Setting Up a Peer Review Process for CBOs: Conflicts and Challenges

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Project:
# Establishing Structures for Quality Assurance of HIV Prevention for ASOs in Germany

- Partners: WZB and Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe (DAH)
- Funder: Federal Center for Health Education (Ministry of Health)
- Timeline: 2006-2008
- Needs assessment: 2004-2005

# The National German AIDS Service Organisation

- Founded in 1983 by the Aids-Hilfe movement
- 116 Member ASOs
- 1 National Office

Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe E.V.:
Community Focused prevention
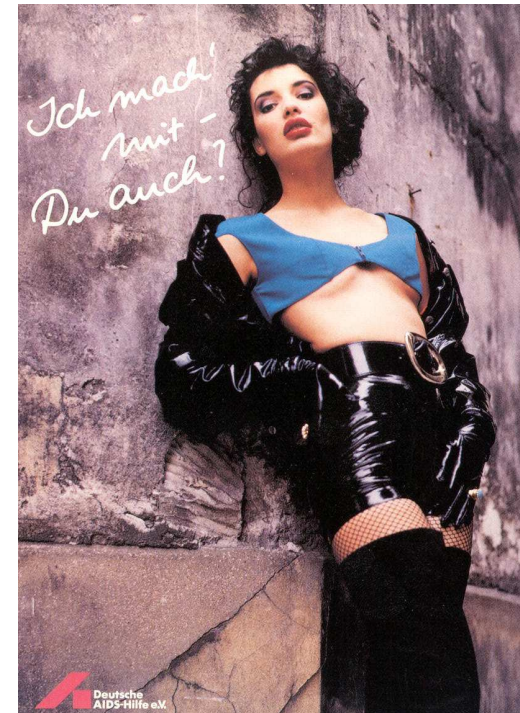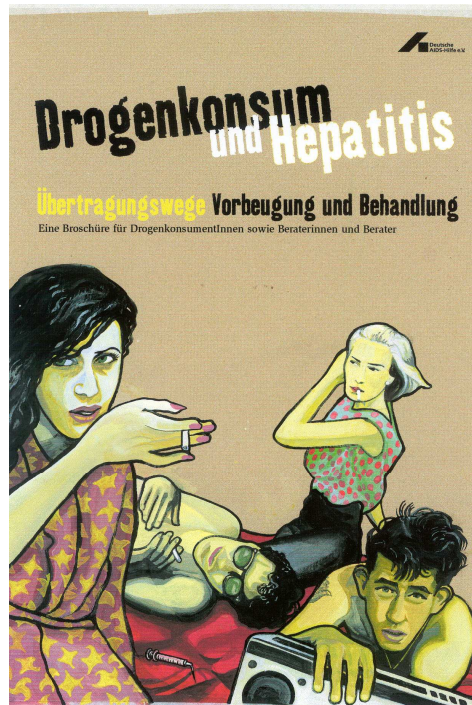
Theoretical Basis: Structural Prevention

– Focussing on behavior in the social and political context

– Enhancing self-esteem and self-efficacy (e.g. for gay men)

– Working towards legal reforms (e.g. regarding drug use)

– "Making the healthy choice the easy choice!"
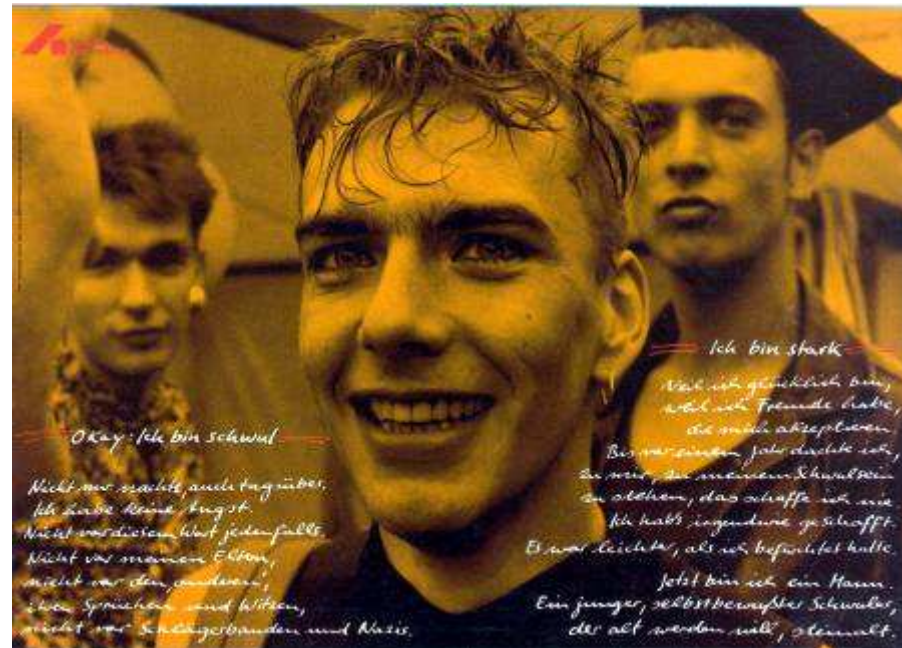
Goals of WZB/DAH Project

