

5 WAYS TO FIX A DYSFUNCTIONAL TEAM

INSPIRED BY THE WORK OF PATRICK LENCIONI

INTRODUCTION

“Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage.”

A dysfunctional team isn't simply a team that disagrees or has tension. Healthy teams debate, challenge ideas, and work through problems. Dysfunction in teams is rarely about capability — it is about breakdowns in trust, clarity, and accountability.

As Lencioni's model highlights, when trust erodes, everything above it begins to fail — conflict becomes artificial, commitment weakens, accountability disappears, and results suffer.



What is a Dysfunctional Team?

A dysfunctional team is one where behaviours consistently work against trust, clarity, and results.

Communication breaks down, issues go unspoken, and energy shifts from performance to politics.

What Drives Dysfunction?

- Lack of clarity
- Low trust
- Avoided conversations
- Inconsistent accountability
- Leadership drift

5 WAYS TO RESET A DYSFUNCTIONAL TEAM



A team becomes dysfunctional when patterns of behaviour start working against the purpose of the team.

Some common signs include:

- Communication breakdowns or silence
- People working in silos instead of together
- Blame, defensiveness, or avoidance
- Low trust or psychological safety
- Lack of accountability or follow-through
- Decisions constantly revisited or resisted
- Energy spent on politics rather than progress

WHEN THESE PATTERNS PERSIST, PERFORMANCE DROPS, MORALE DECLINES, AND FRUSTRATION BUILDS.

1. Name What's Happening –

Leaders go first. Naming the issue creates permission to reset and reduces unspoken tension.

2. Re-Anchor to Purpose –

Clarify priorities, success measures, and roles. If everything matters, nothing does.

3. Reset Communication Norms –

Create clear expectations: speak openly, address issues early, and challenge ideas — not people.

4. Rebuild Trust Through Consistency –

Trust grows through small, consistent actions — follow-through, listening, and fairness.

5. Reinforce Accountability –

Accountability is a team responsibility. Set standards, address gaps early, and recognise strong performance.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE WHEN YOU FIX THE DYSFUNCTION

- The team remembers why the work matters (purpose)
- People understand their roles, and how it contributes to team success
- Clarity provides direction and reduces friction
- Following through on commitments
- Team communicates openly and respectfully
- Issues are raised early, addressed quickly
- Ideas are debated, not people
- Leaders model consistently great behaviour
- Ensures that everyone carries their weight
- Contribution and success is celebrated publicly

A Final Leadership Truth:

Most teams do not become dysfunctional overnight.

They drift there gradually.

The same is true for recovery.

But when leaders step in with clarity, courage, and consistency, teams can shift surprisingly quickly.

Dysfunction is not a permanent state.

It is a leadership signal that something needs resetting.

“When there is trust, conflict becomes nothing but the pursuit of truth, an attempt to find the best possible answer.”

- PATRICK LENCIONI