

DYSFUNCTIONS IN THE TEAM WORK OF AN EXTERNALLY STEERABLE EMPLOYEE IN THE ASPECT OF P. LENCIONI'S THEORY

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Purpose: Teamwork is now one of the primary forms of collaboration in companies. This is particularly true for project-managed companies. The aim of the research was to determine whether the behaviours of a 'E' employee could represent a reinforcement of dysfunction according to P. Lencioni.

Design/methodology/approach: A method for identifying the characteristics of the 'E' employee and their approach to teamwork was presented. These were then contrasted with the dysfunctions according to P. Lencioni.

Findings: The 'E' employee is a potential source of threats to team effectiveness and efficiency. At the same time, when dysfunctions build up in the team, an employee with 'E' traits may exacerbate undesirable behaviours and limit the overcoming of these dysfunctions.

Research limitations/implications: A major limitation of further research is the selection of existing teams and further evaluation of them in terms of the dysfunctions present.

Originality/value: The article is aimed at managers managing teams. It shows how to cope when a team member is a 'E' employee.

Keywords: team work, externally steerable employee, P. Lencioni, personality, dysfunctions.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

In the course of managing organisations, we often wonder where the reasons for differences in performance between seemingly similar companies lie. Existing problems in achieving the assumed results are often due to poor work organisation, weak organisational culture (Tobór-Osadnik, Bluszcz, 2023), poorly selected machinery, material shortages, difficulties in obtaining working capital or implementing sustainable development principles (Chomiak-Orsa, 2023) according to EU requirements (Bluszcz, Manowska, 2020). However, we often overlook

problems related to conflicts between employees, the effectiveness of internal communication or ineffective teamwork. Importantly, different teams achieve different quality and speed in completing tasks (Szwarc, Bzdyra, 2011). Thus, one way to improve business performance may be to rationalise the organisation of forms of work in companies. Often when managing people in an organisation, we need to identify groups and teams well (Ivy, Chabior, 2023). These differences are important in the selection of tasks and motivational tools.

In defining what a group is, it can be assumed that (according to E. Schein, 2016) a group is any number of people who interact (are bound by interactions), are aware of each other and perceive themselves as a group. It also assumes that the group as a whole has a common goal (Jemielniak, Kozminski, 2012). In contrast, according to John Adair (2009), a team involves definable membership, group consciousness, a sense of common purpose, interdependence in achieving the goal, interaction and the ability to act in a unified complementary way (Szczęśniak, 2017). Although the terms group and team are often used interchangeably, there are important differences between them. In a group, members do not have to engage in collective work. Its outcome is the collective work of its members, whereas in a work team there is a positive synergy effect. A team will only be a team and not a group if it considers itself a team, moves in a team direction and has its own team ways of doing things. The most important difference between a team and a group is that in a team, tasks are strictly separated and there are relationships between all members. It follows that in the absence of at least one person, the team loses the ability to continue to operate effectively and has to build relationships and divide tasks from scratch. This phenomenon occurs because each person's potential is carefully analysed and used effectively. This is especially true for project teams (Wach, Chomiak-Orsa, 2022).

In practice, different groups and teams work together, establishing common goals, interdependence and a shared identity or sense of themselves as a group (Hinds, 2015). The effectiveness of groups and teams in an organisation depends on the specificity of different types, as well as forms of power and organisational relationships (Wagoner, 2014). Multicultural and global teams, which are culturally diverse and geographically dispersed, are now common in many global companies (Zoltan, Vancea, 2015). Therefore, managers need to understand the fundamental differences between groups and teams, as well as different research approaches, in order to set realistic goals and achieve expected results (Vancea, 2015).

Teams face a variety of challenges in the workplace that can hinder the development of their skills and approach to teamwork. These challenges include the lack of traditional team structures with hard-to-identify boundaries for activities and fixed composition (Kapritsou, 2022). Those working in teams face difficulties in developing collaborative skills, which can affect their ability to work effectively as a team (Shuffler, Cronin, 2019). Therefore, it is important to focus on purposeful selection of team members, appropriate design and assignment of tasks, functionality of tasks and appropriate evaluation of team performance

(Alcover et al., 2021). By understanding and addressing these challenges, practitioners can increase team effectiveness and improve workplace performance.

