

# How To Know If You Are Part Of A Dysfunctional Team

By Jonathon Yumol, November 2017

(Excerpted from Patrick Lencioni's "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team")

## Part 4 – Avoidance of Accountability

Vince Lombardi, the legendary football coach, defined teamwork as "Individual commitment to a group effort; that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." Good teamwork is essential for high performance in any business, organization, sports or any group working towards a common goal. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare.

That is where the rarity of teamwork comes into play. For all the attention that it has received over the years from scholars, coaches, teachers, and the media, teamwork is as elusive as it has ever been within most organizations. The fact remains that teams, because they are made up of imperfect human beings, are inherently dysfunctional.

Patrick Lencioni believes that First, genuine teamwork in most organizations remain as elusive as it has ever been. Secondly, organizations fail to achieve teamwork because they unknowingly fall prey to five natural pitfalls, outlined in the pyramid below.



Because of this lack of real commitment and buy-in, team members develop an **Avoidance of Accountability**, which is the fourth dysfunction. Without committing to a clear plan of action, even the most focused and driven people often hesitate to call their peers on actions and behaviors that seem counterproductive to the good of the team.

#### 4. Avoidance of Accountability

##### **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

Once a team achieves clarity and buy-in, it is up to the team members to hold each other accountable for the decisions that were made, to uphold high standards of performance and behavior. This may sound simple enough, but most executives do not like to do it, especially when it comes to a peers' behavior because they want to avoid interpersonal discomfort.

Accountability is a buzzword often used in team environments for organizations and business. In the context of teamwork, accountability specifically refers to the willingness of group members to challenge their peers on behaviors or performance that may negatively impact the team. The essence of this dysfunction is the unwillingness of team members to tolerate interpersonal discomfort as a result from calling out a peer on their negative behaviors and the general tendency to avoid difficult conversations. Members of great teams and that have strong interpersonal relationships with other group members overcome these natural inclinations, choosing instead to "enter the danger" with one another.

Even among team members with strong personal relationships and teams with solid foundations, this is easier said than done. Group members who are particularly close to one another sometimes hesitate to hold each other accountable because they fear jeopardizing the valuable relationship that they have. Ironically, this causes the relationship to deteriorate as team members begin to resent each other for failing to live up to expectations and allowing the standards of the group to erode. Individuals that are part of a great team improve their relationships by holding one another accountable, thereby demonstrating respect for each other and have high expectations for one another's performance and behaviors.

Peer pressure, as politically incorrect as it sounds, is one of the most effective and efficient means of maintaining high standards of performance and behaviors on a team. One of the benefits is the reduction of the need for excessive bureaucracy around corrective action and performance management. There is nothing more motivating than the fear of disappointing respected teammates.

#### **Suggestions for Overcoming Dysfunction 4**

How does a team go about ensuring accountability? The key to overcoming this dysfunction is adhering to a few management tools that are simple yet effective.

## ***Publication of Goals and Standards***

An effective way to make it easy and simple for team members to hold each other accountable is to publicly clarify exactly what the team needs to achieve, who needs to deliver what and how everyone must act in order to succeed. Ambiguity is the enemy of accountability, even when a team has initially committed to a course of action and agreed upon behavioral standards, it is important to keep those agreements out in the open so that team members cannot ignore them.

## ***Simple and Regular Progress Reviews***

A little structure is a successful tool in helping people to take action that they might not be otherwise inclined to do so. This is especially true when it comes to giving team members feedback on their performance and/or behavior. Whether it is verbally or in a written form, it is important for group members to regularly communicate with each other regarding how they are holding up to the stated objectives and standards. Relying on them to do so on their own, without clear expectations and structure, is inviting the potential for the avoidance of accountability.

## ***Team Rewards***

Teams can create a culture of accountability by shifting rewards away from individual performance to team achievement. This occurs because members of the team are unlikely to stand idle and fail because a peer is not pulling their weight.

## ***Myers-Briggs Type Indicator***

**unify consulting group** believes that the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is one of the best personality tests out on the market. Some of the best characteristics of the MBTI is that it is nonjudgmental in nature, it is established through decades of research and development, and the extent which participants take an active role identifying their own type.

The MBTI enhances people's clarity and comfort with their own and others workstyles allowing them to effectively and constructively provide feedback to team members. Additionally, the MBTI gives a logical, coherent structure for understanding normal differences among people in communication styles, team work, project management, preferred supervision style and workplace environment. The MBTI provides perspective for analyzing organizational culture, management structure and other organizational systems.

\*\*\* **unify consulting group** can provide MBTI administration and interpretation for your organization, leadership teams, and employees. Please contact **unify consulting group** if you are interested in taking the MBTI questionnaire.

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## **Connection to Dysfunction 5**

How does avoidance of accountability relate to the last dysfunction, the inattention to results. If teammates are not being held accountable to their contributions, they will most likely turn their focus on their own personal needs such as their personal advancement and/or their respective departments.

An absence of accountability is an invitation to team members to shift their attention away from the collective results.