

The Two-Stage Social Identity Model of High-Reliability Organizations

Part 1:
Analysis and model specification

Part 2:
Leadership-focused solutions



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CREATE CHANGE

What is a high-reliability organization?

“Even though carriers represent a million accidents waiting to happen, almost none of them do.” (Weick & Roberts, 1993)

Just Imagine...

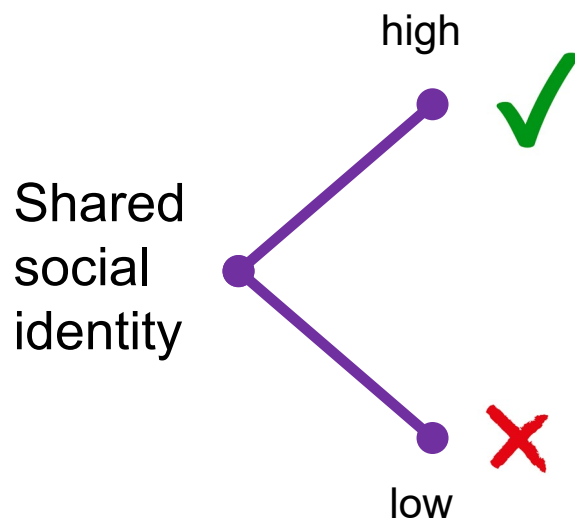
- You shrink Brisbane Airport to one short runway.
- You make planes take off and land at the same time, at half the present time interval, and rock the runway from side to side.
- You now wet the whole thing down with sea water and oil.
- Oh and by the way, you should try not to kill anyone.



The 2-Stage Social Identity Model of HROs

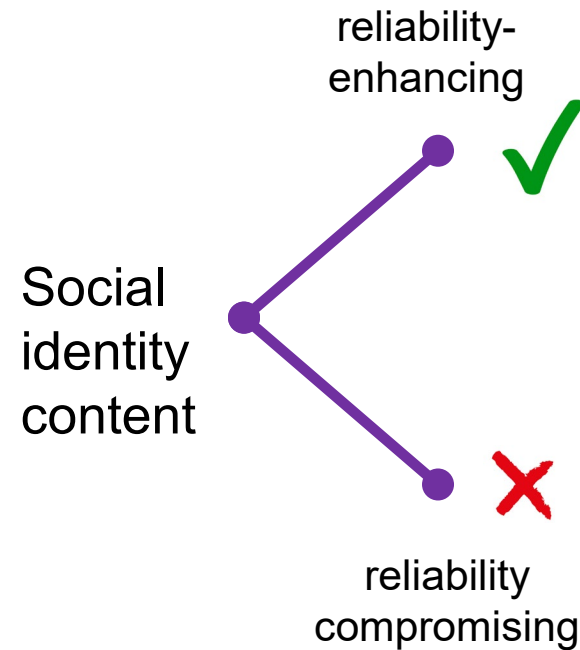
STAGE
1

Identity
Development



STAGE
2

Identity
Realisation



What do high-reliability organizations do?

5 hallmarks of a HRO

(after Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001)



Preoccupation with Failure



Reluctance to Simplify



Sensitivity to Operations



Commitment to Resilience



Deference to Expertise



Identity
Realisation

Social
identity
content

reliability-
enhancing



reliability
compromising



Nevertheless, a lot of literature on “what a HRO looks like” but not much on “how to become a HRO”.

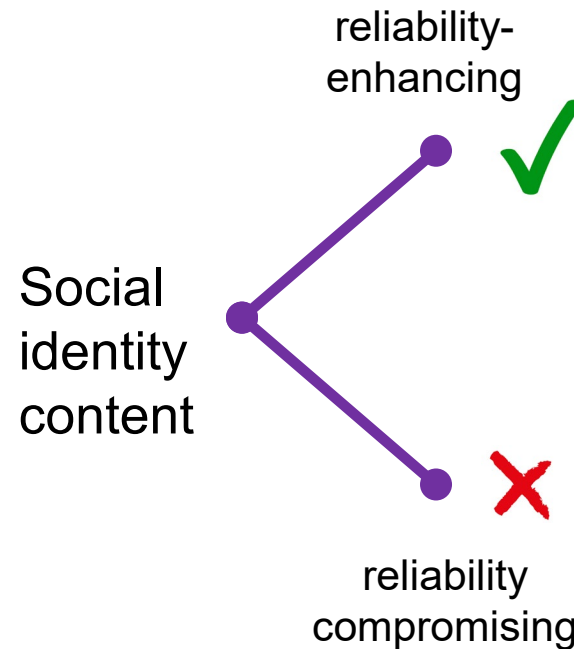
A different lens

Based on existing literature, to address the ‘becoming’ issue, we argue organisations need to:

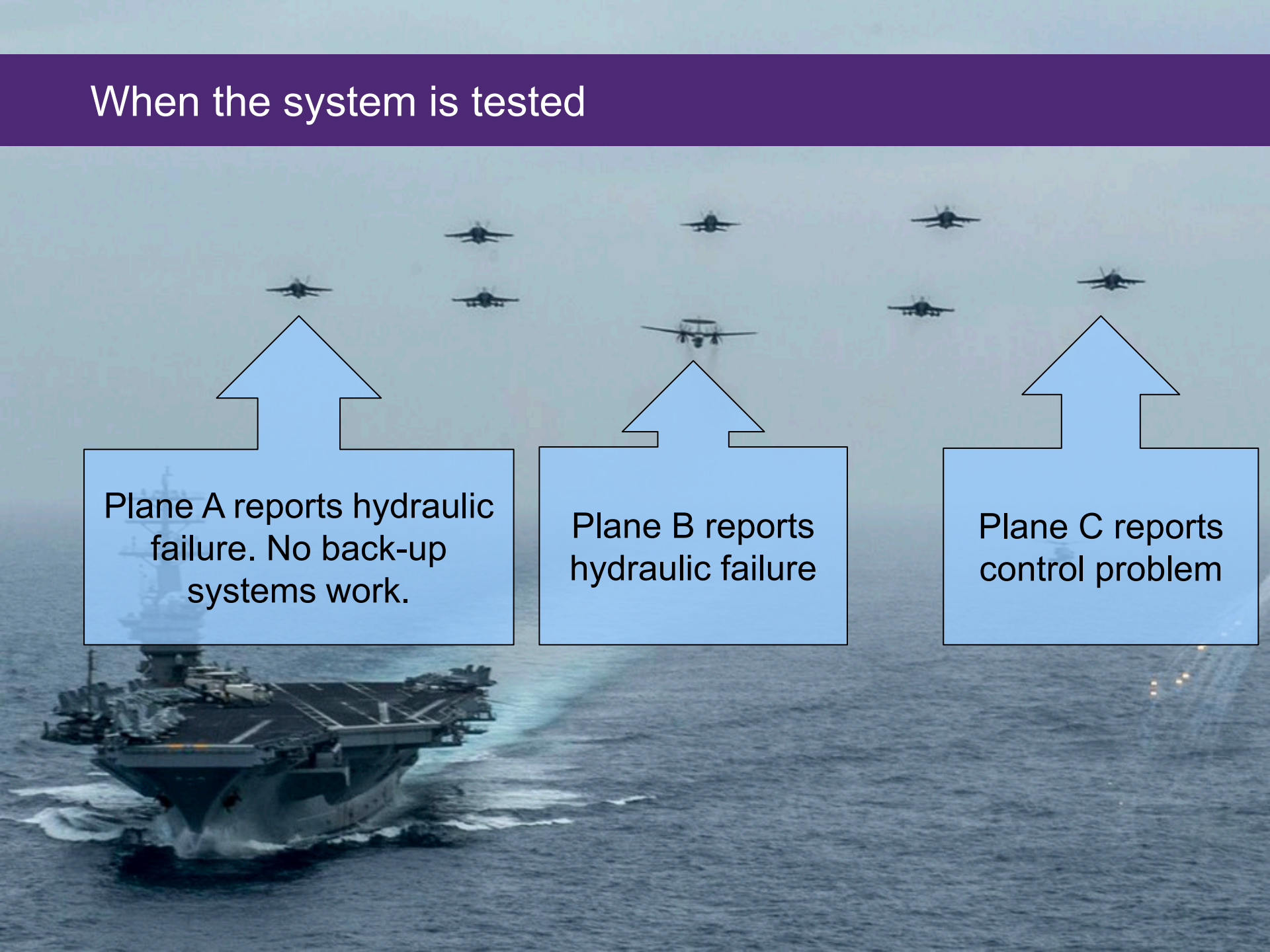
1. Focus on people.
2. Focus on collectives and work teams, not (just) individuals.
3. Ensure HR activities become part of an organisation’s social identity.
4. Harness the power of group capabilities.
5. Close the gap between “who we are” and the “HRO we want to become”.



