

JOINING THE DOTS –

**OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
IN AN INTERNATIONAL
MARINE TRANSPORT
FLEET**



Imogen Stilz,
February 2025

Marine transport and me

seafarers

- 2 to 9 months on ship each time
- Usually >24 hours, and often >7 days from the nearest port.
- Variability in employment security & organizational culture.

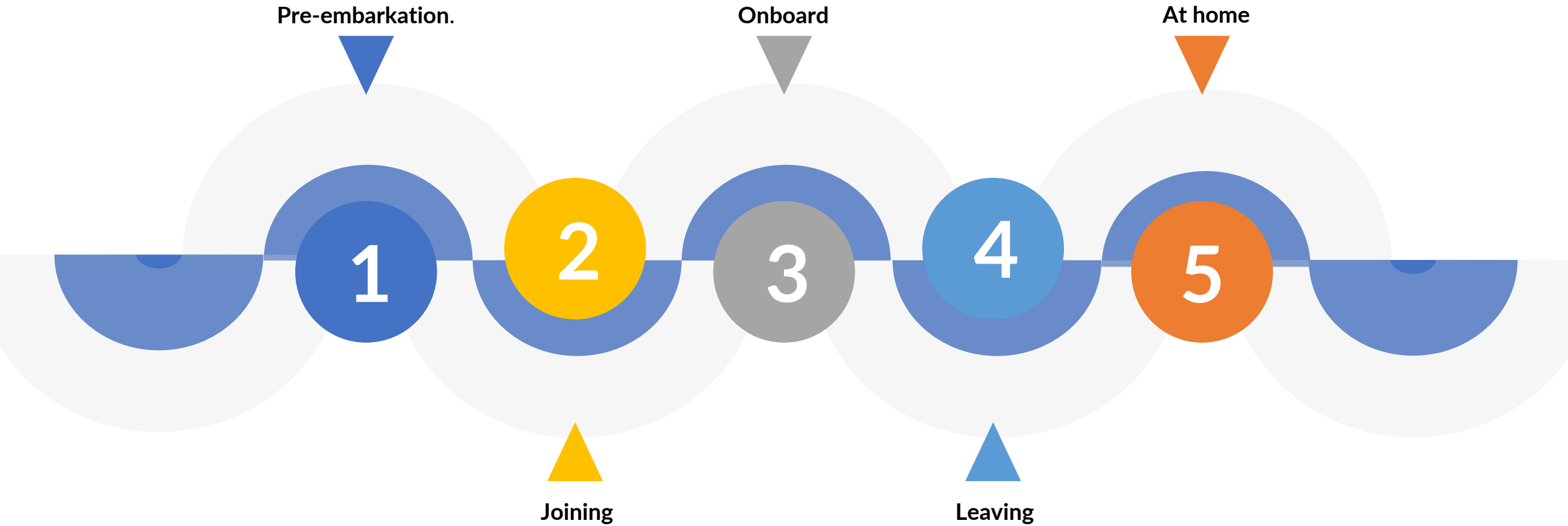
did you know?

- Shipping moves 90% of global trade
- 1.89 million seafarers world wide, 74000 vessels (2021)

seafarer health is important for global trade

- Safety of people and operations
- Timely delivery (daily operating costs \$100k-\$300k)

A seafarer's health journey



Case 1 (fictional)

A tummy ache

- 34 year old 2nd officer, last seafarer medical December 2023
- 15 July stomach ulcer, treated by GP with Lansoprazole for 8 weeks.
- Symptoms resolve 29 July.
- 3 August: joining letter for next embarkation.
- Joins ship 1 September, only 7 days of Lansoprazole left to take.
- 10 September mild tummy ache, seafarer just tries to manage.
- 14 September vomits blood. Medical officer calls telemedical advice. Monitoring blood pressure and fluid intake.
- 15 September emergency disembarkation by launch, admitted to hospital.



