

FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OVERVIEW

The descriptions are based on the work of Patrick Lencioni's book, Five Dysfunctions of a Team.

Dysfunction 1: Absence of Trust

In the context of building a team, trust is the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group.

With trust, team members make themselves vulnerable to one another, confident that their respective vulnerabilities will not be used against them.

MEMBERS OF TEAMS WITH AN ABSENCE OF TRUST...

- Conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another.
- Hesitate to ask for help or provide constructive feedback.
- Jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others without attempting to clarify them.
- Fail to recognise and tap into one another's skills and experiences.
- Waste time and energy managing their behaviours for effect.
- Dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together.

MEMBERS OF TRUSTING TEAMS...

- Admit weaknesses and mistakes.
- Ask for help.
- Give one another the benefit of the doubt before arriving at a negative conclusion.
- Take risks in offering feedback and assistance.
- Appreciate and tap into one another's skills and experiences.
- Focus time and energy on important issues, not politics.
- Look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group.

WAYS OF OVERCOMING

- Personal histories exercise.
- Team effectiveness exercise.
- Personality and behavioural preference profiles.
- 360 degree feedback.
- Experiential team exercises.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

The most important action that a leader must take to encourage the building of trust in a team is to demonstrate vulnerability first. Displays of vulnerability must be genuine, they cannot be staged. One of the best ways to lose the trust of a team is to feign vulnerability in order to manipulate the emotions of others.

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Dysfunction 2: Fear of Conflict

It is important to distinguish productive ideological conflict from destructive fighting and interpersonal politics. Ideological conflict is limited to concepts and ideas, and avoids personality-focused, mean-spirited attacks.

TEAMS THAT FEAR CONFLICT...

- Have boring meetings.
- Create environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive.
- Ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success.
- Fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members.
- Waste time and energy with posturing and interpersonal risk management.

TEAMS THAT ENGAGE IN CONFLICT...

- Have lively, interesting meetings.
- Extract and exploit the ideas of all team members.
- Solve real problems quickly.
- Minimise politics.
- Put critical topics on the table for discussion.

WAYS OF OVERCOMING

- Mining for conflict – extracting buried disagreements within the team and shedding the light of day on them.
- Real-time permission – in the process of mining for conflict, team members need to coach one another not to retreat from healthy debate.
- Other tools – personality and behaviour preference tools.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

It is key that leaders demonstrate restraint when their people engage in conflict, and allow resolution to occur naturally, as messy as it can sometimes be. A leader's ability to personally model appropriate conflict behaviour is essential. By avoiding conflict when it is necessary and productive – something many leaders do – a team leader will encourage this dysfunction to thrive.

Dysfunction 3: Lack of Commitment

In the context of a team, commitment is a function of two things: clarity and buy-in. Great teams make clear and timely decisions and move forward with complete buy-in from every member of the team, even those who voted against the decision. They leave meetings confident that no one on the team is quietly harbouring doubts about whether to support the actions agreed on.

The two greatest causes of lack of commitment are the desire for consensus and the need for certainty.

A TEAM THAT FAILS TO COMMIT...

- Creates ambiguity among the team about direction and priorities.
- Watches windows of opportunity close due to excessive analysis and unnecessary delay.
- Breeds lack of confidence and fear of failure.
- Revisits discussions and decisions again and again.
- Encourages second-guessing among team members.

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A TEAM THAT COMMITS...

- Creates clarity around direction and priorities.
- Aligns the entire team around common objectives.
- Develops an ability to learn from mistakes.
- Takes advantage of opportunities before competitors do.
- Moves forward without hesitation.
- Changes direction without hesitation or guilt.

WAYS OF OVERCOMING

- Cascading messaging.
- Deadlines – for when decisions are to be made and honouring those dates.
- Contingency and worse-case scenario analysis.
- Low-risk exposure therapy.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

The team leader must be comfortable with the prospect of making a decision that ultimately turns out to be wrong. And the leader must be constantly pushing the group for closure around issues, as well as adherence to schedules that the team has set.

Dysfunction 4: Avoidance of Accountability

In the context of teamwork accountability refers specifically to the willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviours that might hurt the team. Members of great teams improve their relationships by holding one another accountable, thus demonstrating that they respect each other and have high expectations for one another's performance.

A TEAM THAT AVOIDS ACCOUNTABILITY...

- Creates resentment among team members who have different standards of performance.
- Encourages mediocrity.
- Misses deadlines and key deliverables.
- Places an undue burden on the team leader as the sole source of discipline.

A TEAM THAT HOLDS ONE ANOTHER ACCOUNTABLE...

- Ensures that poor performers feel pressure to improve.
- Identifies potential problems quickly by questioning one another's approaches without hesitation.
- Establishes respect among team members who are held to the same high standards.
- Avoids excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action.

WAYS OF OVERCOMING

- Publication of goals and standards – the enemy of accountability is ambiguity.
- Simple and regular progress reviews.
- Team rewards.

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THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

One of the most difficult challenges for a leader who wants to instil accountability on a team is to encourage and allow the team to serve as the first and primary accountability mechanism. Sometimes strong leaders naturally create an accountability vacuum within the team leaving themselves as the only source of discipline.

Dysfunction 5: Inattention to Results

The ultimate dysfunction of a team is the tendency of members to care about something other than the collective goals of the group. An unrelenting focus on specific objectives and clearly defined outcomes is a requirement for any team that judges itself on performance. But what would a team be focused on other than results? Team status and individual status.

A TEAM THAT IS NOT FOCUSED ON RESULTS...

- Stagnates/fails to grow.
- Encourages team members to focus on their own individual goals.
- Is easily distracted.

A TEAM THAT FOCUSES ON COLLECTIVE RESULTS...

- Minimises individualistic behaviour.
- Enjoys success and suffers failure acutely.
- Benefits from individuals who subjugate their own goals/interests for the good of the team.
- Avoids distractions.

WAYS OF OVERCOMING

- By making results clear, and rewarding only those behaviours and actions that contribute to those results.
- Public declaration of results – teams that are willing to commit publicly to specific results are more likely to work with a passionate, even desperate desire to achieve those results.
- Results-based rewards.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

Perhaps more than with any of the other dysfunctions, the leader must set the tone for a focus on results.