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Leadership and Psychological Safety: Evidence from a Study with the Calgary Police Service

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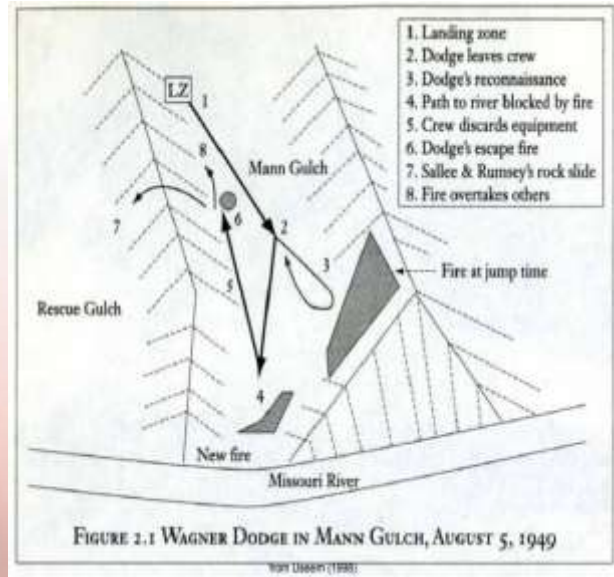
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University of Regina

Public Safety functions in a VUCA environment

- Volatile:
  - Environmental dynamism and hostility (Child, 1972) - Sudden, extreme, unpredictable change

- Uncertain/Unpredictable:
  - Important information unknown, doubtful, or unclear

- Complex (Perrow, 1984; 2006):
  - Many different/connected parts - small errors interact in unexpected ways

- Ambiguous:
  - Meaning of an event can be understood in different ways (ie, goals are vague, problematic, inconsistent, or un-stable: (Cohen & March, 1974; Weick, 1976)

- VUCA leads to individual uncertainty (state, response, outcome) & anxiety

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Example: Mann Gulch Fire, Montana

1. Landing zone
2. Dodge leaves crew
3. Dodge's reconnaissance
4. Path to river blocked by fire
5. Crew discards equipment
6. Dodge's escape fire
7. Sallee & Rumsey's rock slide
8. Fire overtakes others

FIGURE 2.1 WAGNER DODGE IN MANN GULCH, AUGUST 5, 1949

A = landing zone
B = start retreat
C = escape fire started
D = fire catches men
E = Sallee & Rumsey survive

Retrieved from
http://wildfire.fpinnovations.ca/1/2009IA
WFSafetySummitPresentation.pdf

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VUCA, Uncertainty, & Cognitive Issues

- Three types uncertainty associated with VUCA
  - State Uncertainty
  - Response Uncertainty
  - Outcome Uncertainty
- Uncertainty affects cognitive processes
  - Judgment and decision making
  - Anxiety

Uncertainty and Cognitive Problems

- Immediate: Judgement and Decision Making
  - Confusion – no appropriate set response
  - Miss important information (KPIs) for decisions (Thompson, 1995)
  - Rigidity, overlearned behaviours (Weick, 1993; 2007; Kahnemann, 2011)

- Long-term: Anxiety & Hypervigilance
  - fear of the unknown foundation of anxiety (Carleton, 2016)
    - aversive response triggered by perceived absence of salient, key, sufficient info
  - See danger in neutral information (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013)
  - Weight danger cues > neutral/safe cues (Brosschot et al., 2016)

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Immediate: Fight, Flight, or Freeze

- Dodge's order was to throw away just their packs and heavy tools, but to his surprise some of them had already thrown away all of their heavy equipment. On the other hand, some of them wouldn't abandon their heavy tools, even after Dodge's order. Diettert, one of the most intelligent of the crew, continued carrying both his tools until Rumsey caught up with him, took his shovel and leaned it against a pine tree. Just a little further on, Rumsey and Sallee pass the recreation guard, Jim Harrison, who, having been on the fire all afternoon, was now exhausted. He was sitting with his heavy pack on and was making no effort to take it off. (Weick, 1996)

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Long-term: Operational Stress Injuries

- PSP suffering from alarming rate of "Operational" Stress Injuries (Anxiety, Depression, PTSD: Oliphant, 2016)
  - Municipal Police: Anxiety Disorders 24%, PTSD 20%
  - RCMP: Anxiety Disorders 37%, PTSD 30%
- Anxiety / Depression highly correlated with
  - Traumatic Stressors (traffic accidents, shootings)
  - Organizational Stressors (inconsistent leadership, being judged)
  - Operational Stressors (including fatigue, time for family)