Identity Realisation



When the system is tested

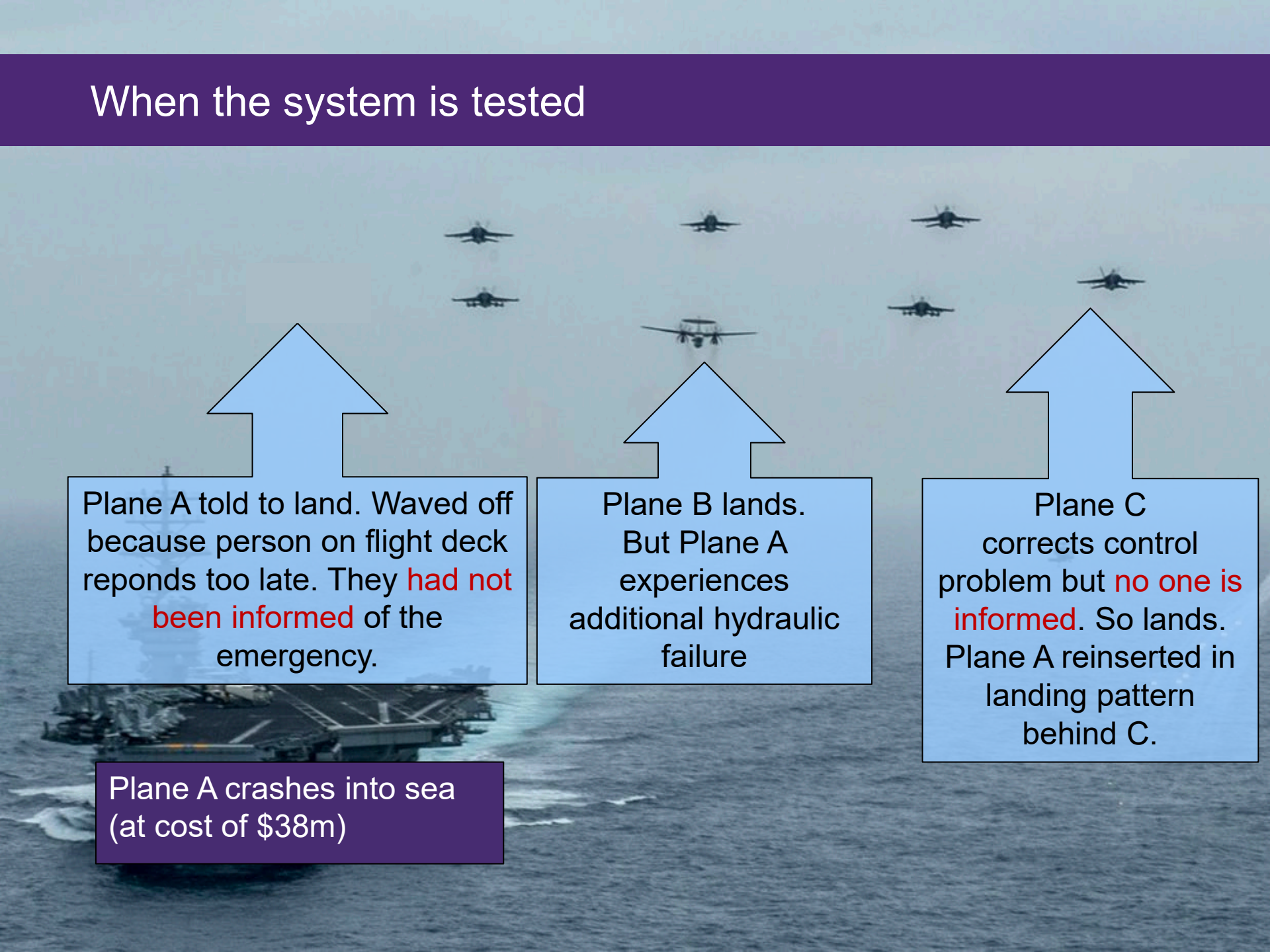


Plane A reports hydraulic failure. No back-up systems work.

Plane B reports hydraulic failure

Plane C reports control problem

When the system is tested



Plane A told to land. Waved off because person on flight deck responds too late. They **had not been informed** of the emergency.

Plane B lands. But Plane A experiences additional hydraulic failure

Plane C corrects control problem but **no one is informed**. So lands. Plane A reinserted in landing pattern behind C.

Plane A crashes into sea (at cost of \$38m)

1. Focus on people

Cantu et al. (2021)

“The fundamental element of successful resilience is people, and the redesign of organisational systems, processes, and interfaces should focus on facilitating the re-engineering around human factors, rather than the mechanistic, inorganic ones.” (p.5).

“It is ultimately through **human actors** that resilience and high reliability operations are actually achieved” (p.2).