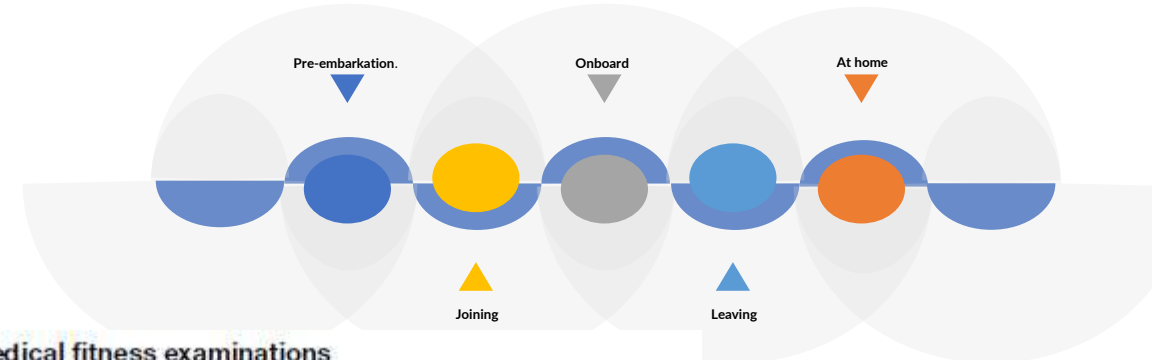
✓ valid fitness medical
✓ appropriate dg/tx

✗ no safety net for
changed health
✗ delay in escalation

1 Pre-Embarkation

The seafarer medical examination

- Statutory requirement (STCW, IMO/ILO Guidelines on the medical examinations of seafarers 2011, Varying flag state formats)
- Common objectives:
 - Seafarer fit for duties with minimized risk to self or others
 - Confirm that present health conditions have a low risk of recurrence
- Opportunities
 - Opportunity for identifying & addressing health problems, and optimising care prior to being on ship.



IV. Seafarer medical fitness examinations

The aim of the medical examination is to ensure that the seafarer being examined is medically fit to perform his or her routine and emergency duties at sea and is not suffering from any medical condition likely to be aggravated by service at sea, to render him or her unfit for service or to endanger the health of other persons on board. Wherever possible, any conditions found should be treated prior to returning to work at sea so that

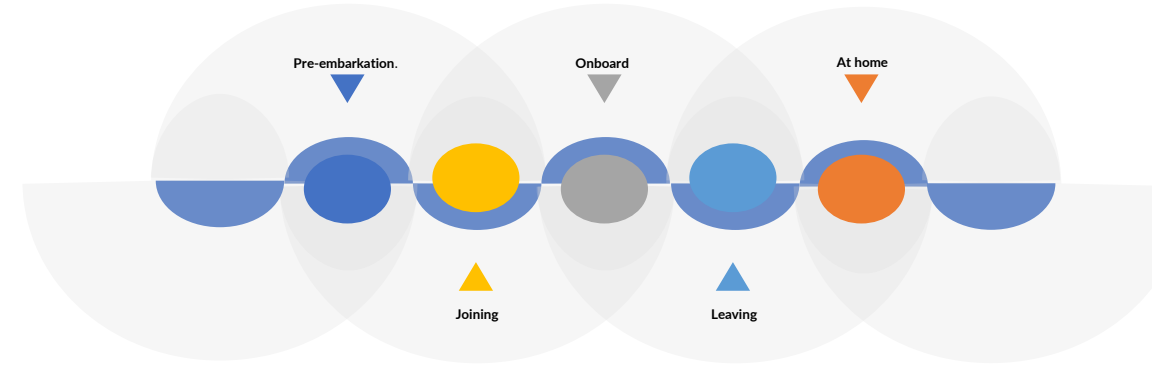


- WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THIS TO WORK?
 - fair and transparent employer processes
 - seafarer being empowered to own and manage their health

1 Pre-Embarkation (continued)

The Joining Instructions

- Confirmation sent by the employer about next embarkation
- Includes joining instructions such as travel itinerary & documentary requirements
- Opportunities:
 - Check if there is any change in health or medication since the last seafarer medical.
 - Ensure appropriate health support is available on board (i.e. medication supplies, monitoring, etc).
 - Information and prompt for the seafarer to get Travel Health advice (malaria, vaccinations, etc)