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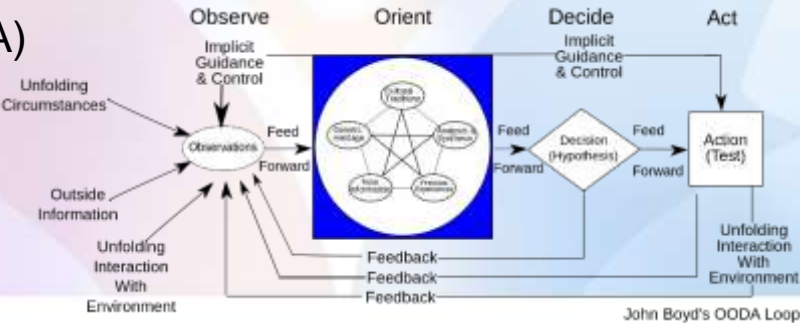
Existing Responses

- Focus on individual's mental health
  - R2MR
  - Psychological First Aid
  - Peer Support programs
- Lack response to organizational role in uncertainty and anxiety
  - (Leppin et al., 2014; Olin, 2016; Ricciardelli et al, 2018; Robertson et al., 2015)

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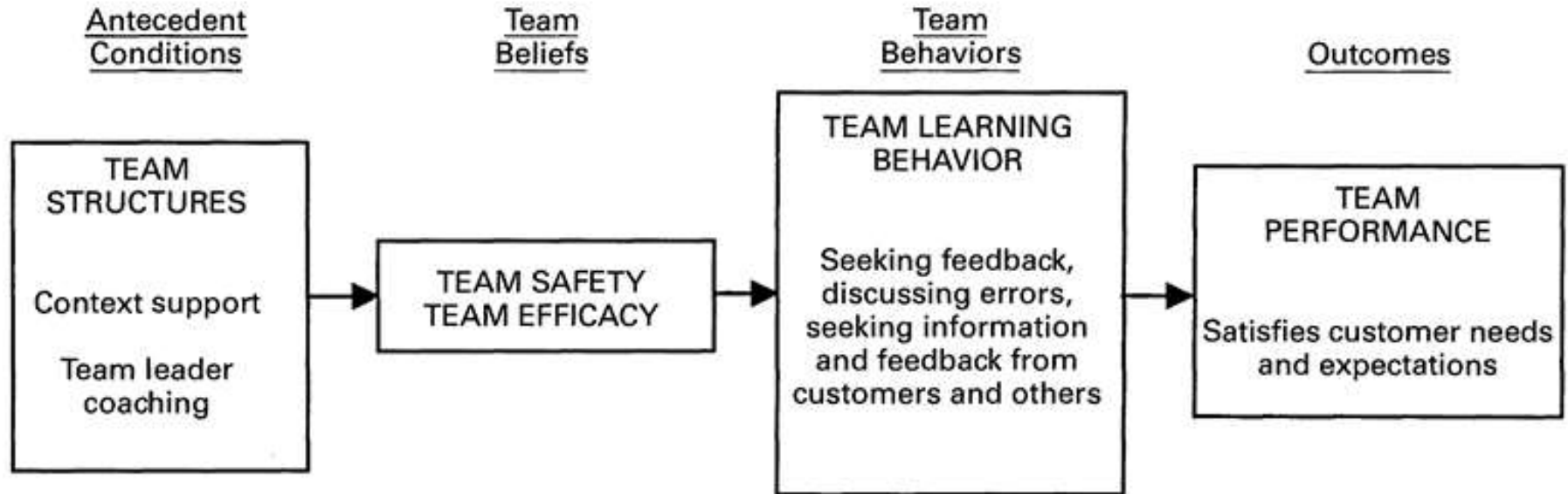de traitement en sécurité publique

"Business" Response to VUCA

- **Common Vision**

- **Organizational flexibility** to respond effectively to VUCA (increase scanning, decentralize: Thompson, 1967)
  - Standard management approaches (PDCA) assume stable environment (Thompson, 1995)
  - Continuous Improvement approach
    - Learning Organization / Thinking Organization (Weick, 1993) improve JDM

- **Mental resilience**
  - Supported by **Team Psychological Safety**

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Continuous Improvement to Cope with Uncertainty

- Devolve decision making to lowest levels possible
  - Requires
    - Clear understanding of strategic vision
    - Appropriate leadership feedback
- Respond to real-time changes in environment (Thompson, 1995)
  - Scientific approach: OODA
    - Create meaning in midst of confusion (VUCA)
    - Increase response appropriateness through successive approximations

John Boyd's OODA Loop

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Edmondson's (1999) Model of Work-team Learning

Antecedent Conditions	Team Beliefs	Team Behaviors	Outcomes
TEAM STRUCTURES Context support Team leader coaching	**TEAM SAFETY TEAM EFFICACY**	**TEAM LEARNING BEHAVIOR** Seeking feedback, discussing errors, seeking information and feedback from customers and others	**TEAM PERFORMANCE** Satisfies customer needs and expectations

Psychological Safety, Feedback, & Learning

- Keys of Team Psychological Safety
  - Freedom to
    - Make mistakes
    - Address problems (organizational) and errors (individual)
    - Admit personal limitations
    - Ask for support
    - Offer support

Infrastructure for Psychological Safety

- Team Structure
  - a clear compelling team goal and enabling team design (e.g., adequate information, rewards)

- Leadership (vs Management) Approach
  - envision, align, inspire direction setting and coaching (envision, align, inspire)
    - (Edmondson, 1999; Hackman, 1987)

Mental Health & Training

- Training programs can produce reductions in stress, symptoms of depression, and negative affect (Carleton, Korol, et al., 2018) .

