Sometimes the Problem Is in the Room.

Why companies rarely fail because of strategy – but because of how teams decide, disagree, and take responsibility

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About this White Paper

Most companies measure almost everything.
Revenue. Pipeline. Forecast. Customer satisfaction. Productivity.

And yet many organisations repeatedly struggle with the same problems: decisions are not consistently implemented. Conflicts are avoided. Responsibilities remain unclear. Teams work side by side instead of together.
These problems do not show up in any dashboard. They are difficult to measure, but often decisive for the success of a company.

This white paper explains why high-performing companies need not only a good strategy, but also teams that are capable of making decisions together, engaging in constructive conflict, and taking responsibility.

It shows which behavioural patterns prevent successful execution, why they often go unrecognised, and how they can be made visible.
The concepts described are based in part on the research and model of The Five Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni, and have been further developed by MUPUC for application in modern leadership teams, sales organisations, and growth-oriented companies.

1. The Strategy Trap

When a company fails to reach its targets, the search begins. Usually in the wrong place.

The pipeline is too small. The conversion rate too low. Growth falls short of expectations. So the analysis begins.
Workshops are organised. Strategies revised. New initiatives launched. New KPIs introduced.
The pattern is remarkably predictable.

A new sales approach is expected to turn things around. Marketing is realigned. Additional staff are hired. The product receives new priorities. Budgets are increased.
And a year later?

The results have barely changed.
Not because the strategy was wrong. Not because the people were not committed. Not because resources were lacking.

But because the actual problem was never addressed.

> **Most of the time, the cause is sought in the market, the product, or the strategy. Rarely does anyone look inward.**

Yet many execution problems do not originate outside the company – they originate within the team. Decisions are made but interpreted differently. Conflicts are avoided. Priorities remain unclear. Responsibilities blur. Issues are deferred rather than resolved.

From the outside, the company appears capable of action. Internally, however, friction builds. And friction is costly. It slows decisions, weakens execution, and ensures that even good strategies fall short of their potential.
The strategy trap is treating symptoms while leaving the actual cause untouched.

Because sometimes the problem is not in the market. Sometimes it sits in the room.

2. Why Intelligent Teams Make Poor Decisions

Many people assume that high-performing teams automatically make good decisions.
After all, these teams consist of competent, experienced, and engaged people – people who understand their roles, take responsibility, and want the best for the company.

But this is where a common misconception lies.
The quality of a team is not the sum of its individuals.
A team can consist of highly qualified people – and still make poor decisions, avoid conflict, or fail at execution.

Not because the people are unsuitable. But because teams develop behavioural patterns over time.
These patterns rarely emerge consciously. They develop gradually.
Often from good intentions. People want to avoid conflict. Protect relationships. Keep discussions brief.

Accelerate decisions. But what seems sensible in the short term can significantly impair a team's effectiveness over time.
Three patterns appear particularly often.

False Harmony

On the surface, everything appears to be fine.
Meetings run smoothly. Discussions stay civil. Decisions are made.
But the real disagreements happen elsewhere.
After the meeting. In one-on-one conversations. In separate calls. Or not at all.
Conflicts are avoided to prevent tension.

> **The problem is: unspoken conflicts do not disappear. They persist.**

The result is decisions that are officially supported but only half-heartedly implemented in practice.

Lack of Commitment

Not every agreement is a decision.
Many teams leave a meeting feeling they have reached agreement. Ask those same people a few days later, and they often have different ideas about what was decided, which priorities apply, or who is responsible.

> **Where clarity is absent, room for interpretation appears.**
> **And where room for interpretation appears, execution suffers.**

Individual Interests Over Team Success

Every person has their own goals, responsibilities, and interests. That is normal.
It becomes problematic when individual success becomes more important than the success of the team.
Information is withheld. Decisions are evaluated from a departmental perspective. Priorities are set according to local interests.
The result: everyone optimises their own area – and yet the overall result still falls short of expectations.