– National demonstration project to promote quality development through participatory research

– Filling the structural gap for quality assurance in community work in HIV prevention

– Contributing to the establishment of national structures for institutionalizing prevention services for socially disadvantaged groups

Guiding Principles

- – Action research
- – Community-driven questions and explanations (local theory)
- – Community-driven methods (local quality assurance)
- – Developing methods which are:
  - – Tailor-made
  - – Practical
  - – Useful
  - – Participatory
  - – Sound
- – Focus on quality assurance

Project Components

1. **Skill-Building Workshops**
   - participatory curriculum, participatory methods

2. **Methods Handbook**
   - internet based, interactive

3. **Individualized Consulting**
   - project-driven focus

4. **Quality Colloquium** (formerly: Peer Review Process)
   - focus on prevention for MSM

5. **Network of Researchers**
   - promoting a new discussion in German on participatory research

Quality Colloquium – Pragmatic Basis

– Workers' need for input from outside their projects

- – Results of needs assessment
- – More than an idea exchange or problem solving between projects
- – Critical appraisal with no effect on funding

Quality Colloquium – Theoretical Basis

- Quality is not an objective category
  - Defined in the context of a discussion (discourse)
- Various stakeholders play an important role in the discussion
  - Community members, project workers, funders, researchers
- Involving key stakeholders in a formal review process makes implicit processes explicit
  - Greater transparency
 - Setting of norms which extend beyond the review process

Quality Colloquium – Theoretical Basis

–   Provides a forum for producing new forms of evidence for public health

–   *Judicial Principle* (Keith Tones)

  –   Decision of a jury (of one's peers)

  –   Plausibility ("beyond a reasonable doubt")

  –   Validity of evidence is not restricted to scientific categories

  –   Social consensus plays a central role

–   Diffusion of participatory norms

  –   Through experience of participants

  –   Through changing membership among the reviewers

Quality Colloquium: Structure and Goals

- Voluntary

- Question defined by the presenting project

- Formal feedback on community-based work

  - "diagnostic" function (strengths and weaknesses)

