

## Lencioni, Patrick – The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Jossey-Bass, 2002 [Business] Grade ★★★★★

According to the management consultant Patrick Lencioni successful teamwork, rather than strategy, technology and other factors, is the ultimate competitive advantage simply because it is both so powerful and so rare to achieve among businesses. Lencioni is the founder of The Table group, a lecturer and an author of a host of books of which for example the title *Death by Meeting* sounds like a quite tempting purchase. *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* is his best seller as it explores how to turn around a failing executive management team to finally get the entire group to work together towards shared goals.

The first three quarters of the book is a fictional story of how Kathryn Petersen is appointed CEO of the somewhat waning former tech star company DecisionTech Inc and how she manages to restore its former strong business momentum by leading the management team from dysfunction and conflict to a tight knit and business focused unit. The last quarter is Lencioni's theoretical repetition of the model that Petersen is using to pull this off plus some practical advice on how to implement group changes. In all this sums up to about 220 easy to read pages that is possible to conveniently finish in a relatively short space of time.

Hardly meant to be a high quality novel the plot is easy and the characters are flat (your first guess of which of the persons that will not stay in the group by the story's end will probably be correct). However, the business fable still serves its purpose well as a tool to bring the methods to life for the reader and the team members exemplify personality types that we all face now and then. We mainly get to know the management team through a number of offsite sessions where Petersen - more or less like the consummate management consultant – with few hiccups works her magic and changes the group dynamics by using the model of five connected team dysfunctions. Relatively little attention in the fable is spent on how the team dynamics would be connected to and dependent on the overall culture of the organization.

The model consists of a pyramid of five dysfunctions or segments where each prior dysfunction has to be remedied to function as a base for the next segment. In combination they will lead to successful teamwork. The dysfunctions are: 1) an absence of trust characterized by team members' unwillingness to show vulnerability in the group, 2) a fear of conflict that leads to an artificial harmony rather than important discussions, 3) a lack of commitment since the shortage of frank dialogue gives people the option to refrain from buying into the decisions taken, 4) an avoidance of accountability since team members themselves didn't mentally commit to the decisions they are very reluctant to give feedback to other's in the group on how to improve and 5) an inattention to the results of the team since those in the group, due to ego or career motives, put their individual needs first. Hence, in a successful team people trust each other, engage in constructive conflict around ideas, commit to plans of action, hold each other accountable for delivering against the plans and they focus on the collective results.

To get everybody in a team to work in the same direction is clearly the key aspect of succeeding with a team. Still there are other somewhat more technical success factors that could have been mentioned as well such as the competence of the team members, the cognitive diversity of the persons so that they bring different viewpoints to the table and the group's size, incentives, working methods etc. Intuitively the advice Lencioni gives makes sense and the topics discussed remind me of the similar work Focus Consulting Group has done in the financial sector. However, the fact that the author was about 36 when he wrote the book makes me slightly hesitant on how much real life backup he's got for the efficiency of the model.

This is an easy read that will give clear inputs on how to tackle many key success factors of teamwork – the “ultimate competitive advantage”.

Mats Larsson, February 23, 2020