

# Improving the Effectiveness of High-Stress, High-Stakes Teams

Prof. Yufei Huang, Trinity Business School, shares research into boosting the performance of stress-intensive surgical teams and an approach that can be applied to other high-stress, high-stakes teams – fire fighters, aircrews, ships' crews or accident investigators.

**Related research:** *Team familiarity in cardiac surgery operations: The effects of hierarchy and failure on team productivity*, by Yufei Huang, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, Emmanouil Avgerinos, IE University, Spain and Ioannis Fragkos at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, Netherlands. SAGE.



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# THE 3 Ps IN A CoBS POD



## PERCEIVE

with a set of key takeaways



## PROJECT

with food for thought: on yourself, your organisation and the wider context



## PERFORM

by putting it all into practice using action tips





## ● PERCEIVE with a set of key takeaways

- Revamping team composition and assignment in the case of surgical teams may ultimately lead to decreasing waiting time and unnecessary patient suffering.
- The focus of this research – cardiac teams – work in complex contexts, have difficult decisions to make, are multi-skilled, must show a high level of coordination, and have a short life span as they are split up after an operation.
- Familiarity among high-status, high-power members has a higher impact on surgical team productivity than familiarity among subordinate members.
- Relationships within horizontal teams are generally stronger, and motivational states, such as cohesion, are more likely to develop among members of the same hierarchy level.
- Research has shown that assigning members that have shared failure experiences in the past seems to be more efficient than using individuals that have only succeeded together in the past.
- Substantial savings in time can be gained from greater efficiency, revamped team assignment and mix, therefore freeing up time for more operations, fewer queues and reduced suffering for patients.
- These research findings and accompanying approach can be applied to other high-stress, high-stakes teams – fire fighters, aircrews, ships' crews or accident investigators.



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## ● PROJECT with food for thought

- To what extent is teamwork required in your organisation, in general, and for you to do your job? In what ways is stress present in the work that your team carries out?
- How does hierarchy affect the way you and others in your organisation work? What behavioural changes take place when senior management and experts lead projects and interact with you and your co-workers?
- How would you describe the hierarchical structure in your organisation? To what extent is it effective in achieving results?
- To what extent does your team/organisation accept failure? How is failure viewed?

*Thoughts*

Lined writing area for notes.



# ● **PERFORM**

by putting it all into practice

## CHECKLIST

- 1. When composing teams,** assign members of the same hierarchy with high levels of past shared experiences to tackle highly sensitive, stressful or high-stakes projects. Ensure that they have chance to familiarise with each other before starting an assignment/project/task.
- 2. Compose teams of members that have shared experience of failure** (patient death in the case of hospital operating theatres) in the past, for it is more efficient than building teams with individuals that have only met with success.
- 3. For fast turnovers and newly hired staff, develop a schedule** so that newly hired individuals build familiarity and failure/success experience for better collaboration in the future.
- 4. Use failures positively.** Encourage team members to communicate and process the rights and wrongs of the experience. Information-seeking leads to understanding and to increased knowledge and learning.
- 5. "Democratic behaviour" in teams** should not be encouraged for every situation or assignment/project. Identify those situations and contexts in which this should be the case.





# Getting involved


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