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**ESG UQÀM**  
École des sciences de la gestion  
Université du Québec à Montréal



**Institut national  
de santé publique  
Québec**

**“Les mécanismes essentiels d’intégration visant à renforcer les capacités d’absorption des écoles au regard d’approches novatrices en promotion de la santé”\***

*(The key mechanisms of integration to strengthen the absorptive capacity of schools in terms of innovative approaches in health promotion)*

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## Research Background (1/2)

- **Innovation**
  - *Healthy Schools (HS) Approach*: to promote health in school context inspired by Health Promoting School (World Health Organization, 2003)
  - *Challenge*: incorporation of HS into the core business of schools
  - *Building schools' capacity* : essential to improve their potential of becoming settings conducive to educational achievement, health and well-being of all youth
- **Québec Joint Initiative**
  - Agreement between Ministry of Health and Social Services and Ministry of Education and Sports to adopt and develop an HS Approach for Elementary and High Schools (Gouvernement du Québec, 2005)
- **Research Program**
  - Results of this presentation are part of the implementation phase: *schools' capabilities to absorb innovation*

## Research Background (2/2)

### ■ **HS Approach**

- Merges Educational and Health issues within the Success Plan of schools
- Implies substantial changes in way schools and staff incorporate schools' health
- Set of multi-level interventions to develop social competencies, physical activities and healthy lifestyle among youth
- Implies various stakeholders (*school directors, teachers, students, parents, community and support and training from the regional administrative board*)
- Guide proposing operational deployment of the approach (ex. Create multidisciplinary team; develop action plan: needs assessment, set priorities, select list of projects, etc.)

## Research Methods

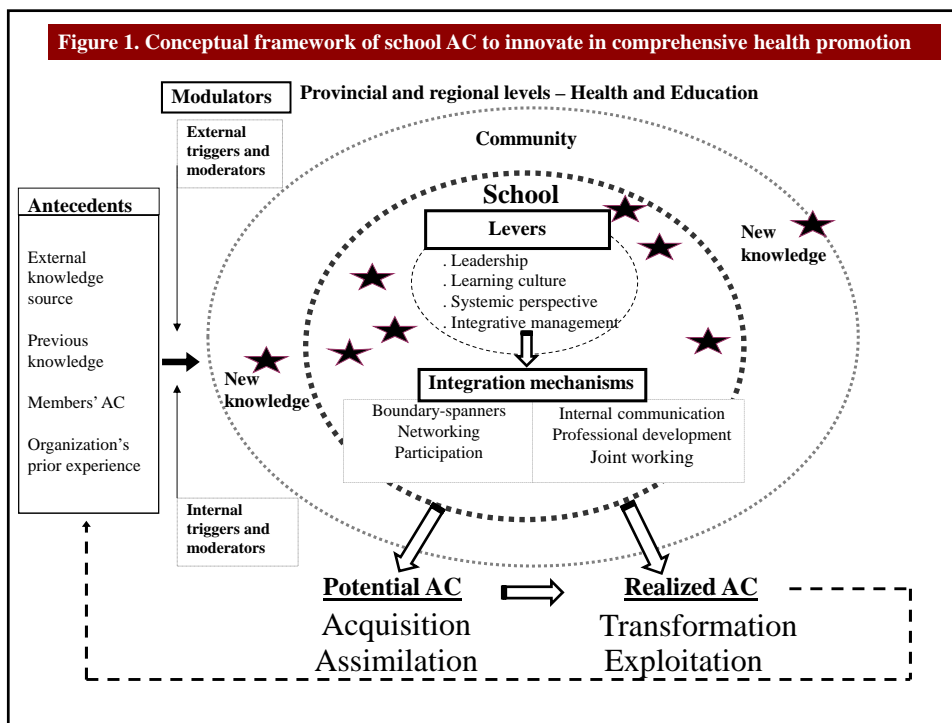
### ■ **Two-Step Approach**

- Step 1: Conceptual Framework based on theoretical corpus on organizational capabilities and change management
- Step 2: Two-case study
  - part of a broader study of 8 cases
  - 2 public secondary schools from same peripheral region and disadvantaged areas but different school board
  - Contrasting cases chosen

