

# **SOCIAL STYLE® and The Five Dysfunctions of a Team**

## OVERVIEW

“The Five Dysfunctions of a Team” by Patrick Lencioni outlines five common pitfalls that prevent teams from achieving their full capabilities. And given the widespread use of teams in the business world, these dysfunctions have significant impact on overall organizational performance. This whitepaper looks at how the behavioral preferences and emotional intelligence (EQ) components of TRACOM’s SOCIAL STYLE Model™ relate to the “Five Dysfunctions” concepts.

### SOCIAL STYLE CONNECTIONS

SOCIAL STYLE is the world’s most effective interpersonal skills model. The Connections Whitepaper Series looks at how SOCIAL STYLE complements and supports other popular workplace programs including Situational Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Crucial Conversations and The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.

The TRACOM Group has no affiliation with “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team”, or the book’s author; Patrick Lencioni. Neither the book’s publishers, authors nor other representatives have reviewed or approved this paper.

## INTRODUCTION

Much of the work performed in organizations today is done by teams. It's hard to imagine not contributing to at least one team on any given day. Teams are critical to every organization's success; they determine and set strategies, generate ideas for new products, and solve problems. Given their importance, why do so many people complain about their teams? If you ask Patrick Lencioni, it is because most teams are dysfunctional.

In his book, "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team," Lencioni outlines five common pitfalls that prevent teams from achieving their full capabilities. Underlying each of these five dysfunctions is the failure to have an in-depth understanding of one another's Style. According to Lencioni, "some of the most effective and lasting tools for building trust on a team are profiles of team members' behavioral preferences and personality styles. These help break down barriers by allowing people to better understand and empathize with one another" (p. 199).

The SOCIAL STYLE Model provides an ideal platform that serves as a starting point for solving the Five Dysfunctions. SOCIAL STYLE and the application of behavioral Versatility offers a highly usable model of people's behavioral preferences, strengths and weaknesses. It provides individuals feedback on interpersonal skills and realistic advice on how to contribute to teams. It leads to greater interpersonal awareness, understanding and more productive teams.

## OVERVIEW OF THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM MODEL

According to Lencioni, most teams unknowingly fall victim to five interrelated dysfunctions. Teams who suffer from even one of the five are susceptible to the other four. Solving all five is required to create a high functioning team. The five dysfunctions are displayed in a pyramid to the right.

### *Dysfunction One – Absence of Trust*

When team members do not trust one another, they are unwilling to be vulnerable within the team. It is impossible for a team to build a foundation for trust when team members are not genuinely open about their mistakes and weaknesses.

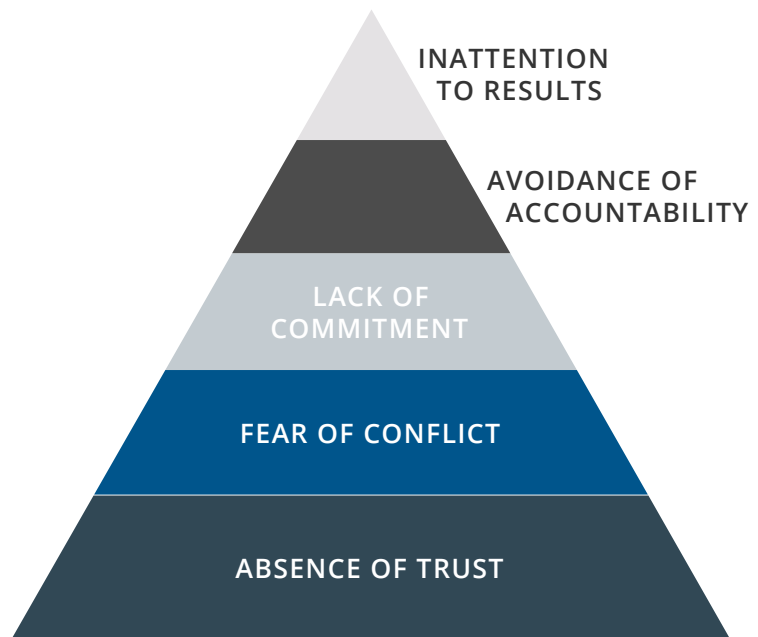
### *Dysfunction Two – Fear of Conflict*

Failure to build trust sets the stage for the second dysfunction. Teams without trust are unable to engage in passionate debate about ideas. Instead, they are guarded in their comments and resort to discussions that mask their true feelings.