2. Focus on collectives and work teams, not (just) individuals

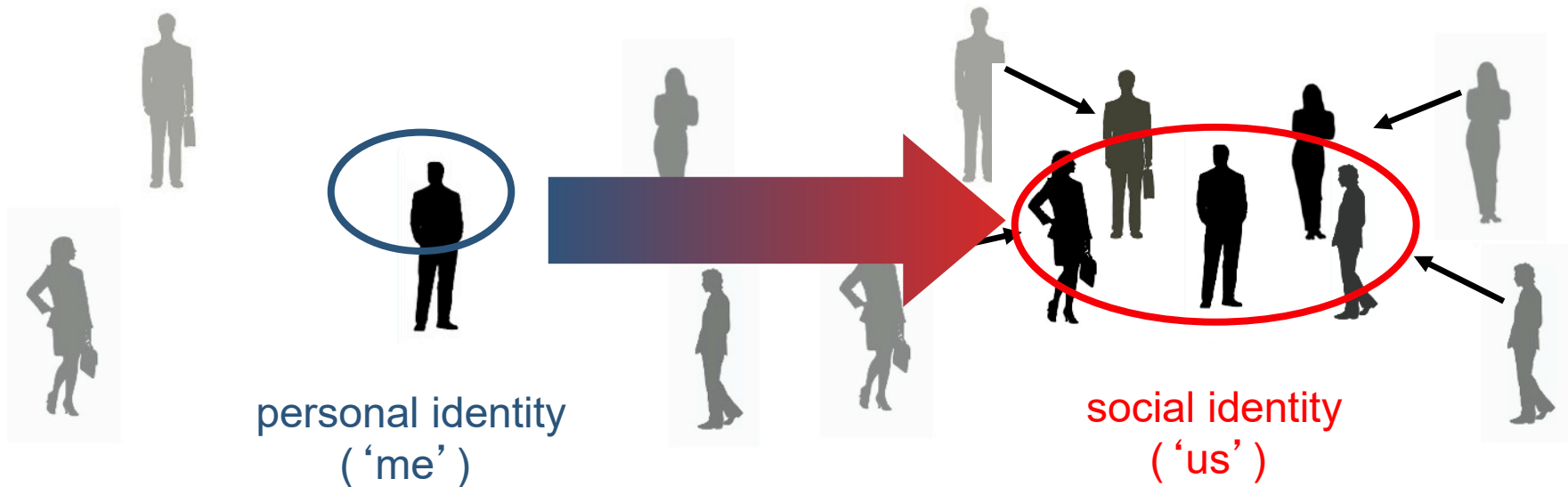
Weick and Roberts (1993):

“As...system, activities and people became isolated, the system began to pull apart, the problems became more incomprehensible, and it became harder for individuals to interrelate with a system of activities that was rapidly losing its form.”

HROs are organisations that are made up of people

“who act as if they are a group” (p.360).

From personal to social identity



- **Social identity** = the sense of self that is derived from membership in a social group (i.e., a sense of the self as 'we' and 'us', not just 'I' and 'me').
- Safety is no longer a choice of whether “I work for the group or for myself”. When people see themselves as group members, the two become the same thing.

3. HR needs to be part of an organization's social identity

Safety initiatives need to:

1. **Enhance identification** with site management and the work team and organisation more generally.
2. Consider how safety can become a **salient and valued norm** whereby reporting incidents becomes rewarded, not punished.
 - Safety needs to become part of an organization's DNA...
 - ... But be mindful of subgroup cultures and relations between subgroups.

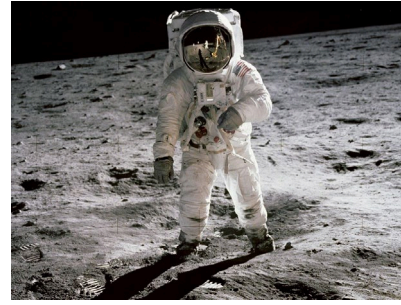
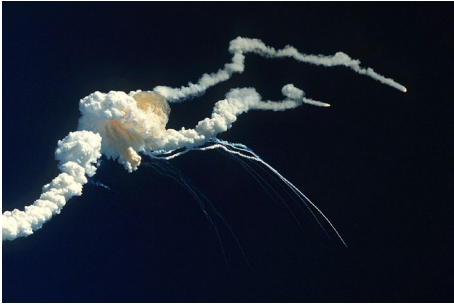
4. Harness the power of group capabilities

- But what if **group dynamics** lead employees to act in ways that compromises reliability?

- The problem of “**groupthink**”:

A mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive ingroup, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. (Janis, 1972, p. 9)

4. Harness the power of group capabilities



Problems with the groupthink literature:

- Focuses selectively on decisions that are understood to be foolhardy, reckless and intemperate (e.g., those implicated in the the Columbia space-shuttle; US entry into the Vietnam war),
- Fails to examine how groupthink can contribute to superior decisions that could be characterised as adventurous, bold and courageous (e.g., support for the 1969 Apollo Moon landing, the rescue of Chilean miners in 2010) (Useem et al. 2011)

