation report on the model for transferring expertise, appropriating knowledge, and influencing research.

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Supervisory Committee: volunteer positions

Mandate: Contribute to the efficient and effective appropriation of knowledge between the worlds of research and community work by supervising the modification of intervention tools aimed at specific clientele. To do this, the Committee:

- receives the global research results
- determines the themes for the meetings
- receives the results of the research co-ordinator's preliminary work
- assures the integration and collaboration of community groups
- supervises and assures the transfer of expertise
- approves the evaluation strategy and tools.

Composition: The Supervisory Committee is composed of prevention workers from the community groups.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the first provincial meeting, participants essentially worked on those points directly related to intervention activities, while, at the second meeting, they said they wanted to work on those issues that went beyond the actual interventions.

Considering the results and the difficulties identified by participants and observed in their daily work, there seems to be a need to:

- 1] follow up on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of prevention intervention projects.
- 2] provide community groups with technical support for presenting their projects following the meetings, and offer training in community research techniques.
- 3] support the appropriation of the Omega Cohort's data and its use in practical grass-roots applications.
- 4] support community groups in their political activities and lobbying aimed at their funders.

Appendix: Creating the tools we need – Phase I

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the first phase of “Creating the tools we need” was to create an “interface” between the researchers from the OMEGA Cohort and community workers from both governmental and non-governmental organisations. Using the analysis provided by the researchers, this “interface” is intended to:

- 1] Conceive practical action programs aimed at better HIV transmission prevention for MASM (men who have affective and sexual relations with other men);
- 2] Develop psychosocial interventions that are effective “upstream” from HIV transmission situations;
- 3] Inform the researchers of the specific information needs as expressed by the partner groups in order to assure that the collection of data and analysis responds to these needs;
- 4] Evaluate the needs of the community organisations from the perspective of program implementation;
- 5] Assure the establishment and the sound operation of these prevention programs;
- 6] Support the community groups in their political activities and lobbying aimed at their funders.

An Advisory Committee made up of researchers from the OMEGA Cohort, a representative of COCQ-Sida (financial trustee), and representatives from each participating group was formed. The Advisory Committee supervised a community-based program developer and a community organiser who assumed the role of “interface” between OMEGA and the groups and community organisers working in the gay male community.

IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

The first phase (from January to March 1998) led to the development of an intervention program involving Action Séro-Zéro. This organisation is the principal actor in HIV-prevention programs working with Montreal's community of men who have affective and sexual relations with other men (MASM).

Essentially, starting from the OMEGA researchers' analysis of their data, a program for group interventions aimed at serodiscordant couples (one partner seropositive, the other seronegative) was created to improve safe sex behaviour related to HIV transmission in these couples. The project co-ordinator planned the contents of a series of workshops specifically designed for this clientele. The objective of this first phase was to verify if the researchers' analysis was transferable to direct prevention interventions.

Appendix: Creating the tools we need – Phase I

RESULTS

At the end of this step, the following results were achieved :

- 1] creation of a complete workshop on communication within gay male couples
- 2] creation of complete workshops (that were partially tested) on communication within serodiscordant gay male couples
- 3] creation of a complete manual, designed for transferring knowledge and expertise, on the workshops for gay male couples
- 4] creation of a complete manual, designed for transferring knowledge and expertise, on the workshop for serodiscordant gay male couples
- 5] developing skills for using the concept of “identity age”
- 6] exhaustive evaluation of the process developed during this step
- 7] identification of the specific difficulties encountered and their solutions
- 8] the publication of pertinent documentation.

This project was intended as an opportunity to experiment with a unique model of knowledge transfer from the world of research to community group interventions. It tried to create, starting with the results of scientific research, specific interventions for a targeted clientele. The interventions were created but they were not integrated into the host organisation and co-ordination of the project was cumbersome. The final results allowed for a better understanding of the process of appropriation and transfer of knowledge.

Appendix: Creating the tools we need – Phase II

OBJECTIVES

This second phase took place between March 1998 and March 1999. The objectives, including those already identified in Phase 1 above, were to:

- 1] permit the community-based program developer to support the community organiser in implementing the workshops for gay male serodiscordant couples
- 2] validate the concept of identity age with focus groups and community prevention workers
- 3] identify more precisely the type of interventions that could be made starting with the concept of identity age.

RESULTS

The infrastructure that was put in place was cumbersome and did not really help the prevention workers. The data analysis was not complete enough to permit the transfer into interventions of what was, all things considered, more intuition than complete analysis. The workers did not seem concerned by the project, tending to see it as something beyond their field of expertise.

One of the realisations of these two phases was that it is important to take the necessary time to study the research analysis in depth and to design a flexible infrastructure, incorporating, as much as possible, community-based prevention workers. Finally, it is necessary to put the emphasis on the appropriation of knowledge, its integration into existing programs, and, principally, to assure that the community workers can develop their knowledge and their aptitudes for research.

Appendix: Creating the tools we need – Phase III

I– PROJECT GOAL

Improving the health of the gay male population of Quebec and Canada by favouring the transfer and appropriation of expertise in community research to community workers who specialise in programs for the prevention of the transmission of HIV. This is intended to permit them to adapt their direct interventions according to new information resulting from research and, at the same time, permitting them to influence the research.

II- OBJECTIVES

1- Offer to community workers tools that will permit them:

- to develop expertise in community research
- to become involved in research-action
- to influence research when this is necessary.

2- Develop a procedure that will improve exchanges between community-based researchers and university-based researchers in order to:

- systematise the diffusion of research results
- encourage the development of programs that address problems that are identified by research.

3- Communicate the knowledge acquired by achieving objectives 1 and 2 throughout Quebec and Canada.

III- ACTIVITIES

Two provincial meetings of HIV prevention workers from the gay male community were organised. These meetings, lasting 3 days each, had as objectives:

- To transfer – to community prevention workers from the gay milieu – knowledge of the OMEGA Cohort's analysis of its research results.
- To assure the appropriation by the community workers of this new knowledge, by allowing them to identify the implications it could have in their daily practice and by adapting their programs accordingly.
- To permit the community workers to propose themes for future research that would aid them in their work.
- To develop in some community workers the interest in, and skills for, community research.