

BOOK SUMMARY

THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM by Patrick Lencioni

Members of truly cohesive teams:

1. **Trust** one another.
2. Engage in unfiltered **conflict** around ideas.
3. **Commit** to decisions and plans of action.
4. Hold one another **accountable** for delivering against those plans.
5. Focus on the achievement of collective **results**.

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Absence of Trust

The first dysfunction is an absence of trust among team members. Essentially, this stems from their unwillingness to be vulnerable within the group. Team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust.

Fear of Conflict

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.

Lack of Commitment

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.

Avoidance of Accountability

Because of this lack of real commitment and buy-in, team members develop an avoidance of accountability, 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 action and behaviours that seem counterproductive to the good of the team.

Inattention to Results

Failure to hold one another accountable creates an environment where the fifth dysfunction can thrive. Inattention to results occurs when team members put their individual needs (such as ego, career development, or recognition) or even the needs of their divisions above the collective goals of the team.

And so, like a chain with just one link broken, teamwork deteriorates if even a single dysfunction is allowed to flourish.

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Dysfunction 1: Absence of Trust

The absence of trust among team members stems from their **unwillingness to be vulnerable** within the group. Team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust.

Team members must make themselves vulnerable to one another, and be confident that their respective vulnerabilities will not be used against them.

It is only when team members are truly comfortable being exposed to one another that they begin to act without concern for protecting themselves. As a result they can focus their energy and attention completely on the job at hand, rather than on being strategically disingenuous and political with each other.

Members of teams with an absence of trust ...	Members of trusting teams ...
Conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another.	Admit weaknesses and mistakes.
Hesitate to ask for help or provide constructive feedback.	Ask for help.
Hesitate to offer help outside their own areas of responsibility.	Accept questions and input about their areas of responsibility.
Jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others without attempting to clarify them.	Give one another the benefit of the doubt before arriving at a negative conclusion.
Fail to recognise and tap into one another's skills and experiences.	Take risks in offering feedback and assistance.
Waste time and energy managing their behaviours for effect.	Focus time and energy on important issues, not politics.
Hold grudges.	Offer and accept apologies without hesitation.
Dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together.	Look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group.

Overcoming Dysfunction 1

- Personal Histories Exercise
- Team Effectiveness Exercise
- Personality and Behavioural Preference Profiles
- 360 Degree Feedback
- Experiential Team Exercises

Role of the Leader

1. Demonstrate genuine vulnerability first (requires them to lose face in front of the group).
2. Create an environment that does not punish vulnerability.
3. Vulnerability must be genuine.

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Connection to Dysfunction 2

By building trust, a team makes conflict possible because team members do not hesitate to engage in passionate and sometimes emotional debate, knowing that they will not be punished for saying something that might otherwise be interpreted as destructive or critical.

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Dysfunction 2: Fear of Conflict

All great relationships that last over time require productive conflict in order to grow.

The more conflict is considered taboo the more time and energy people spend on trying to avoid the kind of passionate debates that are essential to any great team.

Teams that avoid ideological conflict often do so in order to avoid hurting team members' feelings, and then end up encouraging dangerous tension. When team members do not openly debate and disagree about important ideas, they often turn to back-channel personal attacks, which are far nastier and more harmful than any heated argument over issues.

Teams that fear conflict ...	Teams that engage in conflict ...
Have boring meetings.	Have lively, interesting meetings.
Create environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive.	Extract and exploit the ideas of all members.
Ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success.	Solve real problems quickly.
Fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members.	Minimise politics.
Waste time and energy with posturing and interpersonal risk management.	Put critical topics on the table for discussion.

Overcoming Dysfunction 2

- Mining
- Real-Time Permission
- Personality style and behavioural preference tools (The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) specifically relates to conflict)

The Role of the Leader

1. Demonstrate restraint when their people engage in conflict, and allow resolution to occur naturally.
2. Personally model appropriate conflict behaviour.
3. Resist the desire to protect members from harm, which leads to premature interruption of disagreements and prevents team members from developing coping skills for dealing with conflict themselves.
4. Resist the belief that they are somehow failing in their jobs by losing control of their teams during conflict.

Connection to Dysfunction 3

By engaging in productive conflict and tapping into team members' perspectives and opinions, a team can confidently commit and buy in to a decision knowing that they have benefited from everyone's ideas.

