

Abstract, Review, and Critique of Patrick Lencioni's "Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A
Leadership Fable"

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Abstract

Leadership styles, traits, and theories have been researched for years across several settings ranging from education to medicine to the business world. Patrick Lencioni presents a practical view of effective leadership and the necessity of building a cohesive team in his book “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable.” He shares what he has dubbed the five dysfunctions through the telling of the story of Kathryn, a CEO in the technology field, as she takes on the task of walking into a work setting needing different leadership and reform in order to be more effective as an organization. Readers are able to learn from her trials and tribulations throughout this easy to read, yet poignant book that also parallels many of the concepts presented throughout this course.

Review

In his book, “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable,” Patrick Lencioni takes the reader on a journey through what he refers to as the five dysfunctions of a team: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. Each of these dysfunctions is thoroughly explained as key events unfold in the story of Kathryn Peterson’s attempt to create a more highly effective team of individuals in her new role as CEO.

Kathryn experiences a range of emotions that anyone in a leadership position has likely felt as some point, including self-doubt, throughout the early stages of transitioning into her leadership role. The reader is able to follow her thought process as she encountered various struggles with team members and gather realistic examples of how various troublesome events often play out in the workplace. Kathryn faces many struggles as she tries to engage key players

and transform a company at risk filled with many people whom are resistant to change. The story of this transformation and all of its highs and lows becomes the basis for the story.

After the telling of the story to depict his message, Lencioni offers tools for self-assessment and ways to apply his model to one's own organization. He presents a general overview of his model and then goes into further detail about each of the dysfunctions. He concludes with strategies to overcome each of the dysfunctions in order to build a cohesive team.

Critique

I would definitely recommend this book to anyone, not just aspiring leaders. Lencioni presents the information in a relatable way and I think it is important that all members of a team understand more deeply about issues faced in working together and how to overcome them. Many of the course themes were present throughout this book, but what stood out quite a bit was the necessity of productive conflict and staying the course. The textbook for the course also addresses conflict management and negotiation, among other key leadership and organizational management themes.

The dynamics of groups is another key theme of Lencioni's book and the text for this course. The "Four Do's for Hot Teams" as presented by Osland, Kolb, Rubin, & Turner (2007, p. 249) summarizes a similar approach to leadership as to what is presented by Lencioni. These include: like your people, listen to them, make work engaging, and let them decide. Some differences appear in the specifics, but this is a good generalization of the book outline.

In the Lencioni book, Kathryn was also tasked with undoing and replacing previous group norms and managing and motivating people. Similar to creating an entry-level plan,

Kathryn made sure she followed guidelines like those in the Osland, et al. (2007) text in her beginning months on the job when dealing with difficult people on the team (p. 90).

Finally, each of the dysfunctions is also supported with related evidence from the course text as outlined below.

1. Absence of trust: “Building and maintain trust is one of the most crucial social processes of effective leadership” (Osland, et al., 2007, p. 406).
2. Fear of conflict: “Too much or too little conflict are both dysfunctional states” (Osland, et al., 2007, p. 358).
3. Lack of commitment: “Committed employees have higher performance, greater ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances, higher attendance, longer job tenure, and more organizational citizenship behavior” (Osland, et al., 2007, p. 19).
4. Avoidance of accountability, “They also create an organizational culture that values good performance and customer service” (Osland, et al., 2007, p. 112).
5. Inattention to results: “A strong culture does not guarantee good performance unless it focuses on all its key constituencies...” (Osland, et al., 2007, p. 448).

Overall, Patrick Lencioni’s “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable” is an excellent complement to the Osland, et al. (2007) text for this course. The various leadership concepts are presented through storytelling, which helps bring concepts from text and course notes to life in a real-world setting. I would recommend this easy to read book to anyone who wants their organization to function well as a whole.