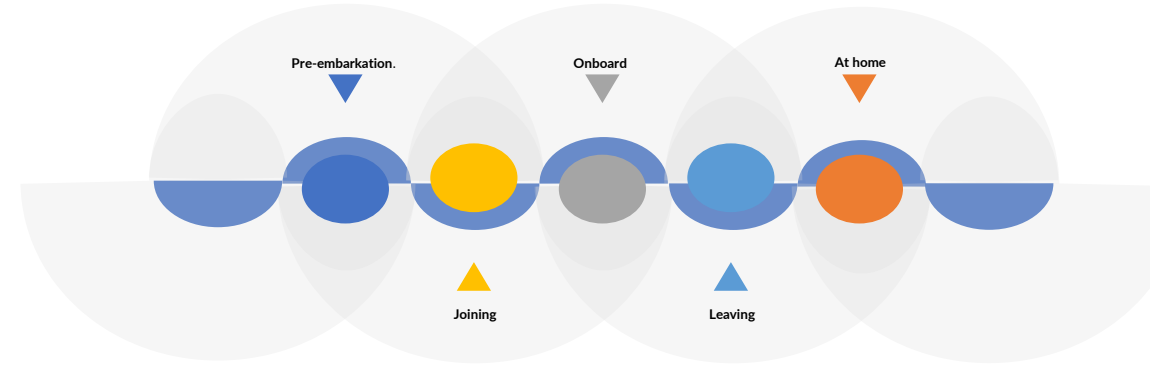
WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THIS TO WORK?

- fair and transparent employer processes
- seafarer being empowered to own and manage their health

2 Joining ship

On boarding safety briefing – incl medication declaration

- Safety policy or statutory need to have medicine information
- Opportunities
 - Ensure appropriate health support is available on board (i.e. medication supplies, monitoring, etc).



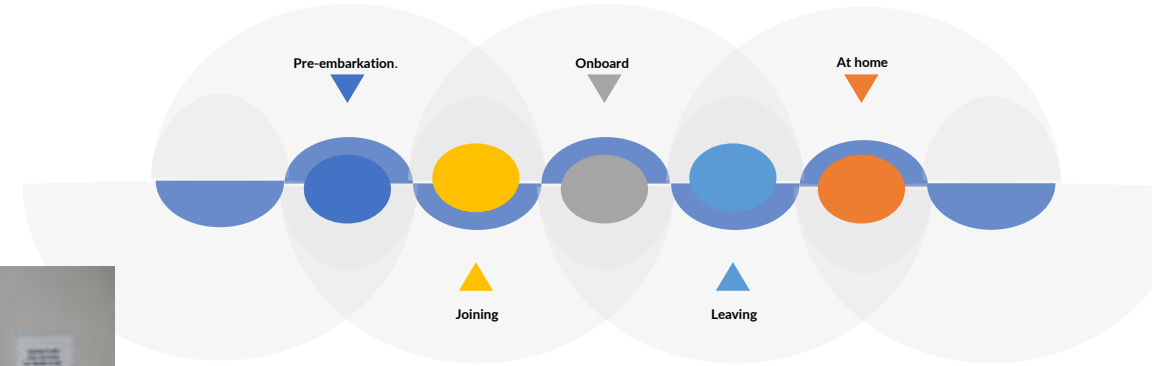
WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THIS TO WORK?

- fair and transparent employer processes
- seafarer being empowered to own and manage their health

3 Onboard

Staying healthy on board

- Lifestyle
 - Nutrition
 - Exercise
 - Smoking and alcohol
 - Dental hygiene
- Access to Resources
- Mental health and wellbeing awareness and ambassadors
- Social connection on board & connection with home
- Supporting others
- Good work
- Health hazard information
- Manage chronic conditions



WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THIS TO WORK?

