Whitepaper

Why teams (almost) never work

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"Let one thing be clear right away: a group of people working together in a company is something completely different from a team."

American organisational consultant Patrick Lencioni (1965) is the founder of consulting firm Table Group. Before this, he worked as a consultant at Bain & Company, Oracle and Sybase. He has since written several bestselling books on team and organisation development that have sold 3 million copies worldwide. According to Fortune, Lencioni is one of the ten gurus we should know.

A team is characterised by a common goal where you depend on each other to achieve it, says Lencioni. 'Interdependence is crucial and, unfortunately, all too often forgotten.' To have a well–functioning team, trust is necessary. And according to him, this trust is only created by sufficient vulnerability of the leader and team members. 'If a leader does not dare to be open, does not ask for help or glosses over mistakes made, it is extremely difficult to build trust. Creating trust is the trickiest part of team development. It really doesn't happen automatically and you can't demand it.'

This whitepaper consists of a concise exposition

of Lencioni's '5 frustrations in teamwork'. According to Lencioni, frustrations that hinder teamwork are: lack of trust, fear of confrontation, lack of commitment, shifting responsibility and not working in a result-oriented way.

On the basis of these five elements, you can get straight to work to make your team work (better).

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5 *frustrations* in teamwork

When a team works together in a reduced way, this is reflected in five counterproductive behaviours within the team. Lencioni calls these the five team frustrations.

1. Lack of trust

The biggest obstacle in optimal teamwork is lack of mutual trust. Lack of trust can be recognised by a variety of symptoms: team members shield their work from their teammates, for example, or 'play nice' and do not admit their mistakes.

The result is closed-mindedness within the team. Decision-making in such cases takes place outside group meetings, because team members are afraid to expose themselves in meetings. They are ambiguous about their responsibilities and say that "everything is under control". You often see then that meetings are held more for form's sake, without real participation and the real issues being discussed.

2. Avoiding conflict

When team members are afraid to engage in conflict, artificial harmony is created. Cooperation looks effective and the atmosphere seems positive. However, team members do not dare to criticise each other's ideas sufficiently, resulting in valuable input being lost. Team members do not show the back of their tongues in this case.

Differences in mutual communication and conflict styles create misunderstanding and resentment. Team members try to minimise this by expressing their feelings about mutual relationships as little as possible.

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3. No commitment

A team without commitment is characterised by indecision and ambiguity. Team members do not know where they stand and are afraid to commit to the team's decisions.

For example, team members say they support ideas, but in reality lack the drive and motivation to actually support and fully commit to the actions. The result is a team with diminished decisiveness, in which endless discussions are not rare.

4. Avoiding responsibility

When team members do not dare to take responsibility, this creates lower standards within the team. Because inferior performance can be blamed on other factors, nobody has to commit to really high-quality work.

Team members do not hold each other accountable enough for results, and within group meetings they put responsibility on external factors. When team members feel less responsible for results, this can create a 'sixes culture'.

5. Focus on individual results

When individual goals are made more important than team results, team members choose themselves instead of the team. Thus, the team as a whole draws the short straw. The very strength of teamwork – synergy – is thus negated.

This causes team members to weigh up whether their personal investment in terms of time, outweighs the team results it brings. This can create a lack of solidarity within the group.

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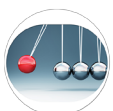
5 Fundaments of
high performing teams

A team is – strictly speaking – a number of people whose goal is to achieve one (or more) common goal(s) together and agree on the way to achieve this goal.

Apart from a common goal and a shared vision of the approach, it is important that team members complement each other. For a team to function well, they also need to (recognise) the same interests, in short: there must be a team interest. Furthermore, there must be shared responsibility and accountability.

Achieving these goals requires teamwork, by which is meant the performance of the team as a whole, rather than the sum of all individual performances.

A High-Performing Team has synergy, and is thus more than just the sum of its parts. Cooperation – real cooperation – is central to working in a team. Team members build the team's performance together, putting team interest above self-interest.

Using the following five fundamentals, it is possible to make any team a high-performing team, in which every team member is fully committed to the team.

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1. *Trust*

Trust is built by sharing experiences and personal histories. Naming each other's personal contribution in the team is also conducive. In addition, mapping profiles of personality and behavioural preferences can be beneficial. Lencioni recommends using personality tools such as behavioural and communication styles tests.

Teams that trust each other:

- dare to ask for help;
- put time and energy into important issues;
- offer apologies and accept them without hesitation;
- look forward to meetings and other opportunities to act as a group;
- admit their weaknesses and mistakes;
- take risks when offering feedback and help.