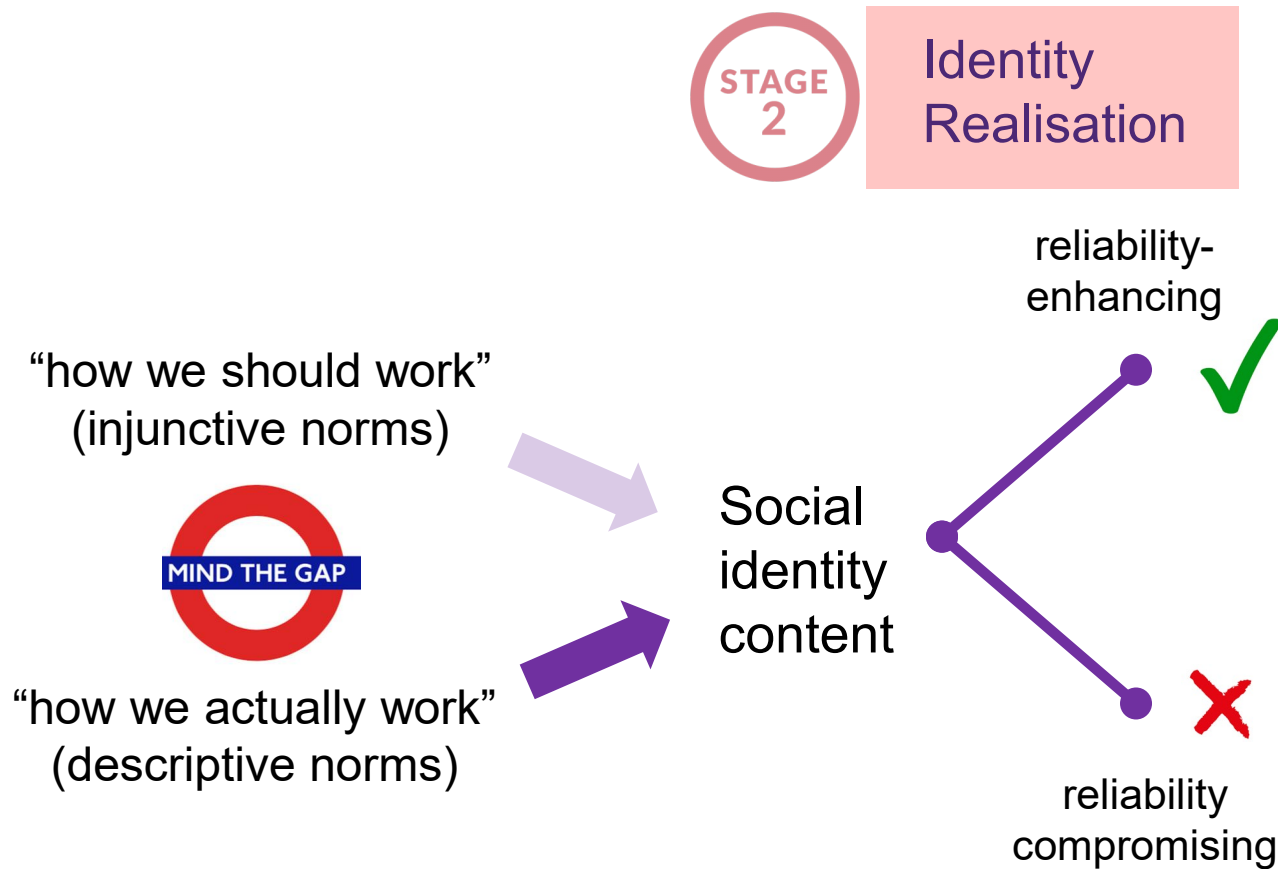
4. Harness the power of group capabilities

- Highly cohesive groups can support *both* regressive and progressive organisation outcomes.
- HR activities should focus not on reducing the cohesiveness in groups and teams (in the way that the groupthink model suggests), but on developing a **normative climate that sharpens critical thinking**.
- These norms need to be directly connected to the five hallmarks of HROs

5. Close the gap

- HRO literature gives us a good sense of what a safety manual needs to contain, but little sense of how you get organisation members to engage with it.
- Rather than just being a rule or guideline, preoccupation with failure needs to be embedded as something that *'we do because it is at the core of who we are'*.

5. Close the gap (Cantu et al., 2021).



5. Close the gap: How do we operate?



The sorts of questions that aspiring HROs ask:

- How many errors and incidents of different types occur?
- Do work teams openly discuss errors and incidents?
- Is error reporting encouraged or avoided?
- Do work teams view safety rules as proper and important or as “meaningless and annoying”?
- Does everyone embrace a safety culture?

5. Close the gap: How do we operate?

Evidence from Chassin & Loeb (2013)

“As opposed to a preoccupation with avoiding, hospitals and other health care organization behave as if they accept failure as an inevitable feature of their daily work”

“65% of respondents from 1,128 hospitals worried that mistakes they had made were kept in their personnel files.”

“50% of staff felt that their mistakes were held against them.”

“Many health care leaders are reluctant to commit to the goal of high reliability because they regard it as unrealistic or unachievable or a distraction from their current serious fiscal and regulatory pressures.”

5 hallmarks of a HRO:



Preoccupation with Failure



Reluctance to Simplify



Sensitivity to Operations



Commitment to Resilience



Deference to Expertise

5. Close the gap: Who we want to be?

“how we should work”
(injunctive norms)



“how we actually work”
(descriptive norms)

normative alignment

It is only when an organisation has a good understanding of descriptive norms pertaining to ‘how we operate’ that it is in a position to appreciate — and reduce — the gap between who they are (the normative content of their present social identity) and the HRO they would like to become.

5. Close the gap: Who we want to be?



Practically, then, an aspiring HRO needs to:

- Work with the relevant social identities of employees
- Develop and make salient valued group norms
- Reward collectives (not just individuals) for effective safety behaviours.
- Ensure there is genuine commitment to safety on part of managers at all levels

All of these things centre on **leadership**

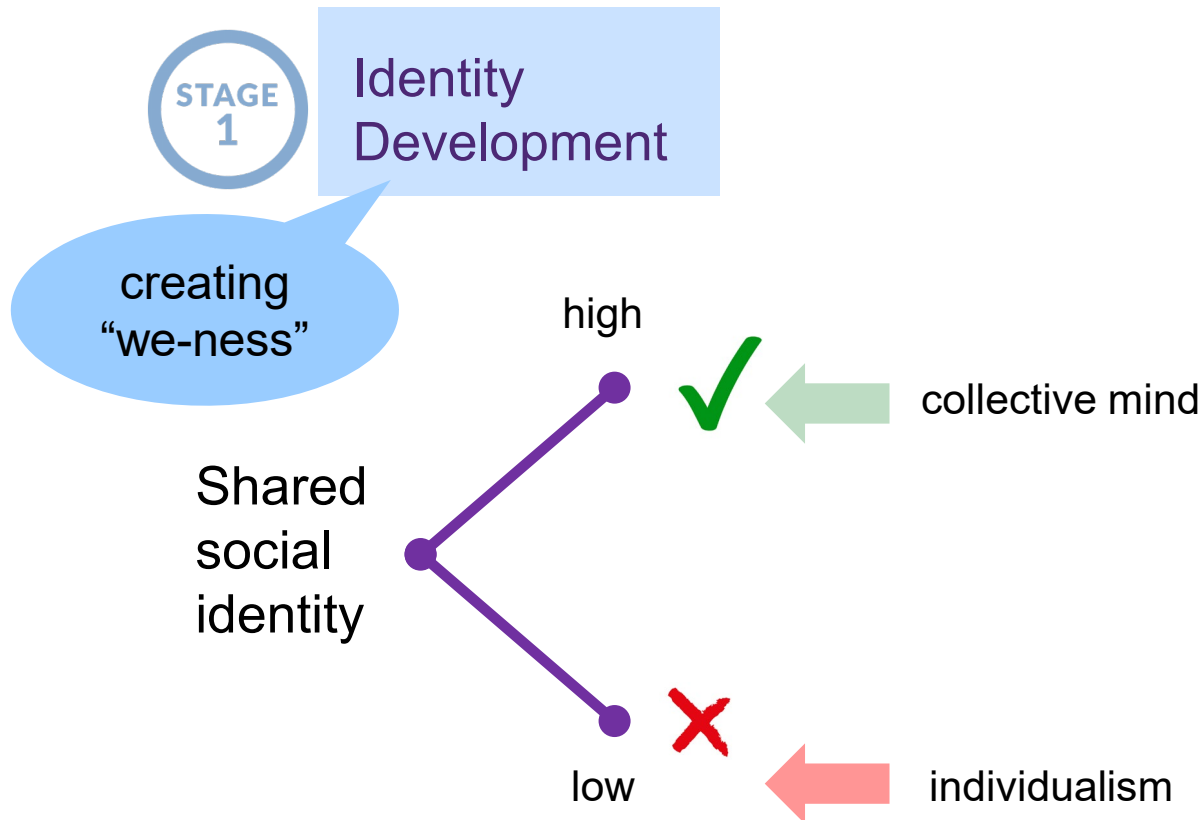
The 2-Stage Social Identity Model of HROs

Stage 1: Shared social identity

- Research points to the centrality of “collective mind” to HROs.