- employer providing facilities and environment
- seafarer being empowered to own and manage their health

Case 2 (fictional)

At wit's end

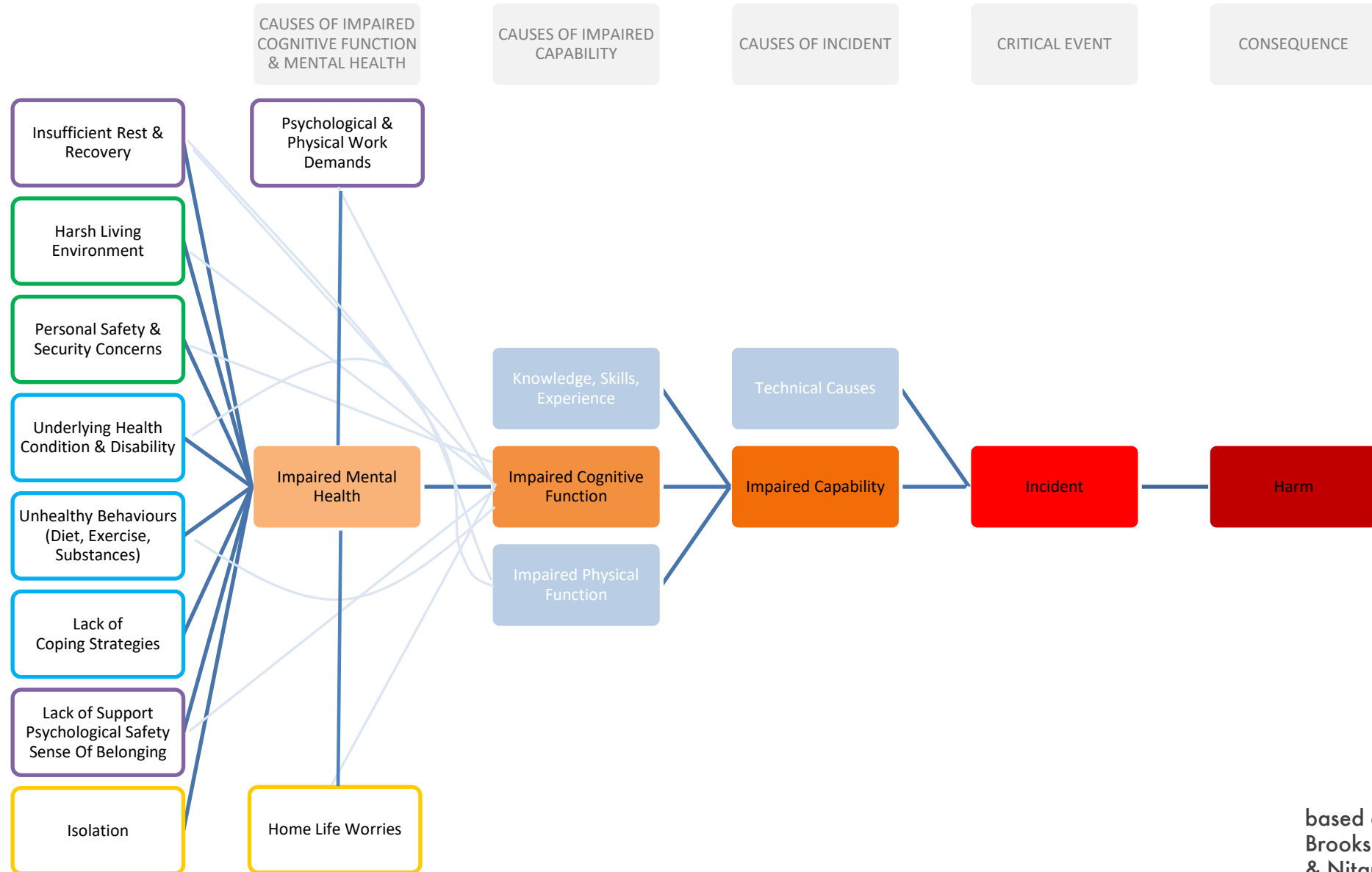
- 45 year old oiler, last medical April 2024, joined ship in May.
- In June he's noticeably less sociable, spends all free time in his cabin.
- A colleague approaches him during a break and says that she's a bit worried about him. The oiler doesn't want to talk at first. The colleague offers to catch up after the shift, and he agrees.
- It turns out that his teenage son has been picked up by police with an illegal substance – not for the first time, and the situation is straining the fabric of his family. He feels helpless and sees no way out.
- The colleague remembers a recent crew talk on mental health support but doesn't remember the details. She offers to accompany the oiler to talk to the medical officer.
- With telephone counselling support, and ship management making arrangements for early relief, and family help once at home, the oiler starts feeling better.

