A systematic approach to mental health during deployment

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Background

- A need for a structured way to assess Mental Health status, and Combat-fitness during deployment.
- A toolset that is easy enough to use, effective enough to be worth the effort, and appreciated as a useful tool among the “leaders”.
What we wanted

• A Structural assessment tool aimed at health and performance by targeting current status of the “group” (individual), active stressors, assessable resources and active leadership.

• A method for continuous collection of employee status to facilitate resources in order to meet organizational demand.

• A tool to document history, since the balance between demands and resources are bound to vary over time it keeps track of changes over time. Opening up for retrospective analysis.
Challenges and possibilities

• Making it simple enough to be used and relevant enough to be of value.
• Mandatory vs. at will.
• Compliance
• User friendly -- making it easy to administer (no more then 5 min a week)
• Not an add-on! Covers leadership responsibilities that should be addressed anyway
• Possibility for HR to enhance their role in actively supporting and reporting HR related issues.
• Based on COSC (Combat Operational Stress Control) & a DRM (Demand Resource Model, Bates et al, 2010)
• We created a "logg" of Mental Health.
• We started in the Bay of Aiden, Operation Atalanta, ME01 (2009, need identified) – ME02 (2010, MH-logg pilot).
• Mali MINUSMA (Mali 01, 2015 – Mali 05 first use as intended)
The tool

- A weekly rating of the “unit” in a scale from 1-10
- A short term prognosis based on current status and known stressors (and unknown)
- A long term prognosis based on current status and known stressors (and unknown)
- Identification of stressors
- And lastly what have been done to meet those stressors.
What we did when we implemented it

- Inform the organization on all levels (transparency)
- Educate leaders on all levels on how to use the tool
- Adapted it to contextual limitations (low computer access) hence analog system.
- Put it in a SOP
- Then just launch it.
The tool

• Only the unit rating was mandatory. Subsequent fields were given and presented as an option to convey information that the unit deemed relevant.
• 86% used all fields (the rest were off and on)
• Why not make all mandatory?
• Summarized weekly by HR and reported at a staff brief.
• Groups with low rating or limited ability to handle stressors were supported by HR.
Examples and experience

• A shift of focus, low-exposure support units under the most negative stress.
• A complement to the line organization (in harmony not challenging or bypassing)
• Identify trends (slope more important than level)
• Been used to support, conceptual stressors, personnel frictions, mismatches (expectations) etc.
• Leaders judgment:
  – Easy enough to use
  – Opens for discussion in the group
  – Raise awareness of all stressors
  – Prompt active handling of subtle stressors
Take-home message

• Structured tools must be simple enough to be made a habit (relatively low cost low reward behavior)

• Raising awareness
  – It’s not the model or tool itself that is most relevant, it’s the fact that you create an incentive to ask, how are we doing and if there is negative stressors what can we do about them.

• Be creative and persistent, still after almost 100 years!! There is a lack of understanding of the capital value of personnel compared to material inventory.

• Be sure to give feedback to the organization just collecting data is not enough one must act as well.
Questions?