

Conflict in close quarters essay



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The case study, Conflict in Close Quarters, discusses an experiment conducted by a team of psychologist at Moscow's Institute for Biomedical Problems (IBMP).

The team wanted to study the dynamics of long-term isolation in space so that they could apply this knowledge to the International Space Station. To achieve this experiment IBMP set up a replica of the Mir space station in Moscow and arranged for two teams to be isolated in chambers that simulated living conditions on the space station Mir. One team was comprised of four Russian cosmonauts who dwelled in the smaller of the two chambers and were spending a total of 240 days in isolation. The other team consisted of three international researchers from Japan, Canada and Austria who were spending a total of 110 days in isolation in a chamber the size of a train car. When the second team arrived the Russian cosmonauts had already completed 120 days in isolation and the chambers doors were open to allow the members of each team to interact with each other. Judith Lapierre, a French-Canadian, was the only women participating in the experiment.

There were several sources of conflict that arose throughout this experiment including crew tension, differentiation issues, communication problems and ambiguous rules. During a New Year's Eve celebration held by the international crew, two Russian cosmonauts break into a fistfight, splattering blood on the module walls. According to sociologist, Marilyn Dudley-Rowley, chief research scientist at OPS-Alaska, one key factor to surviving stress and getting along may be how different each crew member is from the others. In her analysis, groups made up of similar people have more interpersonal

problems than do heterogeneous groups. People of different backgrounds, she says, have more to teach one another over the long haul than do people who are exactly alike and therefore get along better under stressful situations. Soon after the New Year's Eve brawl, the Russian commander, pressed unwelcomed kisses on the only female, Canadian crew member Judith LaPierre.

Conflict is often caused by different values, beliefs, cultures and genders due to unique backgrounds and therefore, this incident was brushed off as a harmless moment by the Russian commander and scientist. The Russians attempted to play down the kissing incident by saying that it was one fleeting kiss, a clash of cultures, and a female participant who was too emotional. Judith Lapierre on the other hand, saw the incident as a prelude to sexual harassment. None of the seven participants in the experiment spoke English as their first language, yet they communicated throughout their stay in English at varying levels of proficiency.

According to Steven Dawson, a neuropsychologist, cultural backgrounds may

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