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Preventing Stress Injury & Developing Resilience For SAR Teams



Are members of a Highly Reliable Team less likely to experience stress injuries?

## Hypothesis:

Helping to create better teams will reduce PTSD and increase psychological safety.





HOW DO WE WORK  
PRE-INCIDENT  
WITHIN OUR TEAMS  
TO HELP PREVENT  
THE SEVERITY OF  
STRESS INJURIES?

# Our study included:



# The Nine Qualities of HRTs



1. Unifying purpose.
2. Free flowing communication.
3. Obsessed with learning.
4. Avoid catastrophic failures.
5. Reluctant to simplify and blame.
6. Adapt to complexity.
7. Welcoming of expertise.
8. Measures measurable performance.
9. Committed to resilience.



## Q1. Does your team have a unifying purpose?



1. Constituents-I know the people we serve
2. Why-We have a common understand of why we do what we do.
3. Attractor-The mission compels new members to join the team and old members to stay.
4. Adhesive-Our team deploys on missions that align with our unifying purpose.
5. Identity-Our team is recognized.



## Unifying Purpose



### Police

“A unifying purpose provides us with the morale clarity to act when there is not time to consult the command structure.”

## Q2. Does your team have free-flowing communication?



1. We have clear communication protocols.
2. Team members self-regulate to protect from information overload.
3. We have a transparent decision-making process.
4. Team members have full access to feedback.
5. All team members take responsibility for communication





## Law Enforcement

“I know I can get the information I need when I need it.”

## EMS

“Someone is backing me up when I hit the limits of my own knowledge.”



### Q3. Is your team obsessed with learning?



1. Team training is based on high frequency and low probability high risk missions.
2. New skills and knowledge are welcomed.
3. Everyone is expected to be able teach what they know.
4. The team review performance after every mission and training.
5. Rare failures are embraced as learning opportunities.



## Obsession with Learning

There is a correlation between AAR's and psychological safety.

SAR

“NOTHING GIVES ME MORE CONFIDENCE IN MY TEAM THAN LEARNING TOGETHER.”

EMS

“THERE IS NOTHING MORE BONDING THAN LEARNING.”

Q4. Does your team  
avoid catastrophic  
failures?



1. Safety of individual team members is the top priority.
2. Quick fixes are avoided in favor of solutions with no anticipated consequences.
3. Problem prevention is recognized and rewarded.
4. Worse case scenarios are anticipated and discussed.
5. The team is suspicious of overconfidence.



## Avoid Catastrophic Failure



Manufacturing  
“Safety IS everything.”

## Volunteer Fire

“I could not get spouses to let their loved ones participate if we did not send them home every time.”

## Q5. Is your team reluctant to simplify and blame ?



1. Individual team members hold themselves responsible for team performance.
2. My team is socially aware.
3. My team does not simplify problems.
4. My team encourages skeptical questions.
5. Everyone on the team owns any failure or success.



## Reluctant to Simplify and Blame



## Rookie Fire

“If I mess up everyone steps up to absorb the breakdown and learn.”

## Lifeboat

“it's never me fault and it's always my fault.”

## Q6. Does your team adapt to complexity?



1. Team members are encouraged to understand the whole mission while doing their specific part.
2. On routine missions the team is ready for the unexpected.
3. The team can adapt to changes in mission scope and intensity.
4. During intense missions, the team focuses on what is actually going on, not what was reported, planned, or trained for.
5. Leadership pays attention to the front line.



# Adapt to Complexity



Fire

“It feels good to when the chief opens up and says this is something new.”

OR

“Every day we find something new. Something we have not seen together. It's good to face questions together.”

## Q7. Is your team welcoming of expertise when appropriate?



1. Leadership knows the expertise to solve a problem does not always match the chain of command.
2. Leadership listens to and filters information from outside sources.
3. Leadership is slow to override decisions made on the front line
4. It is OK to ask for help when a problem exceeds individual abilities.
5. Leadership is willing to bring in outside experts when needed.



## Welcoming of Expertise



### Computer Dev

“I know if I need to know, someone on the team can help. If they can't help, we have the confidence to go outside the team.”

### Fire

“I know I have a back up to my back up if I need it.”

## Q8. Does your team measure measurable performance?



1. My team has a set of core skills and abilities that everyone must master.
2. I am clear about team performance standards for missions and training.
3. Standards are regularly reviewed and occasionally changed.
4. My team records some aspects of team performance (i.e. response time, participation percentage, or other quantifiable standards.)
5. My team does not attempt to measure anomaly or unmeasurable events.



## Measure Measurable Performance



### EMS

“It feels good to know that I won’t get dinged for little things...unimportant things.”

### Law Enforcement

“We measure to grow, not to punish.”

## Q 9. Is your team committed to resilience?



1. The team corrects problems before they worsen and harm individuals.
2. I know where to go for psychological help.
3. Do high stress missions trigger formal stress management programs.
4. Other team members care about my social and emotional well-being.
5. I can talk about personal stress with team members and leaders without negative consequences.



## Commitment to Resilience



### SAR

“If it happens to someone on my team, it happens to me.”

### Police

“I stand with anyone who carries a badge.”

Utah Lake  
Graduation Party  
Drowning





# Thanks!

