

How To Know If You Are Part Of A Dysfunctional Team

By Jonathan Yumol, March 2017

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

Part 2: Fear of Conflict

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.



This failure to build trust is damaging because it sets the tone for the second dysfunction, ***Fear of Conflict***. Teams that lack trust are incapable of engaging in unfiltered and passionate debate of ideas. Instead they resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments.

2. Fear of Conflict

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 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
- Minimize politics
- Put critical topics on the table for discussion

All great and long-term relationships require productive conflict to grow and develop. This is true in marriage, parenthood, friendship and certainly in businesses and organizations.

Unfortunately, conflict is generally not acceptable in many situations, especially at work. The higher you climb up the management chain, the more you see individuals spending inordinate amounts of time and energy trying to avoid the kind of productive, enthusiastic debates that is essential to any great team. Conflict that is not resolved often results in loss of productivity, the stifling of creativity, and the creation of barriers to cooperation and collaboration.

It is important to distinguish productive ideological conflict from interpersonal conflicts and destructive fighting. Ideological conflict should be limited to concepts and ideas and attempt to avoid personally-focused, mean spirited attacks. However, it can have many of the of the same characteristics of interpersonal conflicts such as passion, emotion and frustration which may result in an outside observer might mistake it for unproductive discord.

Teams that aim to produce the best possible solution in the shortest period of time should engage in productive conflict. As a result, they discuss and resolve issues more quickly and competently than others. They emerge from heated debates with no negative residual feelings or collateral damage, rather with an eagerness and readiness to take on the next important task or issue.

Ironically, teams that avoid ideological conflict often do so as not to hurt other team members' feelings. This often leads to back channel personal attacks, which is far more harmful and nastier than any heated argument over issues and concerns. This can be avoided when group members openly debate and constructively disagree about important ideas.

Contrary to popular belief, healthy conflict is in actuality a time saver. Many people avoid conflict in the name of efficiency. The notion that time and energy is wasted due to arguing is false. Teams that side-step conflict actually doom themselves to revisiting issues again and again without resolution. Often, team members are asked to take their issues "off-line", only to have it raised again at the next meeting.

Suggestions for Dysfunction 2

How does a team or group develop the ability and willingness to engage in healthy, fruitful conflict? The first step is to have team members acknowledge that conflict is productive, beneficial and agree that many teams have a tendency to avoid it. As long as some members of the team feel that conflict is unnecessary, there is little chance that it will occur.

Mining

Members of teams that have an inclination to avoid conflict must occasionally assume the role of a “miner of conflict”; someone who extracts buried disagreements within the team and brings them to the surface. They must have the courage and confidence to call out sensitive issues and force team members to work through them. This requires a degree of objectivity during the meeting and a commitment to staying with the conflict until it is resolved. If the team feels that there is an individual on the team who can display these kind of characteristics, there is no reason not to appoint this person and give him or her the responsibilities of the “miner of conflict”.

Real-Time Permission

In the process of mining for conflict, group members need to coach each other not to retreat from a healthy debate. One simple but effective way to do this is to recognize when the people engaged in conflict are becoming uncomfortable with the level of discord, then interrupt to remind them that what they are doing is productive and necessary. This is a remarkable tool for alleviating tension from a productive but difficult exchange, giving the participants the confidence to continue. It is also extremely helpful to remind group members after a meeting has ended that the conflict that they had just engaged is good for the team and should not be avoided in future group assemblies.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

unify consulting group believes that the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is one of the best personality questionnaires 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.

Conflicts develop for a host of reasons: differences in culture, race, gender, religion, social views, politics, personal commitments and/or values. The MBTI explains important differences in communication style, information gathering and giving, decision making and structuring of the environment. These type related differences often lead to or contribute to normal conflicts between colleagues.

The MBTI identifies and affirms an individual’s natural style of dealing with conflict. It makes clear that others will have a very different style that is equally right for them. Additionally, it supports modifying natural styles to interact more effectively.

Teams can utilize the MBTI to help create understanding and acceptance of conflict within the team and also provide tools to help create constructive resolutions that can enhance innovation and productivity.

*** **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 3

How does a fear of conflict relate to the next dysfunction, the lack of commitment? Teams that engage in productive conflict and utilizing every team member's perspective and opinions, a successful team can confidently commit and buy into a decision knowing that they have benefited from all the individual's ideas.