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Dysfunction 3: Lack of Commitment

Commitment is a function of clarity and buy-in.

Causes of the lack of commitment are the desire for consensus and the need for certainty.

Conflict underlies the willingness to commit without perfect information. Only when everyone has put their opinions and perspectives on the table can the team confidently commit to a decision knowing that it has tapped into the collective wisdom of the entire group.

A team that fails to commit ...	A team that commits ...
Creates ambiguity among the team about direction and priorities.	Creates clarity around direction and priorities.
Watches windows of opportunity close due to excessive analysis and unnecessary delay.	Takes advantage of opportunities before competitors do.
Breeds lack of confidence and fear of failure.	Develops an ability to learn from mistakes.
	Changes direction without hesitation or guilt.
Revisits discussions and decisions again and again.	Moves forward without hesitation.
Encourages second-guessing among team members.	Aligns the entire team around common objectives.

Overcoming Dysfunction 3

- Cascading Messaging
- Deadlines
- Contingency and Worst-Case Scenario Analysis
- Low-Risk Exposure Therapy

Role of the Leader

1. Be comfortable with the prospect of making a decision that ultimately turns out to be wrong.
2. Constantly push the group for closure around issues
3. Constantly push the group for adherence to schedules that the team has set.
4. Resist placing too much emphasis on certainty or consensus.

Connection to Dysfunction 4

In order for team mates to call each other on their behaviours and actions, they must have a clear sense of what is expected. Even the most ardent believers in accountability usually balk at having to hold someone accountable for something that was never bought in to or made clear in the first place.

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Avoidance of Accountability

Accountability in teamwork is the willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviours that might hurt the team.

The most effective and efficient means of maintaining high standards of performance on a team is peer pressure. One of the benefits is the reduction of the need for excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action. More than any policy of system, there is nothing like the fear of letting down respected team mates that motivates people to improve their performance.

A team that avoids accountability ...	A team that holds one another accountable ...
Creates resentment among team members who have different standards of performance.	Ensures that poor performers feel pressure to improve.
Encourages mediocrity.	Identifies potential problems quickly by questioning one another's approaches without hesitation.
Misses deadlines and key deliverables.	Establishes respect among team members who are held to the same high standards.
Places an undue burden on the team leader as the sole source of discipline.	Avoids excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action.

Overcoming Dysfunction 4

- Publication of Goals and Standards
- Simple and Regular Progress Reviews
- Team Rewards

Role of the Leader

1. Serve as the first and primary accountability mechanism to create a culture of accountability.
2. Once the culture of accountability has been created on a team the leader then must be willing to serve as the ultimate arbiter of discipline when the team itself fails.

Connection to Dysfunction 5

If team mates are not being held accountable for their contributions they will be more likely to turn their attention to their own needs, and to the advancement of themselves or their departments. An absence of accountability is an invitation to team members to shift their attention to areas other than collective results.

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Inattention to Results

The ultimate dysfunction of a team is to care about something other than the collective goals of the group. An unrelenting focus on specific objectives and clearly defined outcomes is a requirement for any team that judges itself on performance.

Results are not limited to financial measures, and ultimately these other goals drive profits.

Having members place importance on team status and individual status will reduce inattention to results.

Many teams are simply not results focused. Unfortunately for these groups, no amount of trust, conflict, commitment, or accountability can compensate for a lack of desire to win.

A team that is not focused on results ...	A team that focuses on collective results ...
Stagnates / fails to grow.	Retains achievement-oriented employees.
Rarely defeats competitors.	Minimises individualistic behaviour.
Loses achievement-oriented employees.	Enjoys success and suffers failure acutely.
Encourages team members to focus on their own careers and individual goals.	Benefits from individuals who subjugate their own goals / interests for the good of the team.
Is easily distracted.	Avoids distractions.

Overcoming Dysfunction 5

- Public Declaration of Results
- Results-Based Rewards

Role of the Leader

1. Set the tone for a focus on results.
2. Be selfless and objective.
3. Reserve rewards and recognition for those who make real contributions to the achievement of group goals.

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Teamwork comes down to practicing a small set of principles over a long period of time. Success is not a matter of mastering subtle, sophisticated theory, but rather of embracing common sense with uncommon levels of discipline and persistence.

Teams succeed because they are exceedingly human. By acknowledging the imperfections of their humanity, members of functional teams overcome the natural tendencies that make trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and a focus on results so elusive.