“A well-developed organization mind, capable of reliable performance is **thoroughly social**. It is built of ongoing interrelating and dense interrelations. As people move toward individualism and fewer interconnections, organization mind is simplified and soon becomes indistinguishable from individual mind. With this change comes heightened vulnerability to accidents” (Weick & Roberts (1990))

The 2-Stage Social Identity Model of HROs



The 2-Stage Identity Model of High-Reliability Organizations

Stage 2: Social identity content

- The content of shared social identity — the normative sense of “who we are” and “what we are about” — needs to centre on attitudes and behaviour that support reliability (as identified by Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001):



Sensitivity to Operations



Preoccupation with Failure



Reluctance to Simplify

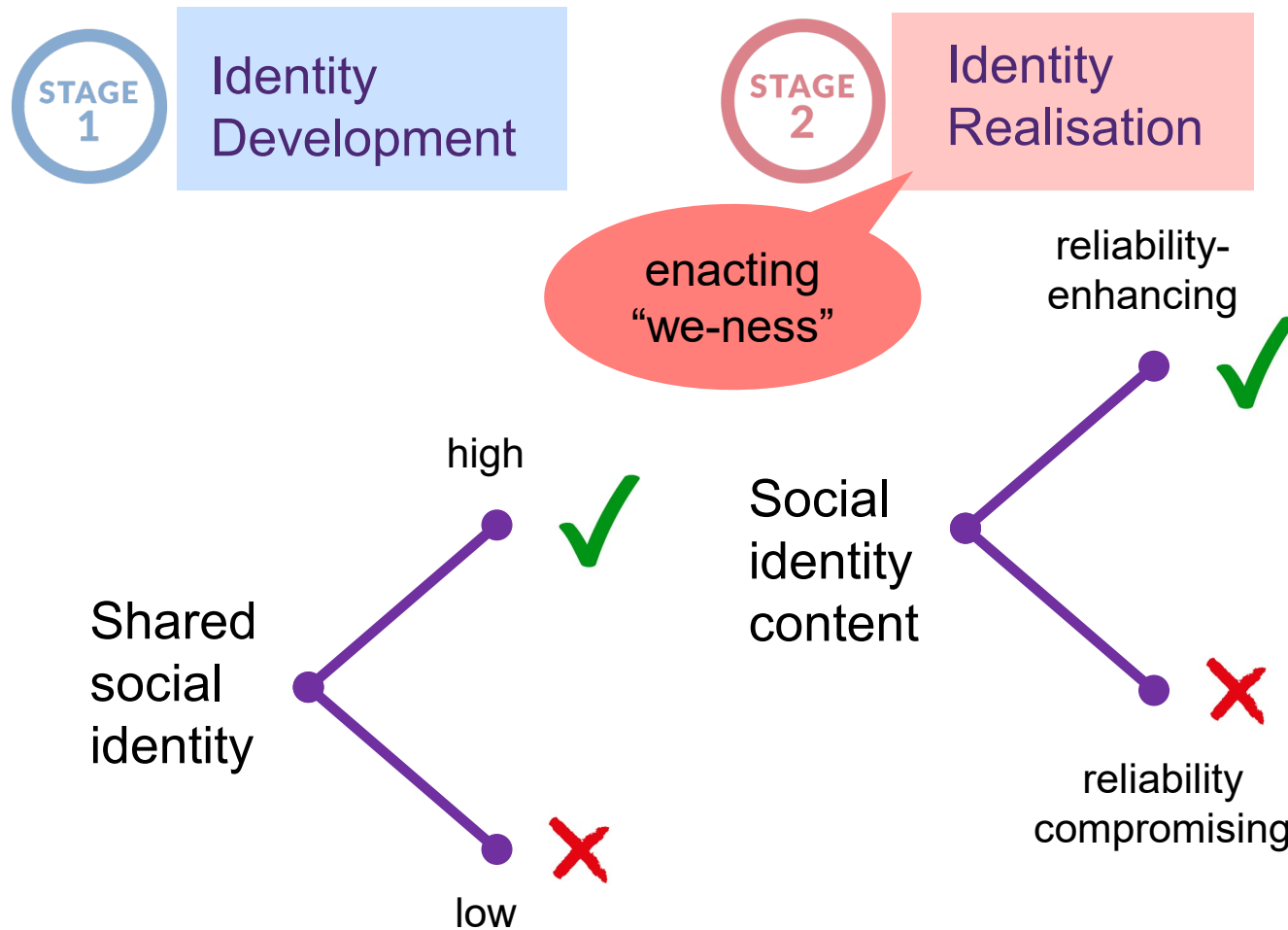


Commitment to Resilience

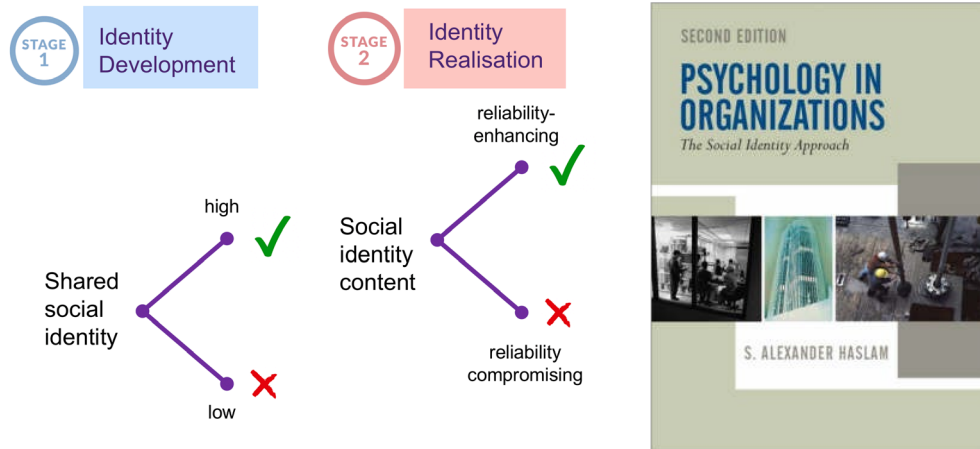


Deference to Expertise

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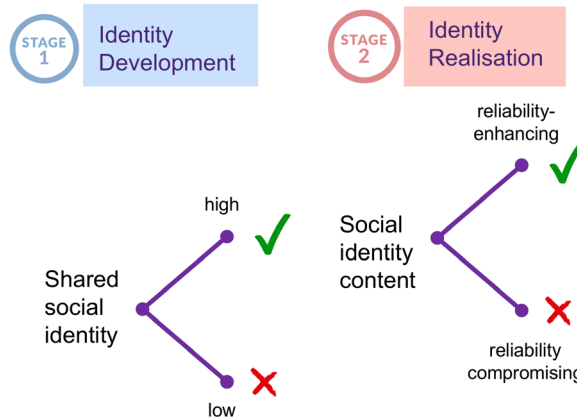


