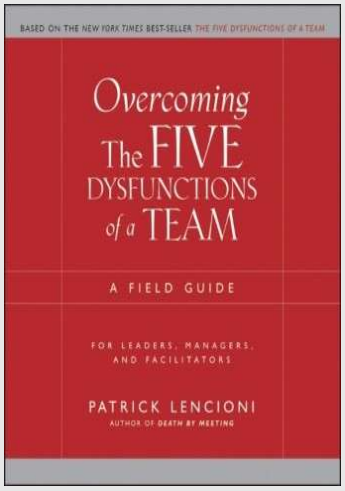

Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team

A Field Guide for Leaders, Managers, and Facilitators

Patrick M. Lencioni
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Rating

8

9 Applicability
6 Innovation
7 Style

Focus

Leadership & Management
Strategy
Sales & Marketing
Finance
Human Resources
IT, Production & Logistics
Career & Self-Development
Small Business
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Take-Aways

- Building functional teams doesn't take a conceptual breakthrough – but it does require dedication and hard work.
- Not all groups are teams; teams have to share norms, goals and the responsibility for reaching those goals.
- Address the "five dysfunctions" that commonly plague teams: distrust, conflict, lack of commitment, lack of accountability and a failure to focus on results.
- Team members need to trust one another enough to be vulnerable.
- To build trust, share personal histories, then use formal tools for behavioral profiling.
- Teams need productive conflict about issues.
- Team members don't have to agree on every decision.
- When the team reaches a decision, everyone needs to understand exactly what's been decided and then commit to supporting the decision.
- Team members should be accountable to one another.
- Teams must continually focus on results, so monitor performance with some simple shared scorecard.

Relevance

What You Will Learn
In this summary, you will learn: 1) How to diagnose the five main dysfunctions of a team; 2) How you can address these dysfunctions; and 3) How to build healthy teams in the process.

Review
Patrick Lencioni wrote this as a follow-up to his 2002 "fable," *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. It applies the earlier book's concepts, and suggests many exercises, approaches, examples and explanations you can use as you apply those ideas. If you found the first book useful, you'll want this one, though you can still get a lot of utility from it even if you haven't read the original. Lencioni recaps his concepts clearly here, including developing trust among team members and keeping teams focused on their goals. The result is broadly applicable. *getAbstract* believes that readers who want a basic introduction to improving team function will appreciate this book. That said, those looking for more complex or theoretical approaches, or for tools to deal with specific challenges, such as knowledge management among teams, may need a more advanced manual.

Summary

"Building an effective, cohesive team is extremely hard. But it's also simple."

"In this day and age of informational ubiquity and nanosecond change, teamwork remains the one sustainable competitive advantage that has been largely untapped."

Teams and Teamwork
Developing good, functional teams doesn't require any special conceptual breakthroughs, but it does call for "courage and persistence." Commit to making your team function smoothly, and then convince the other members that your dedication is real and they should share it. In the process of developing your team, make sure that you address several common misunderstandings and "five dysfunctions": distrust, conflict, lack of commitment, lack of accountability and a failure to focus on results.

Start with the basics: Is your group a team? It doesn't have to be. Many groups think they're teams when they aren't, and that misconception can frustrate people and waste time. A team must share goals and work toward them together. This requires some mutual performance evaluation. Team members must be willing to subordinate their personal needs to those of the team. True teams are "relatively small"; they might have as many as 12 people or as few as three. To build a strong and healthy team, address these five crucial issues:

1. "Building Trust"
Many people misuse the term "team" and disagree about the meaning of trust. Trust doesn't mean being familiar with people, or being able to predict what they'll do in specific situations. Instead, trust comes from vulnerability. If team members trust one another, they are at ease being vulnerable. They know they can admit weakness, or even fail, and not be chastised. "Vulnerability-based trust" depends on people being able to tell the truth without trying to score points off one another. The human desire to avoid risk and protect oneself makes this difficult. To overcome such tendencies, the team leader must set an example. Leaders have to be vulnerable first and then others will follow.

Start building trust by using simple, basic exercises, such as the "personal histories exercise." Ask each member to recount where he or she grew up, say how many children were in the family, and explain a childhood challenge that was "difficult or important." As simple as this sounds, many team members will learn something new about one another.

"A team is a relatively small number of people...that shares common goals as well as the rewards and responsibilities for achieving them. [They] readily set aside individual or personal needs for the greater good of the group."