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2. Conflict

According to Lencioni, it is important to let confrontations do their work. The first step on this path is to recognise that conflicts and confrontations are productive. Important here is the unearthing of veiled conflicts and the encouragement not to withdraw from discussions during this quest. A good process facilitator helps with this. Teams that engage in confrontations can have lively and engaging meetings. They tap into and benefit from ideas from all team members. They solve real problems with each other and bring critical issues to the table.

If there is no absolute trust in each other, there is fear of conflict and confrontation. This ensures that critical or controversial topics do not get on the agenda, or people do not fight for the greater good, if it is perceived as an argument.

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3. Commitment

Commitment from every team member is about clarity and support. There is unity in the team. Constantly seeking consensus does not work; complete agreement is impossible. When all points of view have been heard and factored into the final decision making, a willingness to move forward together emerges.

A well-functioning team knows it is capable of standing behind decisions, even when there is little certainty about their correctness. Work with decision lists and set deadlines. Well-functioning teams make clear decisions and they make them on time. The team develops opportunities to learn from mistakes and takes advantage of opportunities before the competition does. They change direction without hesitation or guilt. At the end of meetings, everyone realises that no team member is in doubt about whether to support the choices made.

Lack of commitment is often a consequence of problems at level two. Lencioni: "When team members have not been able to air their opinions in the course of passionate and open debates, they rarely, if ever, engage, nor do they back decisions, although they may feign agreement during meetings."
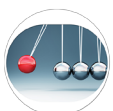
4. Accountability

Holding regular progress meetings, publishing goals, and behavioural agreements, and giving team rewards promote accountability. Teams whose team members hold each other accountable for their responsibilities ensure that colleagues who perform poorly feel encouraged to try harder. They identify potential problems quickly by questioning colleagues' approaches without hesitation. They encourage colleagues who set the same high standards to respect each other.

If a team member does not wholeheartedly support an agreed plan, when he notices that a colleague is not implementing the decisions taken as agreed, he will tend to ignore it, rather than hold him accountable for his responsibilities and shortcomings. But it does irritate him. This causes unhealthy tensions within the team. Needless to say, in this situation, agreed targets and deadlines are not going to be met.

5. Team results

A number of things contribute to optimising results:
- making statements in public and with each other about desired successes;
- expressing appreciation for results;
- granting specific recognition to team members who really contribute to achieving group goals.

A team that focuses on collective results retains and engages performance-oriented employees, minimises individualistic behaviour, enjoys successes and takes care not to be distracted.

If team members do not effectively hold each other accountable for each other's attitudes and behaviour, then own interests (own ego, career planning , status or recognition) or the interests of their own department, take precedence over the team's objectives. Team members do not focus enough on collective results. Achievements of individual team members are not valued enough and successes are not 'celebrated' enough.

The team stagnates and gets easily distracted. It also loses performance-oriented employees.

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In practice

Of course, you only really make a team work by working with the team. An example from our practice is facilitating a management team at Heineken.

The problem this team faced was anything but unique. It is a high-achieving team, which because of its position in the company always works with very challenging targets, under very high pressure.

The team functioned – well and truly – fine. The atmosphere was OK and targets were met. But after the appointment of a new manager, targets changed significantly. With a new strategy and sharper targets, the team was in need of rethinking. The daily operational routine of meetings did not allow them to really reflect on the new approach. On top of that, there were also two new additions to the team. The team badly needed to get its heads back in the same direction and strengthen mutual synergy.

BTC guided their "Day away days". Goals included: identifying project opportunities, redefining mission, vision and strengthening cooperation as a team. A day where these deep-rooted issues were put under the microscope.

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This is what Michiel Verhagen tells us on behalf of Heineken:

"In the area of leadership skills, BTC has helped us move forward incredibly efficiently and in a professional and engaging way by providing insight into the issues and letting the team members find the solution themselves in a very pleasant way. The lasting result is that we have introduced more structure and discipline in our team, for example in meetings and agendas. Meetings run like clockwork. We used to spend too much time talking about subjects on which everyone had already agreed. Now we intervene very quickly if we go wrong."

–Michiel Verhagen, General Manager

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Would you also like a team that works (better)? BTC can strengthen your team into a high-performing team as well.

During an intensive programme of one or more days, we go in-depth to discover which of the five frustrations sabotage the team and what causes this. We make a team assessment at the start of the process (0-measurement) and evaluate the progress (1-measurement).

By taking a keen look at behaviour that most people do not see, we know exactly where the pain points are within a team. By asking for openness, authentic exchanges emerge, giving the team a solid foundation for the culture of a high-performing team with a large dose of trust.

With a tailor-made team programme from BTC, team interests are put first, team members look into the same direction and dare to open up again. The result is a team full of trust, commitment and vigour. A high-performing team, in other words. Not only in the short term, but also structurally.

Contact us via **info@bemelmanstraining.com** or call **020 261 9170** for a no-obligation discussion of the possibilities or ask about our clients' experiences.

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