

How to Know if Your Team is in Serious Trouble and What to Do About It

Do you have a growing sense of unease that your team may be 'off track' and losing its way? You know things aren't 'quite right' but you're not sure how to fix it? Stop worrying! This article will help you discover what's going on and turn your team around to successfully achieve its purpose.

If left unaddressed, team problems become self-fulfilling prophecies where the team fails to deliver and the fallout is much bigger than 'failure to deliver'. Like lemmings on a suicide mission, the team unravels as small incidents become entrenched problems. Individual and team reputations are often irreparably damaged; motivation plummets and the professional and emotional scars can last a lifetime.

Here are the most common Team Trouble Indicators (TTIs), their causes and easy ways to solve them.

TTI #1: Everyone's doing their own thing and collaboration is limited.

Each team member has their own interpretation of the goal and is working independently to achieve it, with limited success. This one is common when a team is in the initial 'forming' stage.

Causes:

- Lack of a clear and shared vision.
- Making assumptions that all team members are 'on board', without consciously checking in on each individual's beliefs.
- Failing to understand and agree a) the purpose, goals and objectives, b) roles and responsibilities and c) how to harness each other's strengths.

Solution: Take time for a team 'kick-off' event at the start of the project. If your team has been underway for a while, create 'time-out' from the team's daily activities to take stock and re-group. Clarify the desired outcome, communicate the vision and explain why they have been selected to be part of the team. Undertake Team Chartering, Profiling (eg DiSC, Myer-Briggs or Social Styles) and other informal activities to help team members get to know each other better.

TTI #2: Conflict is ongoing and escalating.

Most people go to extraordinary lengths to avoid conflict, often resulting in subversive and unproductive behaviours. Common in the 'storming' stage of team development, this undermines team unity and credibility. Left unchecked, unmanaged conflict leads to unproductive alliances and divisive factions within the team.

Causes:

- Failure to recognize and harness conflict as a normal, healthy part of team dynamics.
- Open or subversive hostility caused by mismatched values and beliefs.
- Team members' believe that *"the only way to get it done properly is to do it my way"*.

Solution: Help your team recognize that well managed conflict is a healthy way to generate innovative solutions to challenges and can be a positive, highly constructive way to achieve team goals. Develop a set of guiding principles and values (such as respect). Teach your team effective Problem Solving techniques to show them how to 'play the ball, not the man'.

TTI #3: Failure to deliver what's expected.

One milestone missed does not necessarily mean your team is in trouble. There could be perfectly good reasons for this. However, once the team has failed to deliver on two or more occasions, a pattern could be emerging. Often accompanied by excuses (*101 reasons why we couldn't get it done on time*), blame and avoidance (*I did my bit on time*), immediate intervention is required.

Causes:

- Lack of commitment to the original timeline, fuelled by a secret belief that it was always unrealistic and unachievable.
- Lack of confidence in fellow team member's abilities.
- Conflicting priorities – team members are overloaded and unable to focus on the most important priority.
- Inability to effectively manage others' expectations and engage them to overcome the blockers.

Often seen during the 'norming' stage of team development when they have been together for a while, a critical success factor changes and the team fails to consciously adapt to the change.

Solution: Bring the team together to understand the 'real' issues. Allow members to express frustrations and unearth the problems and beliefs that led to the issue/s. Move into solution mode and help the team identify constructive alternatives, ensuring they take personal and shared accountability for the way forward. Teach the team advanced negotiation and influencing skills to ensure they engage others in a timely and effective way.

In his book "*Overcoming The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*", author Patrick Lencioni summarises the solutions as:

1. Building Trust
2. Mastering Conflict
3. Achieving Commitment
4. Embracing Accountability
5. Focusing on Results

If you can give your team a 10/10 score on each of these factors, congratulations, you're well on the way to leading a high performing team!

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world.
Indeed. It is the only thing that ever has."*

Margaret Mead

If you think your team could well be in trouble and would benefit from knowing how to apply these concepts, contact [Possibility to Reality](http://www.p2r.com.au) today. We'll help you get your team back on track and recognized as one which delivers a quality outcome, on time, every time.