

Psychological Science Goes to Mars

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Teamwork is important in most jobs — but it’s especially critical for people who have to complete an expensive, high-stakes, and technically complicated mission all while locked in a zero-gravity chamber with their co-workers for eighteen straight months. That’s why NASA is calling on psychological scientists like Eduardo Salas and Kimberly Smith-Jentsch to design strategies that astronauts can use to help each other stay healthy and safe during a voyage to Mars that is planned for 2030.

In 2010, Salas and Smith-Jentsch, both of the University of Central Florida, were awarded a [three-year, \\$1.2 million grant](#) by NASA and the National Space Biomedical Research Institute. The two researchers contributed to an extensive [report on organizational training](#) that was published in the latest issue of *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. Previously, the duo had studied teamwork in the Navy, examining “guided team self-correction,” a strategy that transfers well to NASA astronauts.

“Imagine if there is conflict, or they cannot self-correct,” says Salas in an interview posted on the website of the Society for Industrial & Organizational, Inc. “When the astronauts are out in space, they can’t say, ‘I want to get off the bus.’ So they have to be a very cohesive, productive team and be able to recognize problems in themselves and one another, so they can fix them.”

Salas and Smith-Jentsch believe that teaching astronauts to periodically monitor and evaluate themselves and their crewmates will help them to solve problems in an environment where outside resources are not readily available.