The exercise gives team members a chance to drop their guard in nonthreatening areas and understand one another better. This helps them overcome the "fundamental attribution error" that can destroy a team. This fatal mistake occurs when people assume that others are engaging in "negative behaviors" because of flaws in their characters, while they consider their own negative behaviors to come from outside forces beyond their control. Getting past this will help team members deal with one another as individuals, and will reveal some of the influences that shape them. To make this exercise work, be prepared for objections from those who find it too easy or who don't get into it. Gently guide them as a facilitator.

After you establish this initial level of trust, develop it through "behavioral profiling" that boosts the emerging understanding between team members. This provides a shared, objective frame of reference for discussing team behavior and allows you to evaluate feedback in context. Profiling helps people view a discussion as something other than a personal attack. While you could use many tools for this profiling, the recommended option is the widely accepted, thoroughly tested, mainstream "Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)." As you discuss its results, relate them to work situations. Address possible objections about its "touchy-feely" nature. Sharing personality type information will help team members understand one another's actions. Build on this by having individuals explain what they learned from the test, especially if it helped them identify any weaknesses they'd like to address in terms of their contributions to the team.

"No quality or characteristic is more important than trust."

2. "Mastering Conflict"

Conceptually, the first step in overcoming the "all-too-common fear of conflict" is to trust the other party. To work together well, teams must be able to engage in productive conflict that focuses on issues and ideas. Too frequently, people get caught up with winning and getting heard, rather than focusing on what's best for the team. Often, such clashes devolve into personal attacks that may scar the individuals involved and impede team function for some time. When participants try to avoid such attacks and dodge the discomfort that generally accompanies conflict, team members often shut down. They refuse to work through the conflict and, instead, create a state of "artificial harmony." That's not useful. One of your tasks as a team leader is to move your team to the productive point on the "conflict continuum" – away from false accord and politicized debating.

"When it comes to teamwork...accountability [is] the willingness of team members to remind one another when they are not living up to the performance standards of the group."

Just as you started to build trust by using a kind of profile, begin the process of "mastering conflict" by "conflict profiling." First, talk to your team members about how they deal with conflict. Encourage them to discuss what conflict means to them and how they prefer to express intense emotions. Then, build on these moments of shared understanding by using more formal tools, such as the "Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument" or the "Depth-Frequency Conflict Model" developed by The Table Group.

"Peer pressure and the distaste for letting down a colleague will motivate a team player more than any fear of authoritative punishment or rebuke."

Use these diagnostics to gain self-knowledge and to build a shared vocabulary for dealing with conflict. Having common expectations will help your team develop "conflict norms," which can be tacit, articulated fully or even spelled out in a charter written by the team's members.

Even with these norms in place, you'll have to guide people into productive conflict. Even those who say they share the group's conflict norms may shy away from dramatic disagreements. When a conflict occurs, give your team feedback even during the argument to confirm immediately that both the discord and their responses are good. You don't want conflict all the time, but you do want lively debate about key issues. Seek the underlying concerns, encourage people to articulate them and guide conflicts to useful resolutions.

If your team clashes over a complicated issue, work through the questions involved by using the "Conflict Resolution Model." First identify the core issue in the conflict and the obstacles to resolving it. Draw a circle in the center of a white board. In that circle write the issue you're trying to resolve. Surround that "Issue Definition" with four concentric circles, like a bullseye. In the first circle outside the center, write "Informational Obstacles," such as missing facts that are blocking a solution. In the next circle, write "Environmental Obstacles," challenges such as not having sufficient workspace or time. In the third circle, write "Relationship Obstacles," difficulties arising from how people relate, especially when history or a larger context breeds dissent. Finally, in the outermost circle, write "Individual Obstacles." Identify the contributing factors in each circle, and work together to cut through the outer circles and resolve the core issue.

"Conflict norms, though they will vary from team to team, must be discussed and made clear among the team."

3. "Achieving Commitment"

To pull together and get things done, teams must have commitment, especially in the aftermath of genuine conflict. First, team members must understand what commitment is and isn't. Commitment doesn't mean consensus. If you wait for everyone to agree to a decision, it'll take forever, and you'll only be able to agree on dull, mediocre compromises. Instead, work toward two other qualities that build commitment: "Buy-in and clarity." Buy-in is emotionally supporting a team decision, even if you wanted the team to take a different course. Your job as leader is to help produce buy-in by making sure your team has explored all of its options. Clarity is the other quality required for commitment. Simply put, many people initially accept team decisions because they don't understand them or because they somehow think the decisions won't apply to them.

"Clarity requires that teams avoid assumptions and ambiguity, and that they end discussions with a clear understanding about what they've decided."

