The five dysfunctions of a team, by Patrick Lencioni

The first step toward reducing misunderstandings and confusion within a team is to understand that there are five dysfunctions, and that each one that applies has to be addressed separately.

Inattention to results
Status and ego

Avoidance of accountability
Low standards

Lack of commitment
Ambiguity

Fear of conflict
Artificial harmony

Absence of trust
Invulnerability

Patrick Lencioni is an American who writes on business management, particularly in relation to team management. He is best known as the author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.* He is also the founder and president of the Table Group, a management consulting firm focused on organizational health.

In this book Lencioni reveals the basics of teamwork by using a leadership fable, a story of a technology company that is struggling to grow and find customers. The new CEO on board, Catherine Petersen, recognizes the potential of the organization and its people. However, the executives are not working together as a team, which therefore impact the entire organization in a negative way. The team struggles to accept responsibilities and come to any agreements, resulting in low morale. Throughout the fable the five dysfunctions of their team become evident, ie, absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results.

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Absence of trust

The root cause of absence of trust lies with team members being unable to show their weaknesses; to be vulnerable and open with one another. The absence of trust is a huge waste of time and energy as team members invest their time and energy in defensive behaviors, and are reluctant to ask for help from—or assist—each other. Teams can overcome this dysfunction by sharing experiences, following through in multiple ways, demonstrating credibility, and developing strong insight into the unique characteristics of team members.

Fear of conflict

Teams that are lacking trust are incapable of having unfiltered, passionate debate about issues that matter, causing team members to avoid conflict, replacing it with an artificial harmony. In a work setting where team members do not openly express their opinions, inferior decisions are often the result. When working in teams you need to understand that conflict is productive.

Lack of commitment

Without conflict, it is not easy for team members to commit and buy-in to decisions, resulting in an environment where ambiguity prevails. People will buy into something when their opinions are included in the decision-making process—for example through debate. Productive teams make joint and transparent decisions and are confident that they have the support of each team member. This is not as much about seeking consensus but making sure everyone is heard.

Avoidance of accountability

When teams don't commit, you can't have accountability: "people aren't going to hold each other accountable if they haven't clearly bought into the plan". In a well-functioning team, it's the responsibility of each team member to hold one another accountable and accept it when others hold them accountable. Often, the key to success is the measurement of progress: making clear what the team's standards are, what needs to be done, by whom and by when.

Inattention to results

A team can only become results oriented when all team members place the team's results first. When individuals aren't held accountable, team members naturally tend to look out for their own interests rather than the interests of the team. Teams can overcome this dysfunction by making the team results clear and rewarding the behaviors that contribute to the team's results.

The primary role of the leader in overcoming these dysfunctions is to lead by example and set the tone for the whole team. This includes being the first one to be vulnerable, encouraging debate and conflict, making responsibilities and deadlines clear, setting the team's standards, and last but not least being clear on the team's results.

To conclude, with Patrick Lencioni:

Successful teamwork is not about mastering subtle, sophisticated theories, but rather about combining common sense with uncommon levels of discipline and persistence. Ironically, teams succeed because they are exceedingly human. By acknowledging the imperfections of their humanity, members of functional teams overcome the natural tendencies that make teamwork so elusive.