

BOOK NOTES by Abi Noda

***The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni**

ISBN: 978-0787960759

READ: Mar 4, 2015

ENJOYABLE: 9/10

INSIGHTFUL: 10/10

ACTIONABLE: 9/10

Critical Summary

Five Dysfunctions of a Team should be required reading for anyone who is part of a team, especially at the leadership level. After reading this book, I ordered copies of this book to the rest of my leadership team and have begun putting a lot of the suggested solutions to practice.

To describe the content of the book in a gist: a great team is focused on the achievement of a clear set of collective results, with a clear plan that they hold one another accountable to. There's a high level of trust and a willingness for engaging in unfiltered debates.

But great teamwork is hard, especially in the high-paced political climate of corporate America, and teamwork deteriorates if even a single dysfunction is allowed to flourish, like a chain with just one link broken.

My biggest takeaways:

- Create a "team scorecard" of collective goals. Think back to 5th grade basketball... are your goals as clear and actionable as a basketball scoreboard? Collective goals can't just be pinned on the wall – they must truly come above everything else (individual or departmental achievement) and drive decisions and behavior. Focus intensely on the results.
- Constantly "mine" for tensions and unresolved issues. Seek out and encourage healthy conflicts at meetings – it's a necessary part of being an effective team.
- Make sure issues don't linger around. Force deadlines for decisions and make sure those decisions are made and communicated with input and ultimately full commitment across the team. Collectively deciding on messaging after meetings in order to leave no room for interpretation or spinning.
- Make sure action plans, milestones, and responsibilities are clearly defined so everyone knows who is carrying out what. Encourage team members to hold each other accountable.
- Invest in getting "naked" with your team. Vulnerability-building exercises and personality profiles can help increase trust rapidly. It is amazing how little some team members know about one another, and how just a small amount of information begins to break down barriers.

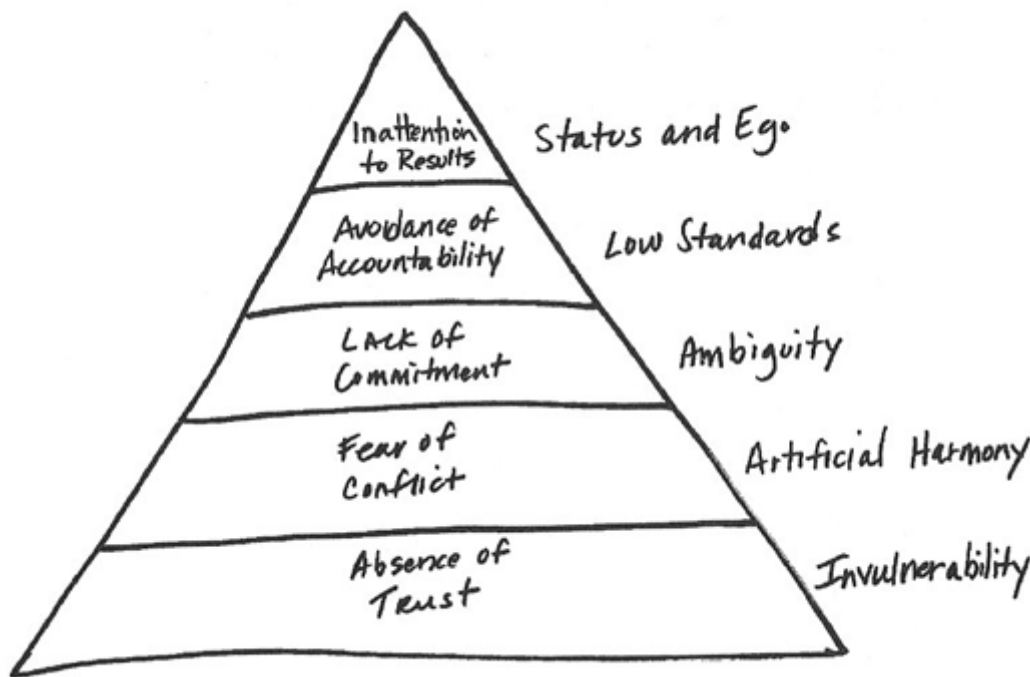
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competitors, and yet we are behind. What we lack is teamwork, and I can promise you all that I have no greater priority as CEO than making us more effective as a group."

