BELBIN and the Lencioni Model

Patrick Lencioni described the pitfalls that can spell a team's downfall, in his bestselling book, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team. Let's look at these five dysfunctions and examine how a Belbin approach can mitigate a team's problems, paving the way for success.

1. Absence of trust

Lencioni observed that teams whose members avoided being 'vulnerable' with one another faced problems. Members in these teams were unwilling to admit mistakes, acknowledge weaknesses and ask for help. *Being open with one another in this way requires individuals to experience psychological safety in the team.* For, that is when they can share the negatives of their experiences without fear of being criticized or pulled up.

In 2016, Google's Project Aristotle – their research into effective teams – named 'psychological safety' as the single most important ingredient for team success. But opening up can be the most difficult part. *Identifying and communicating our Belbin Team Roles – the behaviors we tend to adopt in a team – encourages individuals to share preferences and discuss past mistakes and shortcomings within a protective and positive framework.*

Unlike many theories, for Belbin, 'weakness' is not a dirty word. We talk about 'allowable weaknesses' of a particular Team Role as simply flipsides of a Team Role strength. In other words, they're a trade-off for playing a particular role to good effect – shortcomings which, when known, can be mitigated by others in the team.

The clarity of contributions which Belbin offers can help individuals to understand why certain individuals might respond to failure in a certain way.

Lencioni gives the example of a team member admitting "Your idea was better than mine". For a Plant, who makes a significant investment of time and energy into a new idea, this can be a difficult statement to make. So too, it can take a lot for a proud Shaper to apologize. An anxious Completer Finisher who has let a mistake slip through the net is likely to be punishing themselves rather than sharing the failure with the team. In each case, *understanding the underlying behavior can help the team to process it, modify their approach to the individual, build bridges and move on.*

2. Fear of conflict

Where trust is lacking, key issues cannot be debated effectively, because individuals stand to lose too much from the fallout. Lencioni claims that conflict is simply an attempt to find the best possible solution in the shortest possible time, and that successful teams thrive on engaging in discussions about important topics.

Research shows that harmony doesn't necessarily help teams move forward. Professor J. Richard Hackman, late Edgar Pierce Professor of Social and Organizational Psychology at Harvard University, discovered that disagreements were good for a team, so long as they were handled well and focused on the team's objectives.

In Belbin terms, it can help team members to understand how they themselves and others on the team perceive conflict. For the driven, forceful Shaper, confrontation is a part of life – and not an uncomfortable one. For the Shaper's Team Role opposite, the sensitive, diplomatic Teamworker, however, conflict is to be avoided at all costs, because it creates an unpleasant team atmosphere and risks damaging relationships between team members.

Belbin also helps us to appreciate each person's starting-point in a discussion. There's the Monitor Evaluator, who seeks to arrive at the right decision through impartial, academic debate. The Implementer digging their heels in to avoid changes which threaten their way of working. The Specialist who feels that their expertise is being undermined. *Understanding the motivations behind words spoken in the heat of the moment can help to depersonalize conflict, allow individuals to engage constructively with one another and keep discussions on track.*

"Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare." – Patrick Lencioni, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, 2002

3. Lack of commitment

When team members arrive at decisions without challenging each other, plans are ambiguous or out of line with the team's objectives. This can harm engagement, since individuals don't know where they fit in the grand scheme of things.

Commitment doesn't necessarily come from complete consensus, Lencioni tells us. But the team should have 'buy-in' from everyone, even those who initially disagreed with the proposal.

When the decision making process ensures every team members voice is heard, every individual in the team can work with the outcome, whatever it may be. Someone with strong Co-ordinator propensities can make such decision making happen. With sufficient trust, the team's resident Plant can acknowledge

disappointment that another idea was not taken forward and the Completer Finisher can register concern that the schedule will not allow for sufficient checking.

With an understanding of the Team Role behaviors which prompt their comments, their concerns are likely to be understood and addressed, rather than dismissed as 'sour grapes' or sheer negativity.

4. Avoidance of accountability

In a successful team, individuals are able to confront each other with concerns, whether in terms of behavior or performance. As with conflict, it can be difficult to broach these kinds of conversations, but in a team where individuals are fully aware of their strengths and weaknesses – and used to 'auditing' useful team behaviors on a regular basis – these conversations can be approached consistently and handled in the right way.

For example, a Resource Investigator might be challenged for failing to follow up clients and letting people down. *Belbin provides the language to address the problem* – this failure to follow up is a flipside of the Resource Investigator's enthusiasm for new projects – but also hints at strategies to enable individuals to manage strengths more effectively. In this example, the follow-up could be handed over to another team member (perhaps with Implementer and Completer Finisher strengths) at an agreed point, to ensure that clients' needs are met.

With both team members working to their strengths, each is likely to be more engaged and clients will reap the rewards too. *When team members hold one another accountable in a constructive fashion, they build trust and mutual respect, and assume more responsibility for the team's endeavors.*

5. Inattention to results

When people are not held accountable, there is a tendency for individuals to put their needs and priorities ahead of the team's collective goals. When the team loses sight of the need to achieve, the business suffers as a result.

No one Team Role is better than another, and everyone has something to offer. *Belbin helps individuals to understand what they – and their colleagues – can contribute, and how each contribution helps the organization as a whole.*

With each person playing to their strengths, individual aspirations and goals are pulled into line with the group's objectives, so that everyone benefits when the team succeeds.

A work in progress

Lencioni points out that it is difficult to 'master' these five dysfunctions, because a team's situation is always changing. With new members, a change in leadership, or new goals, the team may have to begin again with establishing trust.

Perhaps your team is performing well, but striving for more? Perhaps it finds itself at breaking-point, ridden with conflict and turmoil? Maybe it is suffering from a little apathy and just needs a boost?

Whatever your situation, the language of Belbin Team Roles meets teams where they are, and provides the tools needed to help them grow.

Make BELBIN happen

Find out how you can leverage Belbin to transform performance of your people and teams.. Get in touch to discuss whether you would like to gain the skills and reports..   to do this yourself, or whether you would prefer us to come in and work with you! Leave your contact details here, and a BELBIN Accredited Consultant from CERT Team Development India (P) Ltd will be happy to reach you. Let's make BELBIN happen for you, your people, your organization and your Clients!

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Patrick Lencioni is an American writer of books on business management, particularly in relation to team management.

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