The 2-Stage Identity Model of High-Reliability Organizations

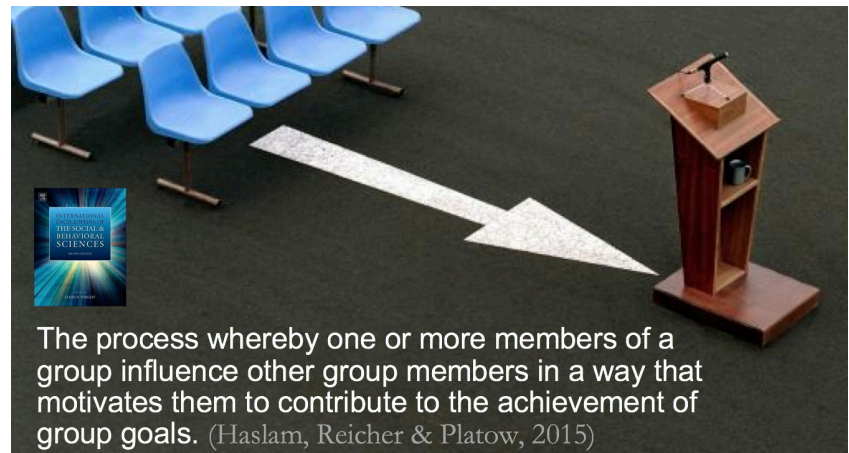


- Key problem is that theory and practice focus on (fetishise) Stage 2, but neglect Stage 1 — the importance of developing a shared social identity that underpins collective mind and provides a basis for heedful inter-relating.
- Yet **without shared social identity** (a shared sense of ‘us’) there can be no collective mind of a form that supports heedful inter-relating and the things that flow from it (that sustain HROs; e.g., trust, communication, perspective-taking; Haslam, 2004).

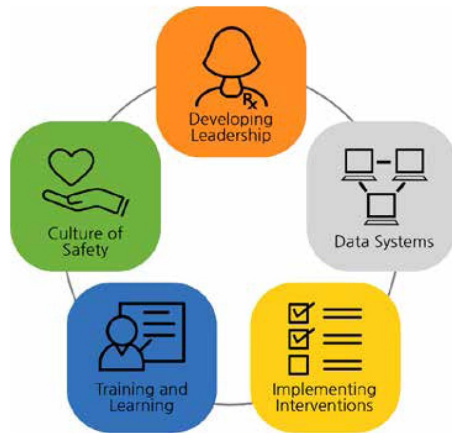
The 2-Stage Identity Model of High-Reliability Organizations



- Key challenges are therefore:
 1. To develop and embed a sense of shared social identity (us-ness)
 2. To use this as a platform for reliability-enhancing behaviour.
- How, then, shall we do this?
- Fundamentally, this is a question of **leadership**



The 2-Stage Identity Model of High-Reliability Organizations



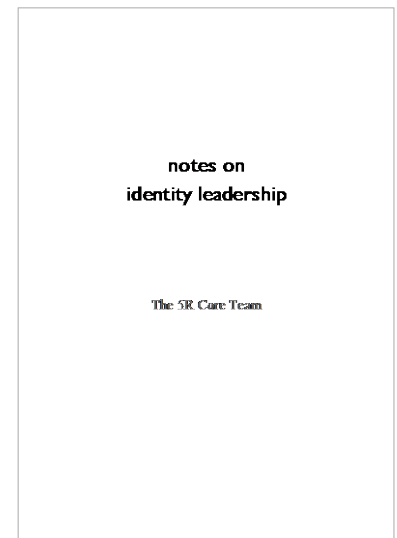
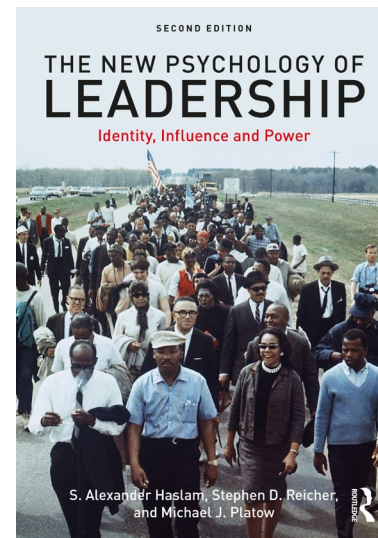
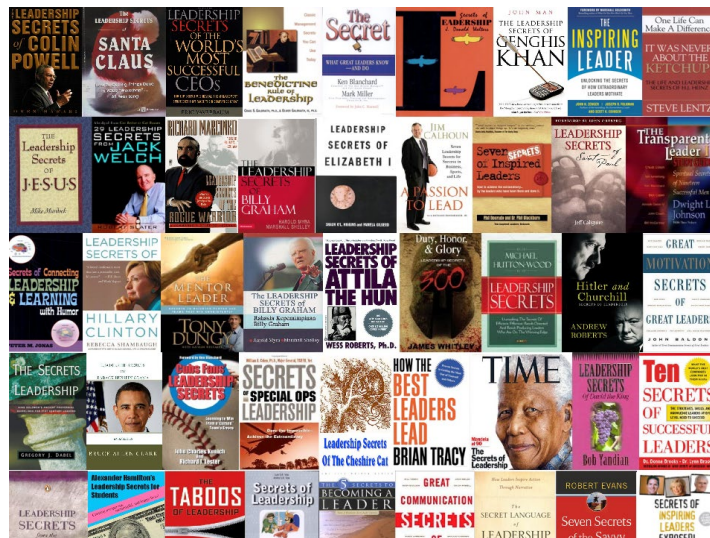
The first key strategy is *developing leadership*. The Joint Commission discussed the need for leadership (eg, board members, CEO/management, and lead physicians) to commit to the goal of zero patient harm.³ IHI described the need for leaders to facilitate and mentor teamwork, improvement, respect, and psychological safety.¹⁸

- This is widely recognised in the field.
- In particular, it is noted that leaders need to promote **teamwork**, **respect**, **improvement**, and **psychological safety** (Veazie et al., 2019).
- But, for leadership to do this in ways that support HROs, we need a new approach to this too.