"A fractured team is just like a broken arm or leg; fixing it is always painful, and sometimes you have to re-break it to make it heal correctly. And the re-break hurts a lot more than the initial break, because you have to do it on purpose."

See "the speech" on pg. 40 where the CEO highlights the dysfunction of the team and frames the purpose of the leadership retreat.

The five dysfunctions:



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

The dysfunctions can be mistakenly interpreted as five distinct issues that can be addressed in isolation of the others. But in reality they form an interrelated model, making susceptibility to even one of them potentially lethal for the success of a team.

Cohesive teams...

1. Trust one another. *by building trust, a team makes conflict possible because team members do not hesitate to engage in passionate and sometimes emotional debate*
2. Engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas. *by engaging in productive conflict and tapping into team members' perspectives and opinions, a team can confidently commit and buy into a decision knowing that they have benefited from everyone's ideas*
3. Commit to decisions and plans of action. *having a clear sense of what is expected allows teammates to call each other on their behaviors and actions*
4. Hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans. *An absence of accountability is an invitation to team members to shift their attention to areas other than collective results, such as to the advancement of themselves or their departments*

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Dysfunction 1: Absence of trust (invulnerability)

Trust is the foundation of teamwork. Great teams do not hold back with one another. They are unafraid to air their dirty laundry. They admit their mistakes, their weaknesses, and their concerns without fear or reprisal.

Signs of a trust problem:

- lack of debate or passionate discussions that exists during staff meetings and interactions amongst a team.
- not agreeing on most things, yet being unwilling to admit those concerns
- holding back weaknesses, mistakes, and feedback from one another

Achieving vulnerability-based trust is difficult because most successful people are programmed to be competitive with peers and be protective of their reputations.

To build trust, the team must overcome the fear of vulnerability by "getting naked".

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 completely on the task at hand rather than on being strategically disingenuous or political with one another.

Techniques for accelerated trust-building:

personal histories exercise (min. time required: 30 minutes) - going around the table and having team members answer a short list of questions about themselves. Questions do not have to be overly sensitive in nature, eg. favorite hobbies, first job, hometown, worst job. By describing innocuous attributes and experiences, team members begin to relate to one another on a more personal basis, and see one another as human beings with life stories and interesting backgrounds. This encourages greater empathy and understanding. It is amazing how little some team members know about one another, and how just a small amount of information begins to break down barriers.

Very similar to Dev Bootcamp day one icebreakers

team effectiveness exercise (min. time required: 60 minutes) - requires team members to identify the single most important contribution that each of their peers makes to the team, as well as the one area that they must either improve upon or eliminate for the good of the team. All members report their responses, focusing on one member at a time, usually beginning with the team leader

While the exercise feels intrusive and dangerous at first glance, it is remarkable how manageable it can be and how much useful information, both constructive and positive, can be extracted.

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experiential team exercises - rope courses and other experiential activities do have some benefit, but only if layered on top of more fundamental exercises.

these exercises must be accompanied by regular follow-up in the purse of daily work. individual developmental areas must be revisited to ensure that progress does not lose momentum. even on a strong team, atrophy can lead to the erosion of trust.

Role of the leader

The most important action that a leader must take to encourage the building of trust on a team is to demonstrate vulnerability first. leaders must also create an environment that does not punish vulnerability. displays of vulnerability on the part of a team leader must be genuine; they cannot be staged.

Dysfunction 2: Fear of conflict (artificial harmony)

When people don't trust one another, they don't engage in open, constructive, ideological conflict. Instead they continue on to preserve a sense of artificial harmony.

Constructive conflict = a team's willingness to argue effectively about an issue and then walk away with no collateral damage.

The higher you go up the management chain, the more people try to avoid passionate debates. It is the job of leadership to fight about real issues and hash them out so everyone can get clear direction.

