

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES DESIGNED TO DEVELOP TRUST AND TEAM BUILDING SKILLS IN SCHOOL LEADERS^{*}

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Abstract

This paper will provide readers with insight into "Team Building and Decision-Making" curriculum methods and strategies utilized in leadership for our administrators. The content is based on "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable" by Lencioni (2002). The writer is working on developing a unique cascade of activities designed to reduce team dysfunctions through trust and skill building.



NOTE: This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of the Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a scholarly contribution to the knowledge base in educational administration.

An abundance of information has been provided about team building, team dynamics, effectiveness of teams, and team decision-making. Research studies, journal articles, books, and websites are available to enhance one's knowledge about team topics. One such work is "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable" by Patrick Lencioni (2002), which serves as the foundation for this paper.

Henry Ford, on teamwork, had the belief that coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success. This certainly plays into consideration when we talk about team building. Not only must administrators be individuals who "constantly examine the school's culture and work to transform it into one hospitable to sustained human learning" (Barth, 2002, p.11), they must also serve as communicators in helping to identify and articulate a vision (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005) and work through a process of distributed leadership to collaboratively attain meaningful goods (Spillone, 2006).

Lencioni states that five dysfunctions are uncovered during the group's interactions and exchanges at their executive retreats, weekly staff meetings, and face-to-face conferences with the CEO (Lencioni, 2002). The first dysfunction is Absence of Trust. Lencioni describes trust as "the confidence among team members

^{*}Version 1.1: Nov 2, 2006 9:19 am -0600

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that their peers' intentions are good, and there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group; in essence, teammates must get comfortable being vulnerable with one another" (Lencioni, 2002, p.195)

Table 1 Summary of signals that identify either the presence or lack of trust within a team, Lencioni, 2002, p.197.

Members with an absence of trust...	Members of trusting teams...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another • Hesitate to ask for help or provide constructive feedback • Hesitate to offer help outside their own areas of responsibility • Jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others without attempting to clarify them • Fail to recognize and tap into one another's skills and experiences • Waste time and energy managing their behaviors for effect • Hold grudges • Dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admit weaknesses and mistakes • Ask for help • Accept questions and input about their areas of responsibility • Give one another the benefit of the doubt before arriving at a negative conclusion • Take risks in offering feedback and assistance • Appreciate and tap into one another's skills and experiences • Focus time and energy on important issues, not politics • Offer and accept apologies without hesitation • Look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group

Lencioni suggests several ways to overcome Dysfunction #1. He has several activities to begin to build trust among team members. Personal histories and warm-up activities are key to the trust building process. A low risk activity that can be used for warm-up activities is known as "High Points." A high point is defined as any high positive experience one remembers. Trust can be enhanced when the strengths, weaknesses, and experiences of team members are known. The leader's role in building team trust is to display vulnerability, in order to encourage risk taking. Trust-based vulnerability is critical to a team's ability to function well.

Fear of Conflict is Dysfunction #2. In Lencioni's book, Kathryn pointed out to her staff that their meetings were pretty boring and non-productive. No one could really disagree with this assessment. The primary reason is the fear of conflict. When team members trust each other, they tend to engage in lively discussions and arguments around the issues that confront the team as a whole. Constructive conflict is significantly different from that filled with sarcasm.

Table 2 Summary of behaviors that identify either the fear or lack of fear of conflict within a team, Lencioni, 2002, p.204.

Teams that fear conflict...	Teams that engage in conflict...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have boring meetings • Create environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive • Ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success • Fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members • Waste time and energy with posturing and interpersonal risk management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have lively, interesting meetings • Extract and exploit the ideas of all team members • Solve real problems quickly • Minimize politics • Put critical topics on the table for discussion

Nobody likes conflict, but conflict is inevitable during human interaction. Lencioni goes so far as to suggest that it is even critical for effective team development. An activity call, Team Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, is designed to assist team members in developing ground rules for effective team operation. The purpose of this activity is to construct rules and strategies by which group members interact during meetings. The role of the leader is especially tricky because the leader wishes for conflict, yet needs to

protect each member from personal harm. Demonstrating restraint and allowing resolution to occur without interventions is the key leader role.

Lack of Commitment is Dysfunction #3. Generally speaking, most teams desire to reach a consensus and assure that decisions are correct before implementation. However, Lencioni points out that these are the two greatest causes of lack of commitment. Most adults are aware that reaching consensus on difficult issues is nearly impossible. One of the purposes of an effective team is to assure that all ideas have been seriously considered. This tends to create willingness for the team to quickly support decisions, even though it may not be the right one

Table 3 Summary of behaviors that identify team commitment issues within a team, Lencioni, 2002, p.209.

A team that fails to commit...	A team that commits...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

To overcome Dysfunction #3, a basic means to deal with lack of commitment is to apply decision-making strategies as described within quality management literature. These efficient tools, when used as focusing lenses, allow people to passionately debate and then weigh in on a decision. Misconception and misunderstanding can be clarified. The role of the leader implementing a decision to which all may not concur and without complete data places a leader in a rather uncomfortable position. While certainty and consensus are important, they are not as crucial as closure and meeting the established deadlines. The leader must continue to follow up to assure that schedules are kept.

Dysfunction #4 is Avoidance of Accountability. Accountability is a relatively new concept within educational community; however it is a new reality. Effective teams likewise are those that hold themselves accountable according to Lencioni (2002). However, Lencioni points out that these are two general causes for a lack of team member accountability: 1) an unwillingness of team members to tolerate interpersonal discomfort and 2) a general avoidance of difficult discussions.

Table 4 Summary of behaviors that identify accountability issues within a team, Lencioni, 2002, p.214.

A team that avoids accountability...	A team that holds one another accountable...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 round performance management and corrective action

To overcome Dysfunction #4, Lencioni suggests that the best form of team accountability is peer to peer accountability. The leader is challenged to allow the team to serve as the "accountability police," rather than

giving the impression to the team that he/she is holding everyone accountable. Team members then are responsible for discipline of their colleagues in order to assure that projects remain on track. At the same time, however, the leader must continue to serve as the final arbiter.

Dysfunction #5 is Inattention to Results. Overlooking collective goals and focusing on individual results are the major causes of teams falling apart. Clearly defined outcomes will serve as a guiding light to keep the team members concentrating on why they are working as a team. Status is an enemy of collective results. Some will tend to stray from the slated mission of teamwork and wish to advance their own skills. This will cause a breakdown of the team.

Table 5 Summary of behaviors that identify team behaviors related to attention of results, Lencioni, 2002, p.218.

A team that is not focused on results...	A team that focuses on collective results...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stagnates/fails to grow • Rarely defeats competitors • Loses achievement-oriented employees • Encourages team members to focus on their own careers and individual goals • Is easily distracted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retains achievement-oriented employees • Minimalizes individualistic behavior • Enjoys success and suffer failure acutely • Benefits from individuals who subjugate their own goals/interests for the good of the team • Avoids distractions

To overcome Dysfunction #5, Lencioni believes that publicly declaring results leads to team commitment and a focus on team outcomes. Whereas many leaders believe that tying rewards to achievement of goals is often an effective way to direct attention on results, sole reliance on this method, however, can lead to difficulties. It is suggested that a systematic program of team development and team building can help team members focus their attention on organizational results and way from personal outcomes.

In overcoming Dysfunction #5, the leader must continually focus on team outcomes in order to send an important message to the team. If the leader is perceived as focusing on anything else, this may distract the team from their mission.

In summary, effective teams are based on trust by being vulnerable, embracing conflict when it comes, holding people accountable for their behaviors, making a commitment to excellence, and focusing on the big picture.

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