Leadership for High-Reliability Organizations

The traditional focus of leadership is on (developing) the aptitudes, characteristics and skills of **leaders as individuals** (Maskor et al., 2020)

The new psychology of leadership focuses instead on the importance of **leaders working as group members** to create, represent, advance and embed a sense of shared social identity in the groups they lead — what we refer to as **identity leadership**.



Evidence that Identity Leadership matters

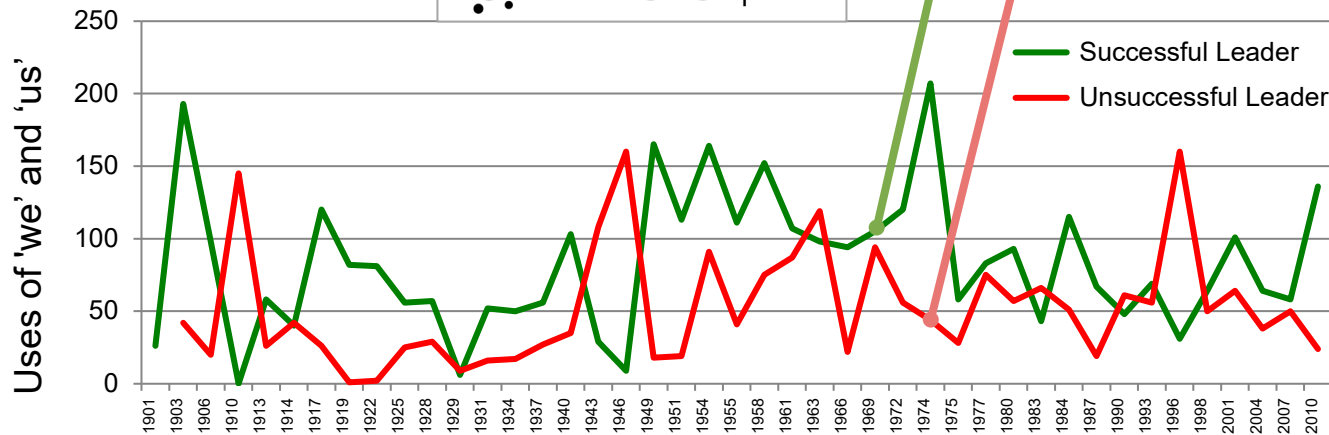
Leaders are better able to lead (to influence their group) the more they are seen to represent a social identity that they share with group members.



Evidence that Identity Leadership matters

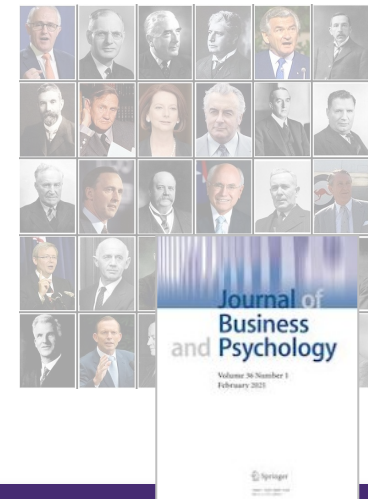
2 We follow those who speak for, and to, our social identity ('us')

Study of all official Australian election speeches since Federation in 1901
(Steffens & Haslam, 2013)



Winners use 'we' once every 79 words

Losers use 'we' once every 136 words

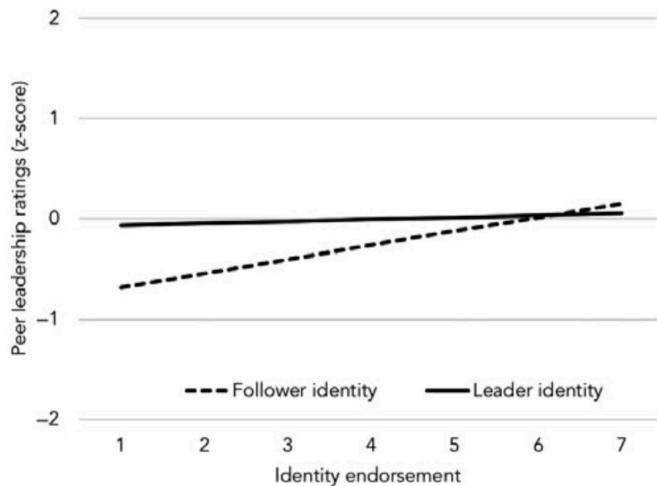


“The least important word in the leader’s vocabulary? ‘I’
The most important word in the leader’s vocabulary? ‘We.’”
(Adair, 1991)

Value of each collective pronoun on DAX = €820k
(Fladerer et al., 2020)

Evidence that Identity Leadership matters

- 3 Leaders are more supported and more followed the more they are seen to be interested in the social identity they share with their team ('us') rather than their personal identity ('me')



68 Marines tracked at 4 time points over 32 weeks
(Peters & Haslam, 2018)
 $R^2 = .34$

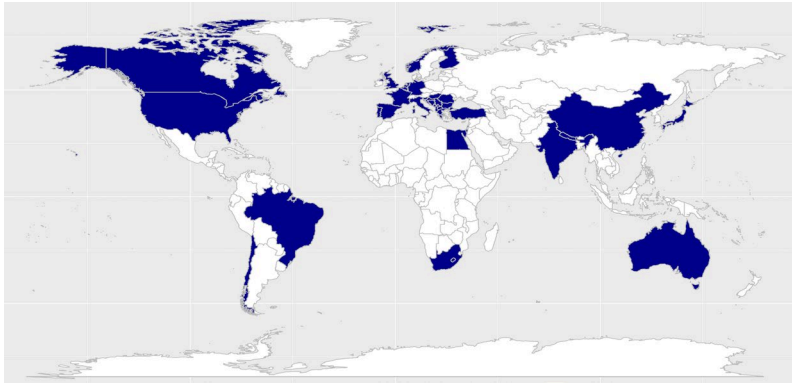
**Harvard
Business
Review**



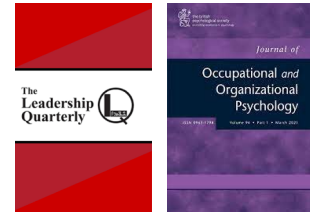
The leaders who work most effectively, never say 'I'. And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say 'I'. They don't *think* 'I'. They think 'team'. They understand their job to be to make the team function.... There is an identification with the task and with the group. (Drucker, 1992)

Evidence that Identity Leadership matters

4 Leaders don't just **represent** social identity, they **create** and **embed** it



IL Global Project
25 countries
21 languages
N = 7,286
(Steffens et al., 2014;
van Dick et al., 2018)



	Job satisfaction	Team identification	Work engagement	Leader influence	Task cohesion
creating 'us' Identity entrepreneurship		✓	✓	✓	✓
representing 'us' Identity prototypicality	✓	✓		✓	
embedding 'us' Identity impresarioship		✓	✓		✓

In every sample, identity leadership was a **better predictor** of these key outcomes than any other leadership measures.