Teams that fear conflict have boring meetings, ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success, fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members, and waste time and energy with posturing and interpersonal risk management.

Techniques for making conflict more common and productive:

acknowledgement - first step is acknowledging that conflict is productive, and that many teams have a tendency to avoid it

mining - designating someone as a "miner of conflict" – someone who extracts buried disagreements, calls out sensitive issues and puts them on the table for discussion

real-time permission - team members need to coach one another not to retreat from healthy debate. when people engaged in conflict are becoming uncomfortable with the level of discord, they should be reminded that what they are doing is necessary to give them the confidence to continue. and once the meeting has ended, it is helpful to remind participants that the conflict they just engaged in is good for the team and not something to avoid.

TKI - Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

Role of the leader

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Dysfunction 3: Lack of commitment (ambiguity)

A desire for consensus and certainty holds back decision-making and commitment, leading to ambiguity around what set of strategies and actions need to be carried out by the team.

This creates a "lull" in forward progress and accountability.

Great teams ensure that everyone's ideas are genuinely considered, which creates a willingness to rally around whatever decision is made by the group. and when that isn't possible due to an impasse, the leader is allowed to make the call

"Disagree and commit" - you can argue about something and disagree, but still commit to it as though everyone originally bought into the decision completely.

Great teams also pride themselves on being able to unite behind decisions and commit to clear courses of action even when there is little assurance about whether the decision is correct. It is better to make a decision boldly and be wrong, and then change direction with equal boldness, than it is to waffle.

One of the greatest consequences for an executive team that does not commit to clear decisions is unresolvable discord deeper in the organization. small gaps between executives high up in an organization become major discrepancies by the time they reach employees below

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.

Techniques for ensuring commitment:

- **Set deadlines for decisions** - Setting and honoring deadlines for when decisions will be made helps keep a team disciplined, and ensures that misalignment among team members is identified and addressed before the costs are too great. when teams force themselves to make decisions after substantial discussion but little analysis or research, they usually come to realize that the quality of the decision they made was better than they had expected. they also learn that the decision would not have been much different had the team engaged in lengthy, time-consuming study. this isn't to say that research and analysis aren't important, but rather that teams with this dysfunction tend to overvalue them.
- **Collectively decide on messaging** - At the end of a meeting, a team should review key decisions and agree on what needs to be communicated to employees or others about those decisions. this exercise often reveals different interpretations of what has been agreed upon, and helps clarify them. this also clarifies which decisions should remain confidential versus not, and ensures that employees receive consistent messaging from managers who attended the same meeting (versus different stories).
- **Consider the worst-case scenario** - clarifying the worst-case scenario for a decision helps reduce fears by helping a team realize that the cost of an incorrect decision are survivable.

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The leader should be constantly pushing the group for closure around issues, as well as adherence to schedules that the team has set.

Dysfunction 4: Avoidance of accountability (low standards)

Accountability = willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviors that might hurt the team, despite the interpersonal discomfort that must be overcome to do so.

Without commitment and buy-in into a shared plan in the first place (previous dysfunction), there's nothing to hold someone accountable to.

Peers (and especially executives) have trouble holding each other accountable to high standards of performance because they consider each other equal peers and thus there's a lot of interpersonal discomfort in having to confront one another. It's difficult but necessary to say: "Carlos is a Vice President of the company, and he needs to prioritize better according to what we agreed to do, and he needs to challenge people in the organization who are not responding to his requests."

Teams must trust that when a teammate pushes you, they're doing it because they care about the team. Push with respect, and under the assumption that the other person is probably doing the right thing. But push anyway, and never hold back.

A team that avoids accountability... creates resentment among team members who have different standards of performance, encourages mediocrity, misses deadlines and key deliverables, places an undue burden on the team leader as the sole source of discipline.

A team that holds one another accountable... ensures that poor performers feel pressure to improve, identifies potential problems quickly by questioning one another's approaches without hesitation, establishes respect among team members who are held to the same high standards, avoids excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action.