✓ somebody noticed
✓ somebody got him help

✗ stigma and shame
✗ support network in tatters
✗ feeling trapped

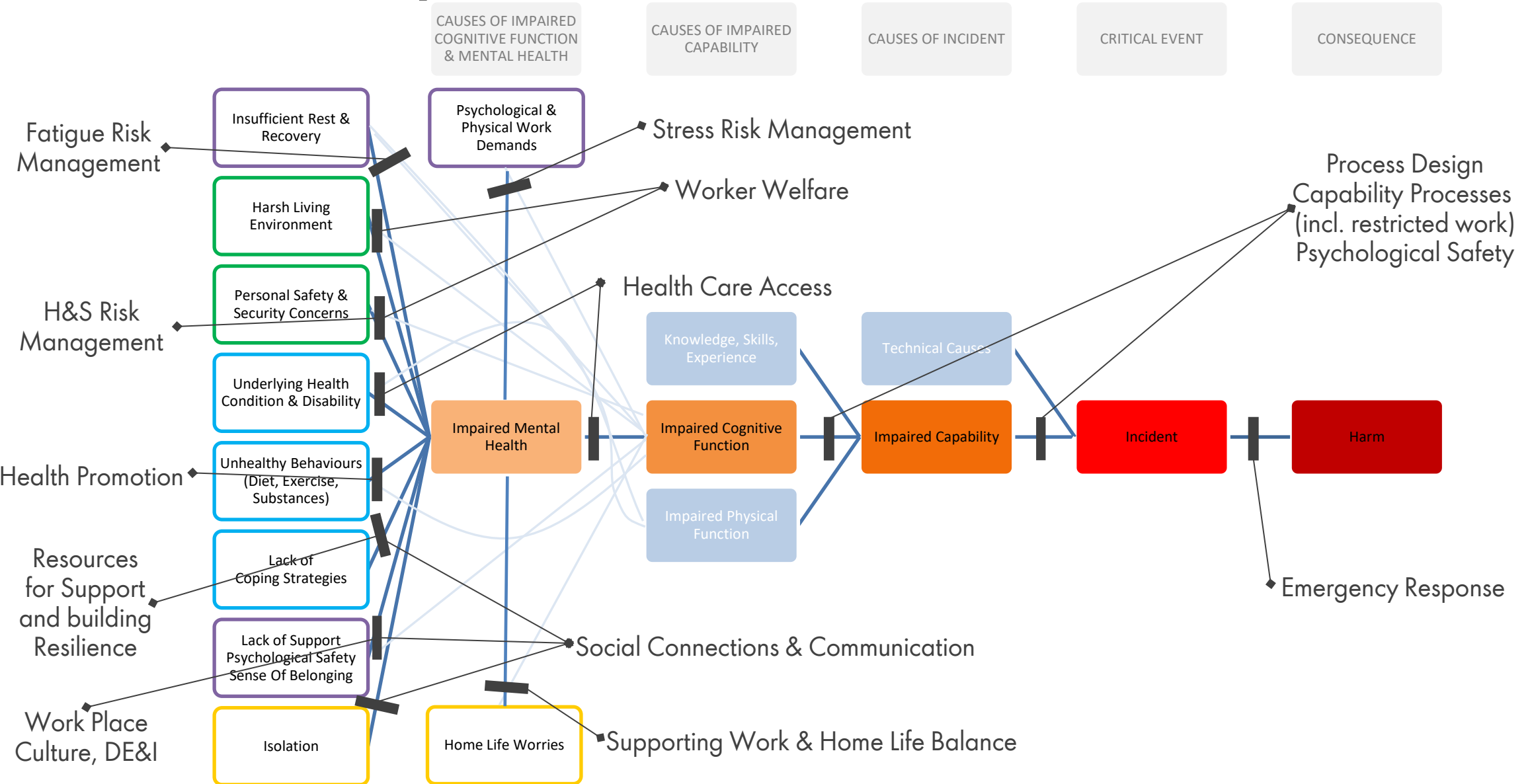


Root Cause Tree & Threat Lines – example Seafarer Mental Health



based on synthesis of:
Brooks 2022
& Nitari 2022

Barriers – example Seafarer Mental Health



Case 3 (fictional)