What to do?

Recognize that social identity (“us-ness”) is a key resource for leadership of HROs. Then work with leaders and their teams to build and harness this resource.



STAGE 1

1. Identify the social identities that matter for your group

STAGE 2

2. Identify the goals and aspirations associated with different identities and facilitate activities that help group achieve them.

3. Integrate different identity-related goals with higher-order organizational practices and policies that ensure high reliability.

Readying



Reflecting



Representing



Realising



Reinforcing



The 3Rs of Identity Leadership

What to do?



To support HROs, leadership development:

- needs to help leaders engage with the 'we' of leadership not just the 'I'
- needs to help leaders engage effectively with the teams they lead.
- needs to involve leaders — at every level of an organization — actually working with the teams they lead to embed high-reliability behaviour.

If your leadership development isn't doing this, why would you expect to be an HRO?

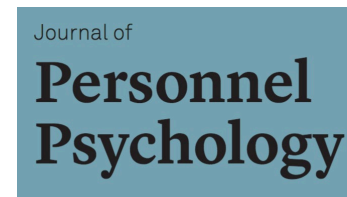
What to do?

Work to develop and adapt 5R for key sectors (health, utilities, government) has been the focus of research that UQ researchers have spearheaded over the last decade.



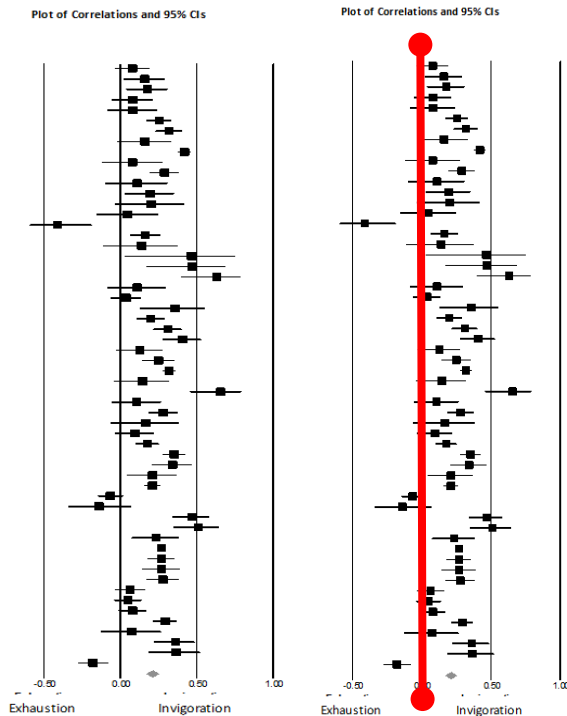
5R and efforts to build social identity shown to increase

- team identity and identification
- goal clarity, pursuit, and performance
- mental health and well-being
(Haslam et al, 2017; Peters et al., 2008)



What to do?

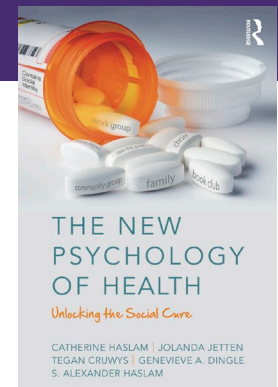
5R isn't just a framework for improving leadership and reliability, it's also foundational to **health**



- Meta-analysis of studies including measures of social identity and mental health in organizational contexts (102 effect sizes, $N = 19,799$) (Steffens et al., 2016).
- Effect size: workgroup identification and mental health $r = .21$.
- Effect size: organizational identification and mental health $r = .21$.



An HRO isn't just reliable, it also has **physically and mentally healthy employees** (Haslam et al, 2018)
.... and without social identity they won't be.



It's about us



The 5R Core team

Q&A



Why 5R?



Why we chose 5R



In addition to peer-reviewed literature – the gold standard of external research – we also looked to see what perspectives different practitioners took on leadership development. These views, gained through experience working with clients rather than through systematic observations and analysis, nonetheless indicate a good degree of alignment with the literature, particularly in stressing the **importance of context**, focusing on **development in the flow of work** and the **key role of senior leaders** in any successful development initiative.



In the October 2016 issue of HBR, Harvard Business School Professor and organisation consultant Michael Beer set out his explanation for “Why Leadership Training Fails”.

In his view, major transformation programmes focusing on training do not succeed because **“individuals have less power to change the system surrounding them than the system has to shape them”**.

The 6 most common system barriers to success are:

1. Unclear direction and conflicting priorities
2. Senior execs who haven't committed to a new direction
3. A top-down leadership style which prevents honest conversations about problems
4. A lack of coordination across functions
5. Inadequate leadership time given to talent issues
6. Employee's fear of telling the senior team about problems.

Beer advocates an approach whereby development of individuals is part of a wider organisational change effort, strongly championed by senior leaders. The “seeds of training interventions need fertile soil in place before they can grow”.



McKinsey's 2014 report into “Why Leadership Development Programs Fail” identifies four main issues:

1. **Overlooking context.** Leaders can perform brilliantly in one context but poorly in another and so training initiatives need to be aligned to the organisation's strategy. Programs should focus on critical competencies or values, not “a long list of leadership standards”.
2. **Decoupling reflection from real work.** People struggle to transfer off-site experiences back to the front line. Instead companies should make every major business project a leadership development opportunity and integrate development components into the projects themselves.
3. **Underestimating mindsets.** Identifying some of the deepest feeling and thoughts is usually a precondition of behavioural change, but this work is often absent from programmes (perhaps because it is too uncomfortable). Promoting empowerment, for example, is fine but won't work if participants have a clear ‘controlling’ mindset.
4. **Failing to measure results.** Relying on participant feedback alone results in programmes that are more enjoyable than effective. Measuring success is important, e.g. through repeated 360 feedback or business impact.



The Centre for Creative Leadership offers four different but related reasons why leadership development programmes can fall short:

1. **Wrong focus.** Too much time is spent delivering information and content and not enough on developing the leaders themselves. Leaders often know what they should be doing but lack the personal development to do it.
2. **Lack of connectivity.** The content of training programmes is too often disconnected from the leader's work. When people return to the real world it is hard to convert learning into actions that address real problems.
3. **Leader in isolation.** Most programmes fail to engage the leader's key stakeholders back at work in the change process. As a result, leaders miss out on the support and accountability of colleagues but are also more likely to experience resistance to new ideas and ways of working.
4. **Too short.** Programmes are designed as events rather than as processes over time. This approach gives leaders a short-term boost but not the ongoing follow-up to solidify new thinking into new habits.