Patrick Lencioni, as a result of many years of research, has identified 5 main dysfunctions of work teams (Lencioni, 2016). These can be represented in the form of a pyramid (Figure 1).

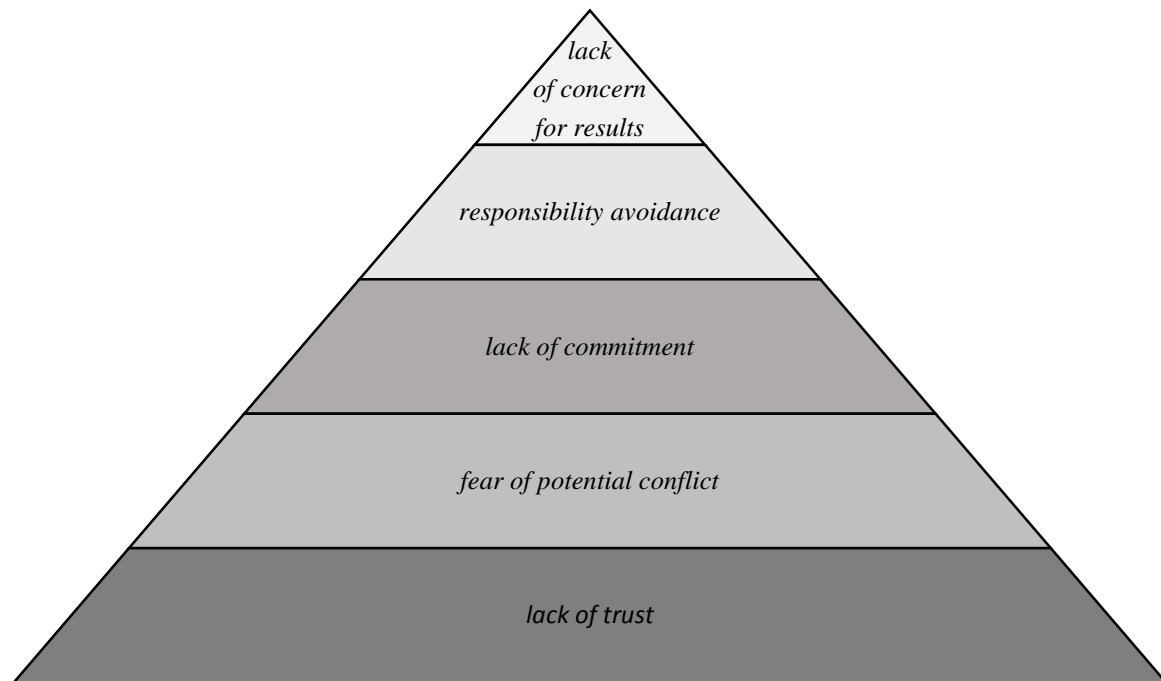


Figure 1. Five dysfunctions in teamwork according to P. Lencioni.

Source: Lencioni, 2016.

The dysfunctional team patterns described by Lencioni can be identified by examining five functional characteristics of teams. These traits include lack of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of responsibility and inattention to results (Aggarwal, 2016). Dysfunctional teams often exhibit these traits, which can lead to reduced productivity and performance. Additionally, the presence of subgroups within a team can also contribute to dysfunction. By examining these characteristics and analysing team dynamics, dysfunctional teams can be identified and steps can be taken to address the underlying issues.

Key signs of dysfunction in a team according to Lencioni include lack of cohesion, low productivity, avoidance of responsibility and lack of trust (Aggarwal, 2023). These dysfunctions can lead to a team becoming dysfunctional to the extent that it needs to be changed or dismantled. Lencioni's model outlines these typical obstacles and provides actionable steps to overcome them and build a cohesive, effective team.