Techniques for ensuring accountability:

clear action plans and objectives - a good way to make it easier for team members to hold one another accountable is to clarify publicly exactly what the team needs to achieve, who needs to deliver what, and how everyone must behave in order to succeed.

simple and regular progress reviews - setting up regular opportunities for feedback giving and receiving with clear expectations and structure helps mitigate the avoidance of accountability

team rewards - by shifting rewards away from individual performance to team achievement, the team can create a culture of accountability

Role of the leader

Leaders should encourage the team to serve as the first and primary accountability mechanism. Leaders often naturally create an accountability vacuum within the team, leaving themselves as the only source of discipline. This creates an environment where team members assume that the

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will not hesitate to step in when necessary

Dysfunction 5: Inattention to results (status and ego)

There's a natural tendency of team members to seek out individual recognition and success at the expense of collective results and goals.

No amount of trust, conflict, commitment, or accountability can compensate for a lack of desire to win as a group. A team that is not focused on results stagnates, loses achievement-oriented employees, gives room for team members to focus on their won careers and individual goals, and is easily distracted.

Athletes in team sports have egos but are ultimately bound by the scoreboard - winning or losing. Work teams should also create a "scoreboard" of collective goals by which the entire team succeeds or fails.

This concept is related to *High Output Management* advice about creating a competitive arena to elicit peak performance from team members.

Symptoms:

- Feeling isolated or "like a consultant" inside your own company
- Leadership lobbying for more resources for their own departments
- Leadership avoiding getting involved in anything outside their own areas

How often did you talk about moving resources from one department to another in the middle of the quarter in order to make sure that you could achieve a goal that was in jeopardy? How disciplined were you during meetings about reviewing the goals in detail and drilling down on why they were or weren't being met?

Your department cannot be doing well if the company is failing. Everyone is responsible for everything.

Inattention to results is a huge dysfunction at Dev Bootcamp. Glassfrog and SOUs have made circles very self-centric. They ask themselves "What do I want to accomplish" versus "what are the company's goals and what is my role in that?". Then they update the company on their developments. The reality is there is not much to celebrate as far as the accomplishments of individual circles when the company is losing as a whole.

Collective goals doesn't mean agreeing on global KPIs – it's about everyone adopting a set of common goals and measurements, **and then actually using them to make collective decisions on a daily basis.**

Like in *High Output Management*, it's important to measure the output, not the activity. eg. student learning outcomes, not # of teachers.

When a team is losing, a basketball coach in the locker room at half-time does not talk to different players one-on-one without any of them knowing what everyone else was talking about. **That's not a team. It's a collection of individuals.**

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because it means the company has a collection of good managers who don't act like a team. Your first team has to be the management team, and your departmental team secondary – this relates back to putting team results ahead of individual issues.

Resource re-allocation skit

CEO: "We owe it to our shareholders and employees to figure out the right way to use our money. this is not a religious battle. its about strategy"

CTO: "You're saying that I'm overestimating the amount of resources it takes to build and maintain our product?"

CEO: "No, were questioning how good our products need to be for us to win in the market. we're questioning how much effort we need to be putting behind future technology, because that might come at the expense of having the market embrace our current technology. And there is no way that you could figure that out on your own. i don't think anyone here is smart enough, and has the breadth and depth of knowledge to know the right answer without hearing from everyone else and benefitting from their perspective"

Techniques for ensuring focus on the results:

public declaration of results - teams that are willing to commit publicly to specific results are more likely to work with a passionate, even desperate desire to achieve those results. saying "we'll do our best" is not purposeful and sets you up for failure.

results-based rewards - tie compensation/bonuses to the achievement of specific outcomes. relying on this alone can send the wrong message because it implies that financial motivation is the sole driver of behavior. but letting someone take home a bonus for "trying hard", even in the absence of results, sends a message that achieving the outcome may not be terribly important after all.

Role of the leader

A leader must maintain an unwavering focus on the results. If team members sense that the leader values anything other than results, they will take that as permission to do the same. Team leaders must be selfless and objective, and reserve rewards and recognition for those who make real contributions to the achievement of group goals.