A cool head

- Engine room in the Middle East in August at anchor
- Break and hydration schedule as per heat risk assessment and management plan.
- An engine rating recognizes that the 4th Engineer appears particularly exhausted.
- The 4th Engineer had a run in with the 2nd Engineer the day before, she doesn't want to cause a fuss, and wants to continue working.
- The engine rating flags his concerns with the 3rd Engineer, who stops all work in the area and reassesses the situation:
- The 4th Engineer had been in the engine room for a prolonged period during the hottest part of the day. Adjustments for breaks during that time period had been overlooked in the risk assessment.

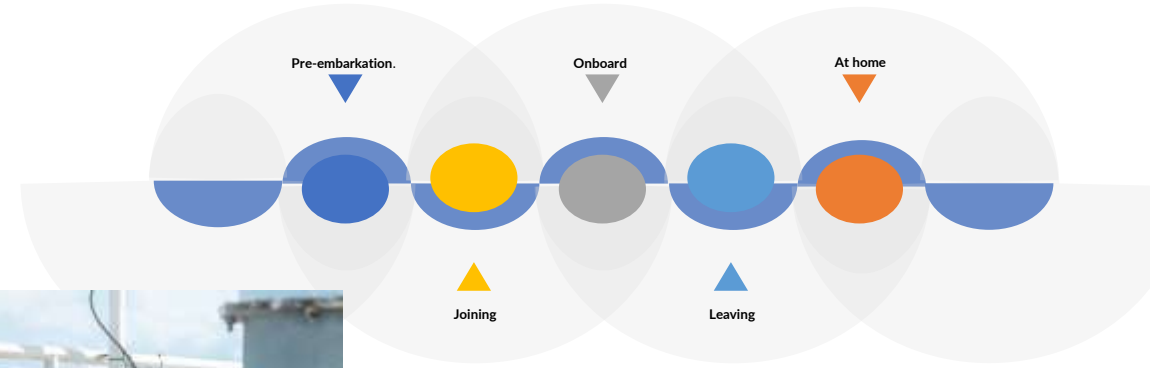


- ✓ somebody noticed a problem
- ✓ they felt safe to speak up

3 Onboard (continued)

Protecting your health

- Risk management for work place hazards
- Physical (noise, heat, vibration)
- Chemical (benzene, paint)
- Biological (legionella, COVID)
- Ergonomic (manual handling, postures)
- Psychological (fatigue, stress, psychological safety)
- Accidents (human factors & safety)
- Know your hazards, feel confident and empowered to recognise & act.



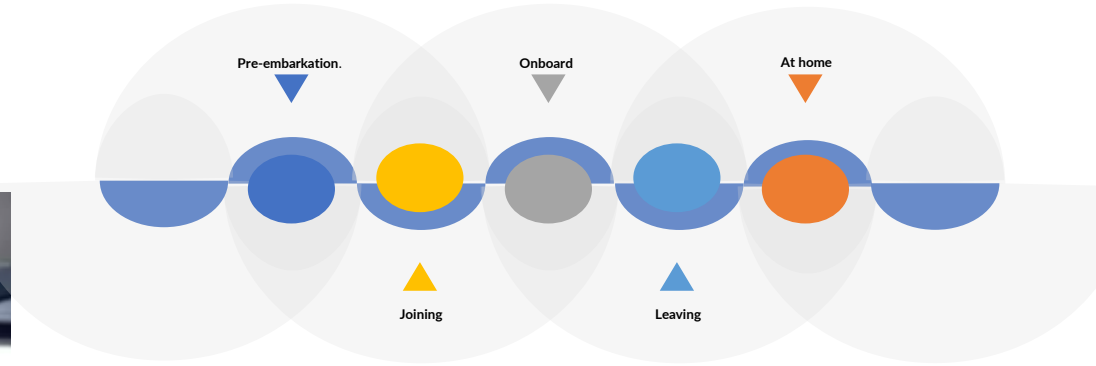
WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THIS TO WORK?