> **Most teams do not fail because of a lack of competence.**
> **They fail because of behavioural patterns that make collaboration harder, slow down decisions, and prevent execution.**

The good news: these patterns are not random. They can be identified. And they can be made visible.

3. The Five Invisible Brakes

Behavioural patterns do not emerge randomly.
They often follow a clear logic - and it is this logic that Patrick Lencioni described in his seminal work The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.
The model is today one of the most widely recognised frameworks for analysing team dynamics.

Not because it is particularly complex, but because it describes a problem that almost every team recognises: why intelligent and engaged people collectively fall short of their potential.
The five dysfunctions are not personality traits. They are behavioural patterns that develop over time and progressively limit a team's effectiveness.

1. Absence of Trust

The foundation of every high-performing team is trust.
Not in the sense of liking or friendship, but in the sense of openness.
Teams with low trust are less likely to openly address mistakes, uncertainties, and concerns. Information is filtered, risks are concealed, and problems often only become visible once they are already causing impact.

2. Fear of Conflict

Where trust is absent, conflicts are avoided.
Discussions remain superficial, critical topics are deferred, and differing opinions are not openly expressed. The result is rarely harmony. More often, it is merely the appearance of harmony.

3. Lack of Commitment

When controversial topics are not discussed openly, genuine agreement rarely emerges.
Decisions are made, but not equally embraced by everyone. Priorities are interpreted differently, and execution loses speed and clarity.

4. Avoidance of Accountability

People hold each other accountable only when they have agreed on shared goals and expectations. Without this foundation, problems are tolerated rather than addressed. Performance gaps persist, and necessary corrections come too late.

5. Inattention to Results

The final dysfunction is usually the most visible.
Teams lose focus on the shared result. Individual interests, departmental goals, or personal priorities gain in importance. The team keeps working. But no longer consistently in the same direction.

> These five dysfunctions do not stand independently. They build on one another.
> Absence of trust leads to fear of conflict. Fear of conflict impedes commitment. Lack of commitment reduces accountability. And lack of accountability weakens the focus on results.

This is why the cause of many team problems is rarely found where they become visible.
Those who treat only the symptoms improve the situation in the short term.
Those who understand the cause improve the team's effectiveness permanently.

4. Why KPIs Do Not Reveal These Problems

Modern companies measure more than ever before.
Revenue. Pipeline. Conversion Rates. Forecast Accuracy. Customer retention. Employee satisfaction. Productivity. Goal attainment. For almost everything, a dashboard exists today.

The underlying assumption is simple: if enough is measured, problems will become visible.
That is true. But only for a certain type of problem. KPIs show results. They rarely show their cause. A poor forecast shows that something is wrong. It does not show why. A declining conversion rate shows a problem. It does not explain its origin.
Missed targets make the effects visible. Not the reasons behind them.

This is precisely where the blind spot of many organisations lies.
Because while results can be measured relatively easily, behavioural patterns elude conventional reporting.

- No dashboard shows whether team members trust one another.
- No KPI measures whether conflicts are openly addressed or deliberately avoided.
- No report reveals whether decisions are genuinely embraced or merely accepted to end the discussion.

And yet these very factors often have a significant influence on subsequent performance.
When a sales team misses its targets, there can be many causes.
Market changes. Product issues. Skills gaps. Lack of resources.

But it can also be because forecasts are inflated. Because critical issues are not raised in meetings. Because decisions are interpreted differently. Or because no one is willing to hold a colleague accountable for problematic behaviour. These causes do not appear in any report.
Not because they are unimportant. But because no one looks for them.

Most dashboards answer the question of what happened.
The real challenge is understanding why it happened.
And that is precisely where the analysis of team alignment begins.

5. Why Alignment Is a Competitive Advantage

Companies rarely win because they have the best strategy. They win because they execute their strategy better than others.
That sounds obvious. In practice, however, this connection is frequently underestimated.
Many companies invest considerable time in strategy development, organisational design, processes, and systems. At the same time, little attention is paid to how teams actually collaborate, make decisions, and take responsibility.