The foundation of the pyramid is a *lack of trust* within the team. Lack of trust makes employees insecure about their position and their actions. They feel a constant fear of showing their weaknesses or shortcomings at work. This causes difficulties in making decisions and expressing their opinions. The manager then misses the chance to get valuable guidance directly from the employees on ongoing projects, tasks and general cooperation.

The result of a lack of trust is the *fear of potential conflict* among team members. Employees are afraid to express their opinions, especially if they differ from other team members. The phenomenon of groupthink then often arises (Moczyłowska, 2006). The team atmosphere restricts the individual from expressing his or her views and prevents him or her from expressing other, perhaps better, solutions to the task at hand. Such actions relegate the individual to a minority position. Team members fear confrontation and avoid commenting when, by contrast, a close-knit team is open to discussion, which is fundamental to its success.

This situation leads to a *lack of commitment*. It results in a lack of emotional commitment to the tasks at hand. Although employees carry out the assigned tasks, their level of commitment is very low.

The next rung of P. Lencioni's pyramid is *responsibility avoidance*. Team members do not see or understand the purpose of their actions, do not motivate each other, and have a reluctance to solve problems that arise and to identify with the stated goals of projects.

As we know, the fate of the company often depends on the results of the projects performed. Therefore, at the top of the pyramid is a lack of concern for results. Thus, any team member who is not interested in the results and is driven by their own interests worsens the performance of the team and the company. Lack of care for the workflow results in poor performance or even failure.

Forming a pyramid structure, these dysfunctions show that a lack of trust forms the foundation and that increasing dysfunctions lead to a lack of attention to performance, which is at the top (Pane et al., 2018). The model suggests that teams need to address each dysfunction in order to build a cohesive and effective team. Lencioni's pyramid is widely used in research and practice to understand and improve team dynamics (Pipkin et al., 2016).

The distinguished five dysfunctions of teamwork according to P. Lencioni indicate certain behaviours of team members that can be exacerbated by the 'E' (Enslave) employee described by K. Tobór-Osadnik (2012, 2017). This employee was identified in 3 dimensions - behavioural traits (Figure 2):

- 'E' – Enslaving (the employee does not have to be responsible for anything because the 'authority' is responsible; he does not have to be creative, entrepreneurial),
- 'S' – Suffering (a daily sense of harm and oppression, a total justification for inactivity),
- 'G' – eGoism (the employee is driven by his or her own narrow interests, incapable of thinking in terms of the common good).

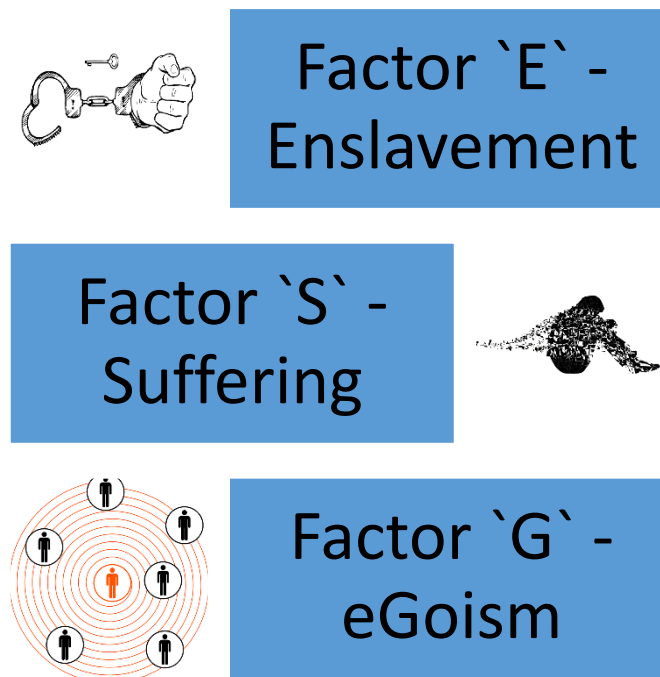


Figure 2. Characteristics of a 'E' employee.

Source: Tobór-Osadnik (2012, 2017).

