

## Five pillars of teamwork (Part I)

# Trusting teams succeed

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Teamwork is the key to successful organisations. And genuine teamwork stands on five pillars, which I will discuss through a series of five articles. The first among them is 'Trust'. Lack of trust is the first pitfall. Read on to know how to build trust in a team and lay the foundation for a successful organisation...

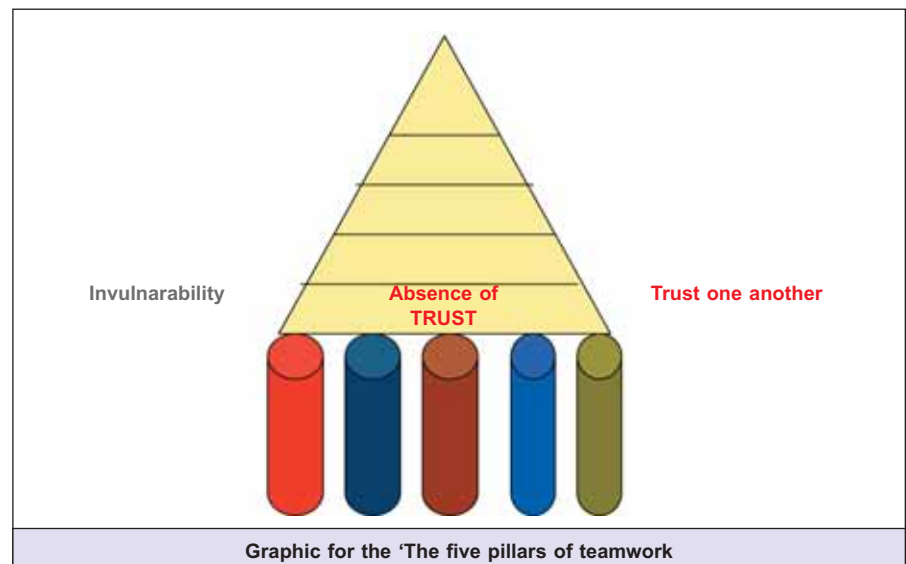
Genuine teamwork has been elusive in most organisations. And organisations fail to achieve teamwork because they unknowingly fall prey to five dangerous pitfalls. Lencioni calls them dysfunctions, and he is right because you cannot get the results you desire by treating them as issues in isolation even though if not built cohesively they might pose major barriers in building excellent teams. These five values if not built can become pitfalls, and like in a chain when even one link or value is broken the teamwork deteriorates and suffers.

### Trust or absence of it

Lack of trust is the first pitfall. Trust lies at the heart of a functioning cohesive team. Without it there is no teamwork. Dictionary meaning of trust is firm belief in someone or something; acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence

or investigation. A good strong team has each member trusting one another. Absence of trust stems from the unwillingness of members to trust one another because they are unwilling to be vulnerable within the group. When team members are not genuinely open about their weaknesses, fears and mistakes they cannot build a foundation of trust. Talking teamwork in theory is easy; building it in practice is difficult because it requires discipline and persistence that few teams actually muster.

In the world around us, the word trust is often used - mostly misused - and has begun to sound more like a cliché in any context when used. Be very specific about what you mean when you use it. In our context here, trust is the confidence that team members have with one another. Genuinely good intentions and without being protective of the group. This means that teammates must learn to confide, exposing their weaknesses and



Absence of trust	Trusting teams
Conceal mistakes & weaknesses from one another	Admit weaknesses & mistakes
Hesitate to ask for help	Ask for help
Do not provide constructive feedback	Provide constructive feedback
Do not offer help outside their area of work	Accept questions and help about their areas of work
Jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others without attempting to clarify them	Give one another the benefit of doubt before arriving at negative conclusion
Fail to recognise and tap into one another's skills and experiences	Appreciate and tap into one another's skills and experiences
Waste time and energy managing their behaviours and effects	Focus time and energy on important issues, not politics
Hold grudges	Offer and accept apologies without hesitation
Dread meetings and avoid spending time together	Look forward to meetings and opportunities to work together as a group

vulnerability with one another. Only then can they focus their energy and attention completely on the job rather than being political with one another. Most successful people learn to be competitive with their peers and protective of their reputations and that makes achieving vulnerability based trust difficult. Such instincts must be overcome for the good of teamwork.

Look at teams that do not have trust among members and you will find; they waste large amounts of time and energy managing their behaviours and interactions, they anticipate team meetings with great apprehension or fear, they almost never offer help to others and are hesitant to take risks. What happens to the moral of a distrusting team; it is always low. The Lencioni table says it all:

So if a team has all of these or any of these dysfunctional traits, how do you overcome them? How to build trust in a team? It requires in-depth understanding of the unique attributes of team members, sharing experiences over time, lots of credibility and follow through. There are a few tools or exercises that can be used to achieve this:

**Sharing personal history:** Just gather the team around a table, under a tree or anywhere convenient; and have each member talk about himself or herself – hometown, spouse, children, challenges

in the past as in school days and college days, hobbies, sporting interests, best job so far, most unique experience in life, etc. Choosing subjects that are not very sensitive will not hinder the members talking about themselves. And as they begin to do so, they get to know one another better and also relax in one others' presence diminishing tensions and being more open. They now see each other with human life stories.

**Team effectiveness:** This exercise is more rigorous and relevant than the previous one, but may involve more risk. Here each member identifies one important contribution his or her peer makes to the team and one area where that person must change or improve for the good of the team. So, by starting with the team leader, each member then voice their responses on one person at a time. The goal here must be to extract positive and useful information.

**Profiles of team members:** Profiles on behavioral preferences and personality styles can be very effective and lasting tools for building trust. What will this do? It breaks down barriers by allowing people to understand and empathise with one another. There are various profiling tools that can be used. These tools provide valid behavioural descriptions of various team members according to the ways they think,

speak and act. Tools such as MBTI are non-judgmental in nature, their basis in research and the extent to which the members take an active role in identifying their own types.

**360° feedback:** These tools have become popular over time. Used properly they work very well, if not can have political undertones and that is why it is riskier than the other tools. Delinking this tool from any incentive or compensation package is the best way of making it work. Here the peers make judgments and provide feedback with constructive criticism. It can be used as a developmental tool that allows members to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

**Experimental team exercises:** Although this tool is said to have lost its lustre, some teams still use it. It is done through creative outdoor exercises in the hope of building trust. However it can be useful tool to enhance teamwork.

For consistent results use these tools regularly and with regular follow up. Areas identified for individual development must be periodically reviewed for progress. The most important role a leader must take to build trust is demonstrating his vulnerability first. This requires the leader to run the risk of losing face before his team, so that others too will take the same risk. Never punish vulnerability, weakness or failure. Many teams discourage trust by punishing weakness or failures. Vulnerability cannot be staged. It must be genuine. ♦

*Look out for the next pillar, which will be discussed in Part 2 in the next issue of Modern Machine Tools*



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