- Have not focused on the role of **leadership**, **team behaviours**, or **help-seeking**, despite recent evidence that organizational factors are critical for understanding PSP mental health (Leppin et al., 2014; Robertson et al., 2015).

Next Steps

- In process of revising content
- Survey CPS employees (January 2020)
- Deliver training to CPS leadership in 1 operational district
- Assess learning (process check)
- Post-Training Survey to CPS employees
- Interview workshop participants

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Leadership & Psych Safety Outcomes

Antecedent Conditions → (+) → **Team Beliefs** → (+) → **Team Behaviours** → (+) → **Outcomes**

Leader's Vision & Coaching — (+) → Psychological Safety — (+) → Team Learning
- Seeking feedback
- Discussing errors
- Sharing feelings

Team Learning — (+) → Better Team Performance
Team Learning — (+) → Better Mental Health

Leader's Vision & Coaching — (-) → Uncertainty — (+) → Anxiety

Uncertainty — (-) → (toward Team Behaviours)
Anxiety — (-) → Better Mental Health

Team psychological safety

1. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you.
2. Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
3. People on this team sometimes reject others for being different.
4. It is safe to take a risk on this team.
5. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help.
6. No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
7. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

Team learning behavior

1. We regularly take time to figure out ways to improve our team's work processes.
2. This team tends to handle differences of opinion privately or off-line, rather than addressing them directly as a group.
3. Team members go out and get all the information they possibly can from others – such as community groups, or other parts of the organization.
4. This team frequently seeks new information that leads us to make important changes....
5. In this team, someone always makes sure that we stop to reflect on the team's work process.
6. People in this team often speak up to test assumptions about issues under discussion.

CPS Leadership Development Workshop

- Combination of "Theory" and Skills
  - Roles of Managers (plan, monitor) vs Leaders (envision, inspire)
  - Creating a Vision for VUCA Environments
  - Performance coaching and feedback

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Leadership: Vision & Coaching

Positive Communication

| **What's Desired** | What's Right | Ways to Bridge | *What's Wrong* |

Yost & Associates - Continuous Improvement Framework
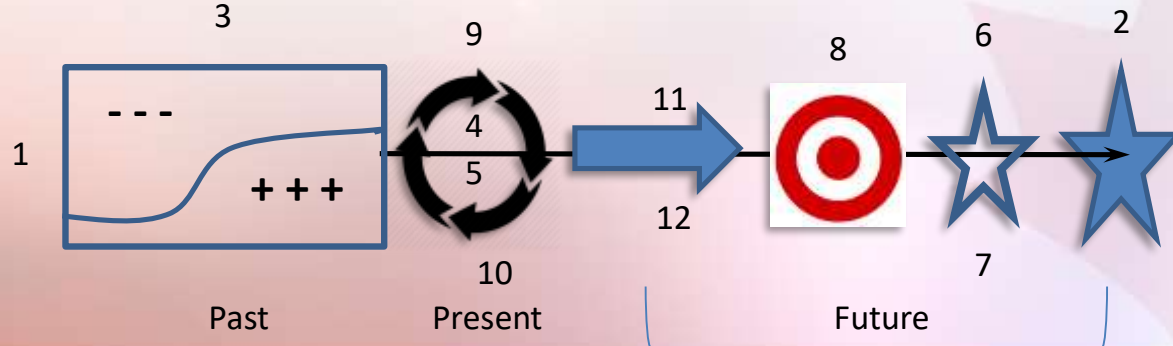
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Past   Present   Future

COACHING ROADMAP

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Early Results

- Leadership "Education"
  - "MBA" approach to evidence-informed best practice
    - VUCA, Uncertainty, Anxiety, Psychological Safety, Leadership roles/tools
      - Role of uncertainty in anxiety
      - Leading through vision, values and beliefs (concept and process)
  - Case-based discussion of leadership tools
- Feedback
  - Need advance reading to process concepts
    - Need concepts to make sense of skills

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Early Results

- Leadership Skills Training
  - Focus on specific skills (e.g., team building, performance mgt.)
    - Needs to be seen as practical and pertinent
    - Difficult to translate "business" examples to a policing environment
- Feedback
  - Not tied to strategic vision
  - Partial implementation (document performance but wait for annual review; increase team diversity, expect uniform behavior)

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