

How To Know If You Are Part Of A Dysfunctional Team

By Jonathan Yumol, August 2017

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

Part 3: Lack of Commitment

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.



A lack of healthy conflict is a problem because it ensures the third dysfunction of a team, **Lack of Commitment**. Without having aired their opinions in the course of passionate and open debate, team members rarely, if ever, buy in and commit to decisions, though they may feign agreement during meetings.

3. Lack of Commitment

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

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

In the framework of a team, two of the most important functions of commitment are clarity and buy-in. Great teams are characterized by clear, timely decisions and move forward with the complete buy-in from every team member, even those individuals who were against the decision. This is why conflict is so important. When people are not allowed to voice their opinions and feel like they have not been heard, considered and responded to, those team members will not really get on board; they need to weigh-in, before they buy-in. Without clarity, you get ambiguity. As a result, direction and priorities are not clearly laid out.

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

Consensus

Great and unified teams recognise the danger of seeking consensus and find the means to achieve buy-in by all team members even though 100% agreement is not possible by the group. They appreciate that realistic individuals do not always need to get their way in order to support the group decision, they only need to know that they were able to upload their opinions and feel like they were listened to. Productive and effective teams ensure that everyone's ideas are genuinely considered, which result in a willingness to rally around any decision that is decided by the group. If at some point that is not possible due to an impasse, the leader of the group must ultimately be able to make the call.

Certainty

Excellent teams pride themselves on being able to unite behind a decision and clear a course of action even when there is little assurance that decision is the correct one. Team members also realize that it is better to make a decision strongly and be wrong (and then change direction with equal boldness), than it is to waffle.

As opposed to the behavior and characteristics of a dysfunctional team who attempt to hedge their bets and put off important decisions until they have enough data to feel certain enough to take the right course of action. As prudent and sensible as this may seem, it results in paralysis and breeds a lack of confidence within the team.

Whether it is the need for consensus or certainty, executive teams that do not commit to clear decisions consequently cause deeper discord within the organization, it creates a dangerous ripple effect for those employees below them. When an executive team does fail to achieve complete buy-in from all group members, even if the disparities appear to be minimal, employees who report to those executives will at some point clash with colleagues in other departments when trying to interpret marching orders. Small gaps between executives at the top of organizations become major discrepancies by the time they reach the employees below them.

Suggestions for Overcoming Dysfunction 3

How does a team go about ensuring commitment? By taking appropriate steps to achieve clarity and achieve buy-in and resisting the lure of consensus and certainty.

Cascading Messaging

At the end of a staff meeting or a group summit, the team should review the key decisions that were made and agree on what needs to be communicated and how it is communicated to employees or other constituencies about those decisions. What sometimes happens during this exercise is that group members learn that they are not all on the same page about what has been agreed upon and that they need to clarify specific outcomes before setting a course of action. Additionally, they become clear on which of the decisions should remain confidential and those that should be communicated quickly and comprehensively. Lastly, by leaving meetings clearly aligned with other team members, group leaders send a powerful message to employees who have grown accustomed to inconsistent and contradictory statements from leaders who attended the same meeting.

Deadlines

One of the best tools to achieve commitment for team members and leaders (also a simple one), is the use of clear deadlines for when decisions will be made and making sure to honor those dates with discipline and integrity. A highly dysfunctional team is susceptible to ambiguity and that is not a good enemy to have. Timing is a critical factor that must be made clear which ultimately combats ambiguity within the team. Committing to deadlines for intermediate decisions and defined milestones is just as important as the final deadline. This ensures that misalignment among group members is identified before the costs are too great.

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.

Few individuals, teams and organizations have been taught the processes for making decisions as a group. The MBTI is very helpful for teams and can provide a structure for discussion and deciding. It can also be quickly expanded to provide a structure based on type preference:

- E – Share information and discuss
- I – Reflect and then talk
- S – Identify facts and realities
- N – Generate possibilities
- T – Analyze by likely outcomes
- F – Evaluate by value and relationships
- J – Make a plan
- P – Be open to changing the plan

*** **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 4

How does a lack of commitment relate to the next dysfunction, the avoidance of accountability? In order for group members to call other team members out on their actions and behaviors, they must have a clear sense of what is expected. Even the most ardent believers in accountability find it difficult to hold someone accountable for something that was never bought in to or made clear in the first place.