Two tools can help produce clarity. The first is "commitment clarification." When you're nearing the end of a decision-making meeting, ask, "What exactly have we decided here today?" Write the answer on a white board or some other public display so everyone can see it. Inevitably, this will stimulate discussion, because some members will say, essentially, "That's not what I thought we agreed on." At this point, reopen the discussion until everyone is completely clear on both the substance and the wording of the decision. Once everyone agrees, get the team to consent to use "cascading communication," in which each member agrees to go back and communicate the decision to his or her staff – and then does so. These tools apply to specific, tactical decisions, as well as broader issues that can unify your team over time, such as agreeing to a set of values, behavioral norms or far-reaching "thematic goals" to which lesser decisions will be aligned.

4. "Embracing Accountability"

"Ego is the ultimate killer on a team, and it is an insidious one. That's because it lurks deep in the heart of every team member. As much as we want our teams to win...we want to win as individuals first."

For your team to function well, members must be accountable to one another. They need to know the team's standards and be willing to monitor one another's actions. Peer-to-peer accountability, which the team leader must be the first to demonstrate, is the goal. This means pointing out unacceptable behavior and being open to constructive feedback. Show people that they can offer you criticism without suffering for it. To establish this attitude, use the "team effectiveness exercise." During a meeting, take at least an hour for every team member to write down the "most important behavioral characteristic or quality" they think each person contributes to team function and, similarly, what characteristic or qualities other members have that can impair team function. Then, ask each one to share his or her comments, with the leader launching the discussion. Start with the positives. While others are talking, do not comment, except to ask for clarification. After everyone has spoken, reflect on the positive qualities the leader contributes and share a general response. Then, review the negatives, followed by a response from the leader. After this discussion, the level of honest feedback will increase significantly. Later, once you've established this general

sense of accountability, maintain it by asking all team members to report briefly at meetings, so everyone always knows what others are contributing.

5. "Focusing on Results"

"What is it that makes it so hard to stay focused on results? It's this thing called self-interest."

Dealing with these emotional issues is essential for building functional teams, but it is possible for teams to have these qualities and still not accomplish much. This occurs when teams are not focused. Your team must focus on results, although many things can distract them. Individual self-interest will continually pull members' focus back to their personal goals, especially if pursuing the team's goals seems to threaten individuals in some way. That's only human. To overcome this, keep the team focused on results. Develop a device that works like a scoreboard for a football game: A clear, unambiguous, continually visible measure of team function. What metric you use will be up to your team.

Limit the number of factors you're measuring, so that your measurements stay useful rather than becoming another distraction. Evaluate objective factors the team shares, not just individual activities. You need a system that goes beyond the clamor of individual egos, which can be a major roadblock to team development. Also, deal with the fact that both money and individual career advancement are ongoing concerns for team members; your metric for results must take these drives into account. Whatever you measure, keep the categories limited and have the "scoreboard" continually available for shared reference.

"Buy-in is the achievement of honest emotional support. Clarity is the removal of assumptions and ambiguity from a situation."

Common Challenges of Teams and Teamwork

Certain challenges will come up repeatedly during team building. The first questions could be a concern as to how long it takes to build a team and how many people should be on it. The amount of time needed varies according to context, but you can lay the foundation for a healthy team in just a few days. Your team should be small enough that each member feels significant and comfortable. Include the individuals who need to be on the team for it to succeed; otherwise, keep the team as small as possible, a good guide is, usually between three and 12 people.

"Results-oriented teams establish their own measurements for success. They don't allow themselves the wiggle room of subjectivity."

Lay the groundwork for team development by recognizing that not everyone belongs on a team – or not on a specific team – and design a mechanism to recognize this and remove nonfunctional members if necessary. Be realistic about time, space and personnel. Block out the time you need to establish the team. If you're in charge but lack the facilitation skills to guide the process, hire an outside professional. If you're not the team leader, recognize that some team leaders don't believe in building teams. Try to convince such leaders of the value of teams. You may also have to deal with problematic team members who either hold back or seek to dominate. Establish an atmosphere of trust that will allow you to address these dysfunctional behaviors. The shared language of behavioral profiles is useful here. Establish goals for the first "off-site" session and a timeline for the first six months. Plan review sessions and regular meetings to share feedback on team performance. Give members opportunities to ask questions and get clarification, rather than just agitate for their own points of view.

About the Author

Patrick Lencioni, founder and president of a management consulting firm, has worked with Fortune 500 senior executives and high-tech startup companies. He is the author of several other books, including *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and *Death by Meeting*.