

# 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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# ● **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.



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