

How To Know If You Are Part Of A Dysfunctional Team

By Jonathan Yumol, July 2016

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

Part 1: Absence of Trust

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.



The first dysfunction is an **Absence of Trust** between team members. This comes about with team member's unwillingness to be **vulnerable** within the group. Team members who are not honestly open with another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust.

1. Absences of Trust

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
- Hesitate to offer help outside their own areas of responsibility
- Jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others without trying to clarify them
- Fail to recognize and tap into one another's skill and experiences
- Waste time and energy managing their behaviors for effect
- Hold grudges
- Dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together

Members of trusting teams:

- Admit weaknesses and mistakes
- Ask for help
- Accept questions and input about their areas of responsibility
- 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
- Offer and accept apologies without hesitation
- Look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group

Trust is the foundation of real teamwork, therefore it has been placed at the bottom of the pyramid. The lack of trust injects a disease up the pyramid and crippling the potential strength of a well-functioning team. Thus, the first dysfunction is a failure on the part of team members to understand and open up to one another. Great teams do not hold back with one another, they are unafraid to air their dirty laundry. They admit weaknesses, mistakes and their concerns without fear of reprisal.

Teamwork begins by building trust and the only way to do that is overcome the need for invulnerability. University of Houston Professor Brene Brown believes that vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, trust and engagement. If you want your employees to feel safe enough to float a new, potentially risky idea, create an environment where people can do that without ridicule; even if the concept doesn't end up panning out.

Trust lies at the heart of a functioning, cohesive team, without it, teamwork is all but impossible. 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. In principle, teammates must get comfortable being vulnerable around each other. Additionally, team members must be confident that their respective vulnerabilities will not be used against them. Weaknesses, skill deficiencies, interpersonal shortcomings, and requests for help are examples of such vulnerabilities.

Achieving vulnerability-based trust is difficult because throughout the course of career advancement and education, most successful individuals learn to be competitive with their peers and protective of their reputations. It is a challenge for such persons to turn off those instincts for the good of the team but that what is exactly required. The failure to do this can prove to be very costly. Teams that lack trust waste precious time and energy managing behaviors and interactions with the group. Team members tend to dread meetings and are reluctant to ask for or offering assistance to others. As a result, morale, productivity and engagement on distrusting teams is usually quite low and unwanted turnover is high.

Suggestions for Overcoming Dysfunction 1

How does a team or leadership group go about building trust? Unfortunately, vulnerability-based trust cannot be achieved overnight or in a matter of days. It requires shared experiences over time, multiple instances of follow-through and credibility and an in-depth understanding of the unique attributes of team members. In other words, understanding and appreciating differences among the people in the group. However, by taking a focused approach, a team can dramatically accelerate the process and achieve trust in a relatively short period of time. Here are a few tools that can help bring this about:

Personal Histories Exercise

This is a low risk exercise that is nothing more than going around the room and have team members answer a short list of questions about themselves. Examples of such questions are:

“Where were you born?”

“Where did you grow up?”

“What was your first job? Favourite job? Worst job?”

“What were your hobbies as a child?”

“What was your favorite subject in school?”

“What is your favorite book? TV show? Movie?”

“What was the best trip you have ever taken?”

“If you could go somewhere you’ve never been, where would it be?”

“What is your favorite food?”

It is amazing how little some team members know about one another. These questions allow team members to relate to one another on a more personal basis, see team members as human beings with life stories and interesting backgrounds. This encourages greater empathy, understanding and discourages unfair and inaccurate behavioral attributions.

Personality and Behavioral Preference Profiles

Some of the most effective and lasting tools for building trust on a team are profiles of team members’ behavioral preferences and personality styles. [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.

Understanding and appreciating individual differences will help teams identify the particular talents and gifts that each member brings to his or her task. This knowledge can help reduce conflict by reframing potential sources of misunderstanding as natural individual differences. The MBTI has shown to improve communication, enhance problem solving and foster team development. Understanding one’s own and others’ dominant functions assist in identifying core values and motivations. It gets at the heart of what people find rewarding and energizing at work.

Team Effectiveness Exercise

This exercise is more rigorous but may involve more risk. It requires team members to identify the single most important contribution that each of the team members bring to the team. Additionally,

team members have to identify an area that they must either improve upon or eliminate for the good of the team.

This exercise may appear intrusive and dangerous at first glance, it is remarkable how manageable it can be and how much useful information, both positive and constructive, can be extracted. The team effectiveness exercise definitely requires some degree of trust in order to be useful, even a highly dysfunctional team can make it work.

Connection to Dysfunction 2

How does an absence of trust relate to the next dysfunction, a fear of conflict? By building trust, a team makes conflict possible because team members do not hesitate to engage in emotional and passionate debate, knowing that there will be no negative consequences to themselves for bringing up something that might otherwise be interpreted as overly critical or destructive.