- employer providing environment and safe systems
- psychological safety is key

3 Onboard (continued)

Health care

- New health problem
 - First Aider -> Ship medical officer
 - Mental health: peer signposting / counselling / EAP -> Ship medical officer
- Routine health care: -> Ship medical officer
- Emergency care - escalation
 - -> Ship medical officer
 - Telemedical support
 - Planned shoreside review
 - Planned medical disembarkation + shoreside treatment
 - Emergency medical evacuation + shoreside treatment
 - ... repatriation



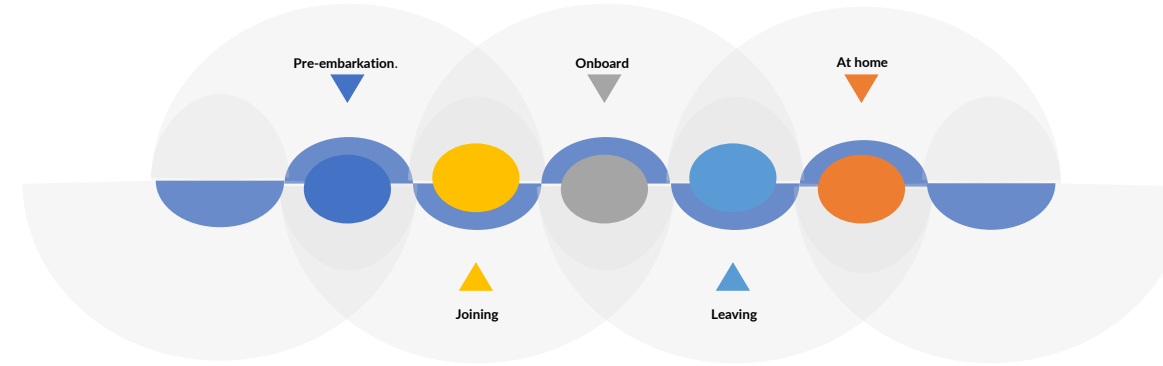
WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THIS TO WORK?

- Employer providing facilities and environment
- seafarer being empowered to own and manage their health

4 Leaving

Travel health

- Travel health back home: malaria prophylaxis, vaccinations, country specific requirements



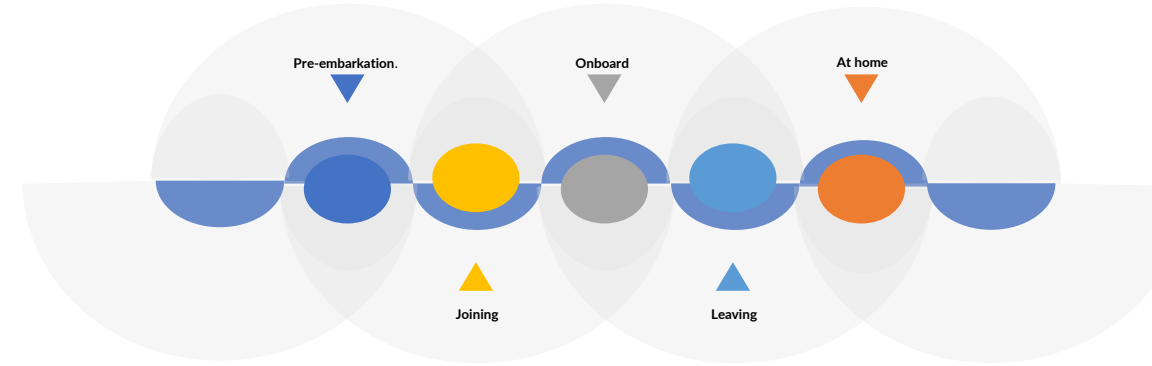
WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THIS TO WORK?

- seafarer being empowered to own and manage their health

5 At home

Healthy home life

- Nutrition, exercise, healthy habits, connections, recharge
- Accessing health care
- look after self and others, financial health



WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THIS TO WORK?

- seafarer being empowered to own and manage their health

Healthy People at Sea – What is needed for this to work?

