



Friction, Factions and Fault-Lines – Our Top 12 Team Trip-Ups...

by Bill Cropper – The Change Forum

Based on materials and experiences drawn from our team improvement clinics and participant Guides for Working Better Together © Bill Cropper 2002-15

In today's workspace, It's virtually impossible not to be part of a team, even if it doesn't always feel like it! We're surrounded by token sentiments of teamwork – we need a 'team effort' on this, they're 'not a team-player', we're all 'on the same team'. Yet far too often, people find teams time-consuming, frustrating and exhausting, rather than exhilarating, involving and effective. *Some succeed. Many others fail. Why is that?*

I don't have all the answers. The contributors to the troubles most teams encounter from time to time are many and varied. But as part of the *Working Better Together* programs I run, I often work with 'teams in turmoil'. To tailor team improvement to particular contexts, I usually start with individual team-talks to find out what's going on, coupled with a *Team Functionality Survey*.

So I thought I'd list the **Top 12 Trip-Ups** people in front-line teams have revealed over the past few years. I'm sure you've met most of them but some are not the ones team text-books talk about. I've listed them in order of *frequency and severity. So commencing count-down...*

12 In number 12 spot is 'Arbitrary Contrariness'. There's often one or two in a team that thrive on disagreeing and arguing heartily with what anyone says, just for the hell of it. *The result can be unsettling and toxic over time – and dampen-down open communication.*

11 3-D Teams is in at 11. It stands for **D**isinterested, **D**emotivated and **D**isengaged. There's a 'don't care', 'I don't-want-to-be-here' attitude that saps vitality, drains interest and enthusiasm, punctures productivity and demoralises. *The big danger is others can catch this infectious malaise.*

10 Talking-behind-backs is 10: rumour-mongering, making up ugly stories, bitching, knit-picking and letting assumptions run riot instead of constructively resolving issues. It's almost a national past-time. *Heck – we see our political leaders doing it every day – so why not?*



9 The Friction of Factions makes it in at 9. Teams fracture into factions that compete with, and undermine, each other. Whether you call it 'them-and-us', 'conflicting priorities', 'territorial disputes' or 'different cultural divides', *the tension factions create corrodes team cohesion.*

8 Team Take-Overs is in eighth-spot. Once you get your faction on-side, you'll want to get your own way no matter what. You'll play inclusion-exclusion games. Use *stand-over* or *stand-off* tactics to ensure others acknowledge how superior, significant or influential you are. Dominate

meetings. Silence dissenting voices. *Why not take-over completely and take on the leader, either head-on or more slowly and deviously.*

7 **Personality-Clashing is a 7.** It's a perennial favourite. Teams love to dismiss conflict and dysfunctional behaviour as a '*personality clash*' – as if it's inevitable, unavoidable and irresolvable. Sure different emotional styles and personality traits may be a challenge to bed-down. *But dominating team-mates who are always at each other, pull down the performance, focus and morale of the whole team, not just them.*



6 **Management Malfunctions comes in at 6.** Whether it's an "*I'm in charge, do what you're told*" style, an entrenched adversarial culture, lack of vision or direction; a team who play's "*blame-the-boss*", or a manager who's oblivious to the emotional life of the team or lacking in empathy and connectivity or appreciation, *stand-offs between teams and leaders are a big failure factor in effective team functioning.*

5 **Fifth is Sharing the Load.** When a team starts to argue over who does more work than who, it's a portent of poisoned relationships. There's often a few who *step back not up* when there's work to be done; who don't pull their weight the way others want. Just as often, some in the team expect everyone else to do exactly what they do. Either way, *lack of shared responsibility and different work ethics can wreak team havoc.*

4 **Temper Control takes 4th place.** People lose it, get hot under the collar, tempers fray, things boil over. There's blow-ups and tensions. It's either retreat or retaliate. Some get abrasive and intimidating. Others sink into sullen silence and passive aggression. Self-management is a central pillar of Emotional Intelligence – and *lack of EI is a major contributor to toxic team stress and tension*

3 **We put Respect and Trust, or rather lack of them, in 3rd spot.** Twin currencies of leadership, they're always near the top of most team lists. Seems some just can't gauge how they come across. They think they're assertive, sticking-up for their point of view. But others see them as abrasive, overbearing, demeaning and disrespectful. Mind you, some '*respect-o-phobics*' are always imagining people disrespect them.

2 **Coming Unstuck is our Number 2.** Yep, it's the 'cohesion' thing, which all us Latin scholars know, means '*sticking together*'. Inability to mesh or meld together cripples teams. Some seem to insist on marking out their territory, doing on their own thing, and too bad if they bring the rest of the team down. Competition for control or conflicting directions kill-off collaboration, another Roman word for "*working together*" – *no way!*

1 **But the Number 1 Team Trip-Up that looms-up larger and more often than many others, is an inability to tackle difficult team moments...**

Every team has friction. People 'cross lines', ignore rules, don't do what they promise, disagree over priorities or behave in ways that upset the rest of the team – and confrontation becomes critical. It's how leaders and teams deal with these moments that make all the difference to morale, climate, cohesion and productivity.

People bump-up against each other. Sometimes it's over workroles, lack of cooperation, sharing work equally – and sometimes, it's more personal issues of attitude, behaviour or even sheer dislike. We call these fault-lines, and admitting we have differences to resolve is the first step in coping constructively

with them. In dysfunctional teams, feuds fester. People don't seem to care if it affects the work, customers, or other team-mates.

The first thing to do to deal with difficult team moments is to understand what goes on in them. That's where our [Tackling Tough Talks](#) and [Dealing with Difficult Discussions](#) clinics can help. If you want help with your team's functionality, have a conversation with me about our tailored [Working Better Together](#) clinics and for a full run-down on our team-building approach, why not take a look at our [Working Better Together Prospectus?](#)

Till Next Time... Cheers!

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