And yet it is precisely this that determines the quality of execution.
In practice, the same pattern emerges repeatedly: companies with similar products, comparable resources, and similar market conditions achieve very different results.

The difference is rarely in the strategy. The difference usually lies in the team's ability to act as one.
Teams with high trust surface problems earlier. Teams with a healthy conflict culture make better decisions.
Teams with clear commitment execute faster. Teams with strong accountability correct problems earlier and more consistently.

The result is faster decisions, less friction, and higher quality execution.
This is not a theoretical advantage. It is an operational advantage. And operational advantages compound.

Over months and years, this produces shorter response times, better prioritisation, higher productivity, and ultimately better business results.
This is precisely why team health is not an HR topic. It is an execution topic.

And execution determines which companies reach their goals – and which fall short of their potential despite good strategies.

For growth-oriented companies, PE portfolio companies, and organisations in periods of change, this leads to a simple conclusion:

> **Those who want to improve a team’s effectiveness must look beyond structures, processes, and metrics.**
> **They must understand how the team actually works together.**

Because the biggest brakes rarely operate visibly. They operate in daily life. In meetings. In decisions.
And in the behavioural patterns that no one measures.

6. Making Dysfunctions Visible

Problems can only be solved once they become visible.
That sounds obvious. In practice, however, many organisations fail at precisely this point.
Not because the problems are unknown. But because they are rarely spoken openly.

Trust issues do not appear in any report. Conflict avoidance does not show up in any dashboard. Lack of commitment is absent from any quarterly presentation.

The effects become visible. The causes remain hidden.
This is why every improvement begins with a diagnosis.
Not with a new strategy. Not with a workshop. Not with a reorganisation.

But with an honest understanding of how a team actually works together.
This is exactly why the Team Alignment Assessment was developed.

The methodology is based on the research and model of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni and has been further developed by MUPUC for application in modern organisations.

> **The goal is not to evaluate people. The goal is to make patterns visible.**
> **Patterns that make collaboration harder, slow down decisions, and impede successful execution.**

What the Assessment Measures

The Team Alignment Assessment analyses five core dimensions of successful teamwork:

- Trust
- Productive Conflict
- Commitment
- Accountability
- Results Orientation

The assessment is completed by all team members independently and on an anonymous basis.
This produces a more objective picture of the actual team dynamics than is possible in conventional workshops or management discussions.

What the Assessment Delivers

The result is more than a score.
It reveals,

- which strengths a team already has,
- which behavioural patterns are currently limiting performance,
- which risks exist for future execution,
- and which measures offer the greatest lever for improvement.

The Process

- Phase 1 · Assessment: Structured online questionnaire for all team members.
- Phase 2 · Analysis: Evaluation, pattern recognition, and interpretation of results.
- Phase 3 · Executive Debrief: Discussion of findings and prioritisation of potential measures.
- Phase 4 · Final Report: Summary with results, risks, strengths, and recommendations for action.

The goal of the assessment is not to document problems.
The goal is to make them visible before they permanently impair a team's effectiveness.
Because most dysfunctions do not emerge overnight.
But they do not disappear on their own either.

Closing Thought

Most problems in organisations do not arise suddenly. They develop gradually.

A decision is not consistently implemented. A conflict is deferred. A responsibility remains unclear. A problem goes unaddressed. Taken individually, these things seem insignificant.

Over months and years, however, they can significantly impair a team's effectiveness.
The challenge is that such patterns are rarely visible.
They do not appear in any forecast. In any KPI. In any dashboard.
And yet they influence daily the quality of decisions, the speed of execution, and ultimately the results of a company.

This is why sustainable improvement does not begin only with optimised processes, new systems, or better strategies.
It begins with an honest understanding of how people actually work together.

Because sometimes the greatest challenge a company faces is not in the market.
Not in the product.
Not in the strategy.

Because sometimes the Problem Is in the Room.

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Methodological basis: Patrick Lencioni, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team (2002), Jossey-Bass. The Team Alignment Assessment was developed by MUPUC on the basis of this model for use in modern organisations, teams, and sales organisations.