***Dysfunction Three – Lack of Commitment*** Teams that do not engage in healthy conflict will suffer from the third dysfunction. Because they do not openly surface their true opinions or engage in open debate, team members will rarely commit to team decisions, though they may feign agreement in order to avoid controversy or conflict.

***Dysfunction Four – Avoidance of Accountability*** A lack of commitment creates an atmosphere where team members do not hold one another accountable. Because there is no commitment to a clear action plan, team members hesitate to hold one another accountable on actions and behaviors that are contrary to the good of the team.

***Dysfunction Five – Inattention to Results*** The lack of accountability makes it possible for people to put their own needs above the team's goals. Team members will focus on their own career goals or recognition for their departments to the detriment of the team. A weakness in any one area can cause teamwork to deteriorate. The model is easy to understand, and yet can be difficult to practice because it requires high levels of discipline and persistence.



# HOW SOCIAL STYLE AND VERSATILITY ENHANCE TEAMWORK

SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility provide a proven and easy-to-use strategy for team members to understand themselves and one another, and to overcome the five dysfunctions. The Model provides an awareness of how people behave towards others, use their time, and make decisions. Further, the Versatility component of the Model provides advice for increasing interpersonal effectiveness with individuals regardless of their particular Styles. Research has shown that SOCIAL STYLE is easier to learn and apply than either DiSC or Myers-Briggs. Of additional importance, the SOCIAL STYLE Profile is available as a multi-rater instrument, providing feedback from other team members, which helps to overcome the biased and inaccurate perceptions people often have of themselves.

In the following sections we describe how Style and Versatility help to manage the five team dysfunctions.

## WORKING TOGETHER WITH SOCIAL STYLE

Awareness of SOCIAL STYLE is particularly important for the first two dysfunctions: absence of trust and fear of conflict. Understanding one another's Styles helps teams develop trust and learn to debate in healthy and productive ways. This provides a solid basis for managing the other three dysfunctions, where Versatility plays an important role. Versatility provides tools and mechanisms for team members to reach commitment, hold one another accountable, and achieve results.

### *Absence of Trust*

Lencioni states that trust lies at the heart of a functioning, cohesive team, and that without trust teamwork is all but impossible. Members of trusting teams admit weaknesses, take risks by offering one another feedback and assistance, focus their energy on important issues, and are willing to ask for help. Teams that use a focused approach can achieve trust, and one of the best ways to do this is to utilize a behavioral styles profile.

The SOCIAL STYLE Model focuses on people's behavior – the things they do and say to one another. It provides a very clear description of people's strengths and weaknesses, as well as insight into people's work preferences. This knowledge is invaluable for creating an atmosphere of trust.

Different Styles of people often have a hard time working together, and this can lead to a breakdown of trust. This is particularly true for people who have opposite Styles because their behavioral preferences are dramatically different from one another. For example, during team meetings an Expressive person speaks loudly, frequently, and likes to make decisions quickly. In contrast, an Analytical person speaks softly, less



frequently, and wants to take time before coming to decisions. Because these people's Styles are at odds, their behavioral differences can lead to conflict and a lack of trust. SOCIAL STYLE can help. By recognizing Style differences, these individuals will develop a better understanding and acceptance of one another. They will identify one another's strengths and weaknesses, and how to accept and capitalize on them. Since their differences are merely behavioral and are not a reflection of personal judgments or personality disputes, they will more easily develop a cohesive and trusting team that focuses on work rather than Style differences.

### ***Fear of Conflict***

Team members sometimes engage in heated and unhealthy conflict that undermines effective teamwork. Instead, it becomes very personal and results in damaged relationships and an atmosphere where productive debate is virtually nonexistent. The SOCIAL STYLE Model helps in two specific ways. First, it describes each Style's "Backup Behavior" when under stress and how people engage in conflict. Second, the Model explains how to manage this behavior and replace it with effective communication strategies.