  - not a certification

- Panel consisting of community member, service provider, funder, researcher

  - from a different region than the presenting project
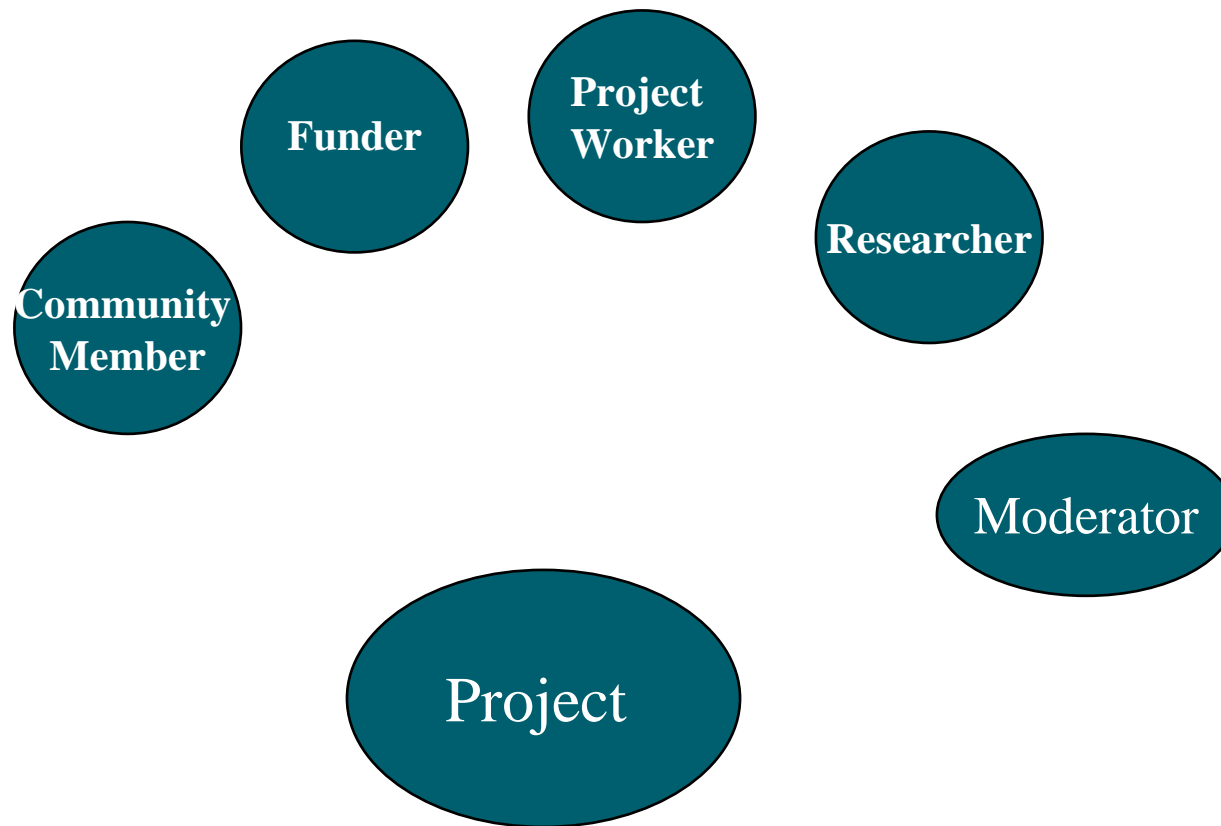
Quality Colloquium: Process

1. **Information from Projects**
   - annual report, completed questionnaire (including a description of their question)
2. **Invitation to Reviewers**
   - Based on needed expertise
3. **Colloquium**
   - 4 hours per project
   - Dialogue between project and reviewers until project's question is answered
   - Feedback from the project to the reviewers and the moderator
   - Meeting of the reviewers to reflect on their work
4. **Documentation/ Reflection**
   - Project worker summarizes what s/he learned
   - Reviewers summarize as a group what they have learned (with particular attention to the review process itself)
5. **Diffusion of Results**
   - Basic information presented (description of project, question, names of all participants, date of the colloquium)
   - Lessons learned by the participants
6. **Follow-up with the project**
   - What effect has the input had on the work of the project?

Issues for Discussion

– Fear of being "judged" vs.
  Creating a supportive atmosphere of critical appraisal

– Building a pool of reviewers (particularly funders)

– Nationally or regionally based?

– Incentives for projects to present their work

– Incentives for reviewers

Advice/ Feedback 1

– **Interesting model – extension of community advisory board model ("board swapping") overcoming conflicts of interest**
– **Comparability of regions?**
  – **Would probably be adapted over time to the culture and context of each region**
– **Legitimizing the boards over time important, incorporation/ recognition from other review processes**
– **Follow-up with the board: Effects on the board members in their own work as a result of serving on the board**
– **Discussion period between the review board and the project is important – very different than other review processes – opportunity to clarify the points – crucial to the success**

Advice/ Feedback 2

– **Bias and accountability**
  – **Importance of work ahead of time on the part of the reviewers, reflecting on their own bias in the rule (managing their ego in the context of the role) – not the typical role in everyday work**
  – **Change process at individual level over the course of the discussion – your mind might change during the discussion – Need for reflection as a group in between?**
– **Importance of a common language among all reviewers and respect for difference/ homogeneity of perspectives – a key task of the moderator**
– **Practicality/ Representation**
  – **Might need more community representation to assure balance of view/ opinion**
  – **Diversity of reviewers, or always the same people**
  – **Administration of the process**
– **Accountability**
  – **What happens if the project of low quality?**

Advice/ Feedback 3

– **How do you assure a commonness in the view of quality among the reviewers?**
  – **Discussion among the reviewers as a way to achieve that**
– **Conflict between the project and the review panel – how to resolve**
– **Setting up a culture of discourse is central element**
  – **How best to do that?**
  – **How much structure (training) or developed as one goes**
– **How are peers chosen? (Bias)**
  – **Boundaries, type of feedback**
– **Role of the facilitator in driving the process – does that distract from participatory intent**
– **How does the group come to concensus?**
  – **Open-ended or consensus driven?**
– **How does it relate to other models?**
  – **Continuous Quality Improvement**
  – **Other practice models around quality**