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Author: Mr. Karoly Schlosser
Institute of Management Studies, Goldsmiths, Hungary

Ms. Tajana Lucic
Space Exploration Project group, Space Generation Advisory Council (SGAC), Croatia

WHAT ABOUT SUPPORTING MISSION SUPPORT? THE EVOLVING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN
MISSION SUPPORT CENTER.**Abstract**

Analog missions are plausible alternatives for studying human behaviour in space-like conditions. These environments have a number of psychological similarities to space missions, such as cramped confined conditions, isolation from other people and in some cases, no options for evacuation (Krins, 2009). Analog missions have been used widely to study, train and prepare crews for space exploration. However, do analog missions provide adequate similarities for mission support (MS) members? In this paper we argue that the stress faced by analog MS members (15 - 30 members) resembles well the psychosocial dynamics similar to real missions, and thus can be used to model real life MS conditions. Further, even though tension among and between mission support members and astronauts are a known factor in both analog and real space missions, there is little publicly available guidelines that can provide practical solutions to the problems observed. Typically, analog astronaut crews receive, if at all, minimal communication and/or stress management training with rare access to psychological support, while members of analog MS centres are completely left to their own devices to find a way to function as an effective group. Similarly to analog crews, most MS members had minimal contact with each other and the crew before, making the social context that much challenging while still having to deal with large amount of information and stress that MS work entails. This social negligence can compromise group cohesion, performance and psychological well being. Hence, in this paper we raise the point and discuss the use of providing a comprehensive psychological training and psychological support for analog mission support based on contextual behaviour science. We argue that such support can help the MS to manage stressors and high cognitive load thus enabling them to shift between gears of activation effectively and communicate in a humanly way among and between crew and mission support. Using different indicators of stress, qualitative measures and our personal experience (working with five shorter analog missions in the past years) of providing the continuous support and on site psychological consulting we will discuss ways in which psychologists can battle the stigma and fear traditionally following the question of psychological support in the aerospace industry and be a crucial asset of the mission support by increasing productivity, well-being and group cohesion of both analog crews and mission support.

Keywords: Analog space missions, Mission support, Productivity, Team cohesion, Performance, Contextual behavioral science.