Returning to our example, the Backup Behavior for Expressive Style people is to attack. They are confrontational and verbally aggressive. In contrast, Analytical Style people's Backup Behavior is to withdraw; they try to avoid the situation. Conflict between these two people will lead to a situation where healthy debate is rare. The Expressive Style person will display outright hostility while the Analytical Style person will go out of his way to avoid saying anything that might trigger this type of outburst. Both approaches lead to a poisonous atmosphere without meaningful discussion of ideas. However, simply learning about these Style differences helps to neutralize them. This is because the SOCIAL STYLE Model provides techniques for engaging with one another in ways that focus on ideas rather than personalities and behavioral differences. This will lead to more effective conflict, where team members solve problems without wasting time on politics and personal differences.

## **VERSATILITY AND TEAMWORK**

SOCIAL STYLE can help teams trust one another and engage in productive debate. With Style as a foundation, Versatility is essential for dealing with the next three dysfunctions – lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. Lencioni provides team-building and problem-solving techniques to manage these pitfalls. While these tools are helpful, individual team members' Versatility is critical for overcoming these dysfunctions.

### ***Lack of Commitment***

According to Lencioni, commitment is a function of clarity and buy-in. Effective teams make timely and clear decisions with buy-in from all team members, even those who do not agree with the decision. Teams with



### *Appropriate Use of*

IMAGE	PRESENTATION	COMPETENCE	FEEDBACK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dress and Grooming</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Effectiveness of Group Communication</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conscientiousness</li><li>• Flexibility</li><li>• Innovation</li><li>• Perseverance</li><li>• Optimism</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Active Listening</li><li>• Adaptive Communication</li><li>• Empathy</li><li>• Interpersonal Relations</li></ul>

commitment have common objectives, move forward without hesitation, change direction when necessary, and learn from their mistakes.

To reach commitment, the Five Dysfunctions model recommends techniques such as establishing clear deadlines and communicating the team's goals throughout the organization. This happens through effective discussion, which is a reflection of Feedback. Feedback involves active listening and understanding other team members' concerns and viewpoints. It also includes adapting communication to match the Styles of other team members. When team members practice Feedback, it helps create an atmosphere where teams can reach commitment. Competence is also important for achieving commitment. Team members need to be flexible to changing circumstances and make decisions when information is ambiguous or imperfect. As Lencioni makes clear, effective teams move forward without getting stuck in "analysis paralysis."

#### ***Avoidance of Accountability***

Accountability requires team members to call their peers on performance or behaviors that might hurt the team. Teams that hold one another accountable identify problems quickly by questioning one another's actions, hold one another to the same standards, and avoid needless bureaucracy around managing performance.

Lencioni states that making the team's goals public and conducting regular progress reviews are techniques that can contribute to individual accountability. However, personal Competence is especially important. Individuals need to take responsibility to meet their obligations and persevere to achieve their goals. Optimism is also important. An optimistic outlook is critical since it communicates confidence to other team members and to the rest of the organization that the team is on the right track. An optimistic team is more likely to hold one another accountable for achieving its goals.

#### ***Inattention to Results***

The ultimate dysfunction is when members put their own status or personal goals above the best interests of the team. Teams that focus on results minimize this type of self-centered behavior. Publicly declaring the team's results and offering results-based rewards are techniques for managing this dysfunction. Once again, many of the same Versatility skills we've been discussing are relevant here. Without personal conscientiousness, perseverance, flexibility, and optimism, it would be difficult if not impossible for teams to achieve results. Innovation is another aspect of Competence that is particularly important for achieving results. Teams that are creative and generate innovative products and solutions will inevitably achieve results that are superior to those of their competitors.

## BENEFITS & SUMMARY

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team model provides a persuasive analysis of the common pitfalls of many teams, as well as effective strategies for overcoming these hazards. An understanding of one another's strengths, weaknesses, and Style preferences is the heart of effective teamwork. It is the foundation for teamwork, and it is best achieved through the insights and tools learned from SOCIAL STYLE. In this whitepaper we have described how SOCIAL STYLE provides a basis for implementing Lencioni's teamwork model, and how Versatility builds on Style awareness to further enhance individual and team performance.

### REFERENCES

We are grateful to Dr. Karl Krumm for his review and comments on this whitepaper.

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# ABOUT **TRACOM<sup>®</sup> GROUP**

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THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANY<sup>®</sup>

## **[WHY we do]**

We believe that improving peoples' understanding of themselves and others makes the world a better place.

## **[WHAT we do]**

We synthesize our discoveries into actionable learning and resources that improve an individual's performance in all parts of their lives. We call this Social Intelligence.

## **[HOW we do it]**

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