Key Factors

- Employer providing facilities and environment, safe systems, psychological safety
- Fair and transparent employer processes
- Seafarer being empowered to own and manage their health



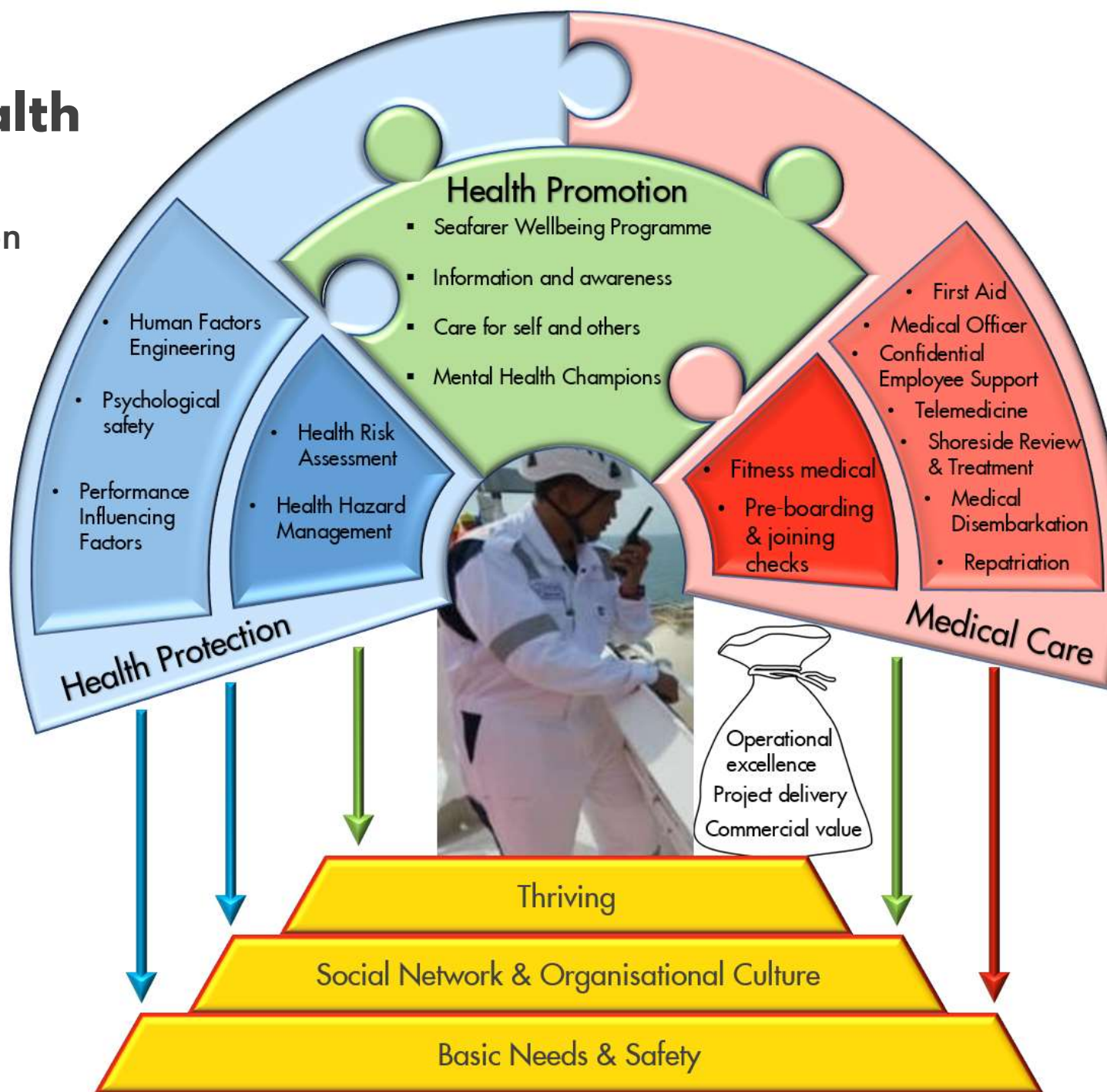
...are dependent on

- Leadership commitment
- Organisational culture



Shipping Health

...the jig saw version





Imogen Stilz
February 2025