# Conceptual Lens

## ▪ Definition of *absorptive capacity*

▪ “Absorptive capacity is a set of organizational processes and routines by which firms **acquire**, **assimilate**, **transform** and **exploit** knowledge to produce dynamic organizational capability. The four dimensions are the foundation on which to achieve advantage that yields superior performance (added value).” *Zahra and George (2002)*



Cases		Potential Capacity	
		Acquisition	Assimilation
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➊ HS knowledge acquired by School Director and other champions</li> <li>➋ Presence of technical resources e.g. HS Guide and other tools</li> <li>➌ HS knowledge from training and networking with local advisers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➊ Internalization of HS planning process</li> <li>Ex: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➋ Multidisciplinary team with good understanding of HS perspective</li> <li>➌ Use of HS Guide and comprehensive tools for needs assessment and priorities setting</li> <li>➍ Good understanding of the comprehensive approach and reflexive thinking about the action plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>➎ No internalization regarding actions selected on the basis of best practices in HP</li> </ul>	
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➊ Presence of technical resources e.g. HS Guide and other tools</li> <li>➋ HS knowledge from training by local advisers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➎ Team members with limited focus: “physical activities oriented”</li> <li>➏ No global and integrated vision of students’ needs</li> <li>➐ No reflexive thinking about the action plan</li> <li>➑ HS is more a label /serves to legitimize existing activities</li> </ul>	

➊ positive change  
➋ no change

Cases		Realized Capacity	
		Transformation	Exploitation
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➊ Favor only one committee to address issues that affect students’ health and school success</li> <li>➋ Planning is more reflexive and rigorous</li> <li>➌ Incorporation of HP activities in the school success plan</li> <li>➍ Use of the school success plan to evaluate and follow-up the implementation of actions</li> <li>➎ Effort to innovate and offer healthy food and more physical activities during lunch time for students, teachers and staff</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➏ Changes observed are not yet incorporated in routines</li> </ul>
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➐ Functioning : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• does not reflect a concerted and reflexive planning process (e.g. physical activities added without questioning their benefits for students)</li> <li>• does not alter the way school intervenes in HP</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➊ positive change</li> <li>➋ no change</li> </ul>

# Absorptive Capacity

## Potential Capacity

- **A** and **B** show capability to acquire knowledge
- **A** shows some capability to assimilate knowledge (mainly confine to HS committee)
- **B** did not assimilate the approach but used the label

## Realized Capacity

- **A** shows some signs of transformation but no sign of exploitation
- For **B**, the approach did not alter the way to do health promotion

- *One part of the equation was more easily achieved*
- *Very few transformations occurred; No exploitation*
- *To fully benefit from the HS, schools need to possess more realized capacity*

# Factors that Facilitate

## Both A and B:

- External Modulators / Triggers
  - Healthy lifestyles as priority for Gov.
- Internal Modulators / Triggers
  - School's investment in Healthy lifestyles
  - Complementarities of the approaches
  - Schools' prior experience
- Antecedents
  - Previous commitment to promoting healthy lifestyles
  - Familiarity with planning process

## Only A:

- Strategic Levers
  - Leadership by School Principal
  - Learning culture
- Integration mechanisms
  - Participation to HS Committee
  - Collaboration with health professionals, School principal and teachers
  - Communication strategy
  - Boundary spanners and Networking

## Factors that Hinder

### Both A and B:

- External Moderators
  - Multitude of compartmentalized programs proposed by Gov.
- Internal Moderators
  - Lack of time/ resources
  - Competing work priorities
  - «Silo» management approach between subject matters and secondary school teachers

### Only B:

- External Moderators
  - School Board imposed HS Tools
  - High turnover of local guidance personnel
  - Guidance offered not sufficiently concrete
- Internal Moderators
  - Compartmentalized committees
- Strategic Levers
  - Weak leadership with regard to HS Approach
  - Less developed learning culture

## Conclusion

### ▪ Still more work to do

- The framework served as an instrument of exploration to understand absorptive capacity and analyze the data
- More research is needed to validate the framework and to understand the process of absorptive capacity
- Next Step: Research results to validate the framework will be presented tomorrow

# Questions?

Thank you

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