How to Diagnose & Fix Dysfunctional Workplace Culture

CultureWise®

Workplace dysfunction doesn't happen overnight. It often starts when a few people's unproductive attitudes and habits slowly spread to the coworkers around them. If left unchecked, this trend will affect an increasingly larger group of employees. Eventually, the unhealthy environment can derail the entire team and negatively impact the company's bottom line.

Symptoms of a Dysfunctional Team

Business leaders can find it challenging to pinpoint a cause behind a mixture of seemingly unrelated misfires. But there is a common thread in every dysfunctional workplace: weak company culture. An organization's culture is reflected in the behavioral norms displayed by its team members—or how people typically act every day. So when a company's productivity, quality, and service start to slump, it's almost always due in part to deteriorating behaviors.

Below are some of the most common forms of conduct that are red flags for a dysfunctional workplace.

- Gossip
- Territorialism
- Cliques
- Cynicism
- Defensiveness
- Risk aversion
- Hiding mistakes
- Resistance to change
- Passive-aggressiveness
- Withholding information

Outcomes of a Dysfunctional Team

Leaders will begin to see deteriorating results when one or more disruptive behaviors take hold in their organization. Even if many of their people still make an effort to perform, they simply can't do their jobs well when they're submerged in poor workplace culture. Inevitably, a slow trickle of adverse side effects will ensue. These may include:

Reduced accountability.
People will shy away from accountability—taking ownership of their work or collaborative projects.

Lack of focus.
Staff members will find it harder to concentrate on their work and overall goals.

More errors.
Employees will miss details more often, and mistakes will become more commonplace.

Wasted time.
Poor communication will result in confusion, duplicated efforts, and slower output.

Conflict.
Lower standards of behavior inevitably lead to <u>arguments and distrust</u>.

A self-over-team mentality.
Teamwork will suffer as people start to prioritize personal agendas over organizational goals.

Lower morale.
Dysfunctional behaviors and their side effects disintegrate <u>enthusiasm, confidence, and job satisfaction</u>.

The Ultimate Costs of a Dysfunctional Team

The behaviors that cause a steady deterioration of functionality cost money. Even if the slippage is happening so slowly that it's hard to quantify, it adds up drip by drip. Left unchecked, the stream of inefficient actions and negative attitudes can lead to issues that bear a much higher price tag.

These are the four most expensive problems that spring from uncontrolled dysfunction:
1. Project Failure
2. Employee Turnover
3. Failure to Attract Top Talent
4. Customer Dissatisfaction

Project Failure
Workplace dysfunction can be a significant contributor to project failure. For example, many of the behaviors listed above can lead to a breakdown in communication, which significantly contributes to delayed or poorly executed projects. Aside from immediate costs incurred from project failure, long-term financial drains include a decline in a company's reputation and loss of business.

Employee Turnover
The combination of an unpleasant atmosphere and people's inability to perform effectively in a dysfunctional workplace reduces <u>employee engagement.</u> Disengaged workers have little or no commitment to the organization and its goals, affecting how vested they are in their job roles. If their disinterest plummets to unhappiness, they look elsewhere for work—and <u>turnover is one of the costliest problems</u> business leaders face.

COSTS

Failure to Attract Top Talent

Qualified and [talented jobseekers actively research an employer's reputation](). Just as high customer satisfaction positively influences a company's public image, happy and engaged employees signify an exemplary workplace. Unfortunately, the converse is also true—the best candidates will bypass companies with poor reputations. Consequently, such organizations settle for less qualified people, who become continuations of the problem.

Customer Dissatisfaction

Ultimately, dysfunction affects the customer experience. Tensions among employees, poor service, and missed commitments will drive customers away. And studies show that 75 percent of consumers will move on after just one instance of subpar customer service. Of course, even a strong workforce can have occasional dissatisfied customers. But the chance of that happening increases exponentially with a dysfunctional team.

The Remedy for a Dysfunctional Team

The good news is that culture doesn't have to be inert—it can change, and it can improve. Organizations that take measures to inspire healthy behaviors can help dispel the insecurities and mistrust that cause dysfunction.

Leaders can build, enhance, and even transform culture through an intentional process, such as the one developed by CultureWise CEO David J. Friedman. The basis of his methodology is to:

- Identify and define the preferred behaviors that make an organization thrive
- Routinely model, communicate, and teach the behaviors in multiple, impactful ways
- Encourage and assist employees to regularly practice the behaviors until they become second nature

When they define optimum behaviors, leaders create a "common language" that makes behavioral expectations clear to everyone. Then, by exemplifying, coaching, and reinforcing these behaviors, leaders provide their people with the foundation of a thriving work environment. This process gets everyone rowing in the same direction and strengthens team unity.

When leaders intentionally develop a healthy, high-performing culture, it's easier to spot people who aren't aligned with team goals. Employees who don't adhere to their leader's standards will have two options: change their behavior or leave. Departing non-conformers make room for enthusiastic recruits eager to join a vibrant organizational culture.

Working to improve culture should be a continuous process. Over time, behaviors that bring out the best in people will replace the detrimental actions and attitudes that cause workplace dysfunction.

Visit our website to learn more about how CultureWise has helped organizations across North America create a robust workplace culture. And schedule a call with one of our specialists to learn how CultureWise can strengthen your organization.