Turning Research into Action

PAR — Participatory Action Research

- PAR is a “systematic investigation, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for the purposes of education and taking action or effecting social change.”

Fundamental Characteristics

- It is participatory
- It is a cooperative and co-learning process
- It involves systems development and local community capacity building
- It is an empowering process
- It achieves a balance between research and action

Why Promote Participatory Research?

Research Steps

1. Defining research needs/priorities
2. Recruitment and data collection
3. Data analysis
4. Dissemination/taking action on the research findings

Impacted Population

- Culinary Workers Union Local 226, Las Vegas, Nevada
- Low wage, immigrant (85%), women (99%) workers
- Experiencing high stress, injuries, musculoskeletal disorders?
- Experiencing growing workloads?
- [Union approaches LOHP 1 year before contract negotiations (2002)]

Union Goals

1. Document health, workload, stress, injury and work organization
2. Support internal organizing & leadership development
3. Win a good work conditions (labor contract) that includes improved workload for GRAs.
1. Research Design – How to involve room attendants in identifying research needs and priorities?
   - Workforce—10,000 room attendants in 39 major hotels
   - 75% Spanish speaking
   - 11% English
   - 5% Tagalog
   - 1% Vietnamese
   - 1% Mandarin
   - 1% Serbo-Croation
   - 6% other

2. Research Design - (Part I Focus Groups)
   1. Focus groups of 35 room cleaners leaders to define questions, review instrument, plan logistics.
   2. 7 sessions held every other week—3 hours after work
   3. Simultaneous translation—Spanish.

Focus Group Activities to identify research needs and priorities
   - Body-charting and risk mapping
   - Mock hotel rooms—i.d. ergonomic risk factors
   - Break out tasks/stressors/increases in workload...(specialty beds, coffee pots, ironing boards, etc.)
   - Problem-solving
   - Framing the message, going back and organizing

2. Research Design - (Part II Survey)
   - Conduct a survey with room attendants
   - Union selected of 5 representative hotels:
     - Upscale tourist
     - Convention/mid-level tourist
     - All-suite tour
     - Mid-level tour/travel
     - Old economy tour
   - Participation GOAL – 65%

3. Research Design - (Part III Blood Pressure)
   - 591 GRAs from the 5 study hotels participate in a 24 hour monitoring of heart rate and blood pressure
   - 296 GRAs participated in a blood pressure screening during the survey
• Findings: 39% of GRAs have hypertension. For comparison, 25% of adult US population has high blood pressure.

4. Recruitment and Data Collection

• Trained room attendants to conduct outreach education and recruitment
• Trained multi-lingual survey helpers [Room attendants and workers from other hotels & UNLV students]
• Trained on human subjects protocols

• 74% survey participation rate (941 room cleaners completed survey out of 1276)
• 70% participation in blood pressure screening (887 out of 1276)

5. Data Analysis

• Researchers entered data, provided simple frequency tables by hotel
• Focus group of 34 reconvened
• Reviewed and discussed findings in small groups (e.g. room credits for suites, messy rooms)

66% of GRA’s skipped lunch breaks or took shorter breaks in order to complete their room assignments.

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<th>Luxor</th>
<th>Bally’s</th>
<th>Rio</th>
<th>Mirage</th>
<th>Stardust</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%</td>
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I have constant time pressure due to a heavy workload.

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<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>90%</td>
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Ten most frequent occurring problems across all hotels.

• Clean large glass or mirror doors.
• Too many beds.
• Problems dusting high or low area in room.
• Call in from each room.
• Problems dusting high or low areas in room.
• Clean marble sinks.
• Lots of garbage left in the room.
• Restock missing supplies on cart.
• Bathrooms very wet and dirty.
• Clean chrome or brass fixtures.
• Food left in room on tables or carpet or extra scrubbing in bathroom.

More Key Findings
• Overall health status of GRA is worse than general population, score of 39 verses 72 for general US population
• Over 78% report work-related pain or discomfort
  – Only 21% formally reported
  – 33% said they had to take a drug test after reporting an injury or illness
  – Only 46% got well before returning to work
  – After returning to work 36% missed additional days because of their injury. 21% received a warning for missing work
• 83% took pain medication in the last 4 weeks

A Few Key Findings
• I was encouraged to say what was bothering me at work. 83% almost never/sometimes.
• I learned to live with stress because there was nothing I could do about it. 63%
• I was usually able to solve the problem. 79% almost never/sometimes
• When I complained about the problem things improved. 87% almost never/sometimes

6. Dissemination/ Taking Action
• Union Meetings
• Video
• Presentations at the bargaining table
  – researchers
  – room cleaners
• GRA activism “Follow the housekeepers to justice!”
• On May 16th, 18,800 workers vote “yes” to strike verses 877 “no” votes.
• GRA actions at each hotel: new sponges, changed uniform for easier movement, etc.
• GRAs report on committee building successes: new recruits, inroads to groups that were difficult to reach, commitments to participate, etc.
• Reports on committee discussions: paid by the shift, not by the room. Don’t buy rooms, agree to clean more rooms if it comes with OT pay.

Workers Target of Hotel Action
• 23 workers are fired at Rio hotel for wearing red solidarity ribbons in support of the GRA struggle
• 5 workers at Circus Circus are attacked in the employee cafeteria by security officers while conducting a meeting to discuss GRA issues

Union Demands
• Increase contributions to health fund
• Address workload for GRAs (examples)
  – 14 rooms maximum (account for suites and penthouses)
– Check-out language
– Travel language
– Ergonomic study
– Improve communication
– Review injury and illness reporting
– Options to wear pants or skirt
– Review current use and practice – cleaning products

Outcome
• Empowerment of participants/leadership development!
• Over 20,000 workers participate in strike vote. 18,800 vote yes, 877 vote no, scores turned away by police.
• Strike set for June 1st.

Applying fundamentals of participatory research can be challenging
• Examples of challenges?
  • Community perspective?
  • University perspective?

• Union - would the data provide evidence of why R/As were getting hurt? Would we benefit from this study?

• University - could the union mobilize members for action without compromising scientific protocols?

• Could the researchers respect the needs of the union and also maintain methodological rigor and scientific integrity of the study?

Research gitters.....
“This was like a marriage with no chance of getting a divorce in case things didn’t work out.”
  Union representative

How would you calm the jitters?

“When the union representative said, “We are comfortable with the process and will abide by the findings.” That statement set a tone of mutual trust.”

  University researcher

Community Partners - What to look for?

Researchers
As the researcher....
1. Do you really get participatory research?
2. Will you take the time to make this work?
3. Do you have good inter-personal skills?
4. Are you aware that this may not advance your career as effectively as other types of research?

**When applying participatory research, are you?**
- starting from the experiences of the community?
- including critical analysis?
- getting to the stage of talking about action?
- leaving people with more leadership skills?
- challenging people to question their role in the community, society?

**Summary**
1. Take needed time to reach a mutually acceptable process
2. Pay attention to how the field-work is conducted, create a safe, respectful and learning environment for the community
3. Find the right partners
4. Check yourself