The authors asked themselves whether the attitude represented by the 'E' employee poses a threat to the work of the team and whether these declared behaviours could, according to the authors, constitute an amplification of dysfunction according to P. Lencioni.

2. Methodology

Employees from a Polish mining company were taken as the research group for identifying the attitudes of 'E' employees. A questionnaire was constructed for the study, including 17 questions identifying the 'E' employee and questions describing declared teamwork behaviour.

Selecting an appropriate sample size was an important issue of the survey. To determine the minimum sample size, random selection was used on the basis of a predetermined level of precision, as described by the mathematical relationship (1):

$$n = \frac{\hat{s}^2 \cdot t_{\alpha}^2}{e^2} \quad (1)$$

where:

\hat{s}^2 – variation,

t_{α}^2 – value of the t-student distribution for the confidence level $1-\alpha$,

e^2 – maximum estimation error.

Among the random simple sampling techniques, a number of direct and unconstrained sampling methods are used. In order to identify the behaviour of a 'E' employee towards teamwork, random sampling of employees from the time recording system was used. This consisted of replacing individual units with numbers, which, by means of a random algorithm, were selected for the questionnaire survey in compliance with all probability rules. The sample thus selected has all the characteristics of a representative sample.

When determining the minimum sample size, the confidence level $1-\alpha$ and the maximum, i.e. acceptable, estimation error e must also be determined in advance. In the study carried out, it was assumed that 95% of the result obtained did not deviate from the actual value, requiring a significance level value of $\alpha = 10\%$, as a result of which the maximum estimation error could also be 10% (the value t_α was read from the Student's t-distribution tables for level $1 - \frac{\alpha}{2}$, as there is a two-sided critical area). Relationship (1) therefore takes the following form:

$$n = \frac{2,3897^2 - 1,9609^2}{0,1^2} = 186 \quad (2)$$

It can therefore be assumed from relation (2) that the sample will be representative at 186 ± 18 correctly completed questionnaires. The employees who took part in the survey were diverse in terms of age, length of service, education and position held. A total of 218 correctly completed questionnaires were collected and this value was entered into further statistical analyses.

Equation 3 (Stanislawek, 2010) was used to determine the number of compartments analysed.

$$k = 1 + 3,3 \cdot \log_{10} n, \quad (3)$$

where k determines the number of compartments and n the size of the test sample.

$$1 + 3,3 \cdot \log_{10} 218 = 6.6 \quad (4)$$

Seven ranges were adopted for further calculations. The range of values for the adopted chapters was determined by relation 5 (Starzyńska, 2009):

$$h = \frac{x_{\max} - x_{\min}}{k}, \quad (5)$$

where h – range of intervals.

Within the 7 compartments identified, the following ranges were highlighted for further study:

- no traits,
- weak traits,
- weak traits,
- medium level of traits,
- noticeable traits,
- high intensity of traits,
- strong level of traits.

In order to identify employee attitudes, a comparison of the responses obtained to an assumed pattern (pattern = no 'E' employee characteristics) was used. The resulting variation in the observed values was called dispersion and a distance measure was adopted for further analysis, which illustrated that the greater the value of this dispersion, the more the values of individual observations deviate from the expected value - the pattern (Aczel, Sounderpandian, 2017).

Thus, in order to illustrate the dispersion of employee attitudes in relation to a pattern, the Mahalanobis distance was used, which is referred to as the distance between two points in an n-dimensional space that differentiates the contribution of individual components and uses correlations between them (Kukułka, 2010). It is used in statistics to determine similarities between an unknown random vector and a vector from a known set - a pattern. Distance calculations were implemented and performed with the Matlab programme 7.1.

The research methodology developed and the author's programme written enabled the research to be carried out and to identify employees with varying degrees of 'E' traits (Figure 3).

Next, the respondents' attitudes towards teamwork and their role in the work team were examined, divided into employees with 'E' traits and employees not displaying such traits. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, in addition to the trait-identifying questions (E, S, G), the questionnaire also included 4 questions on the employee's attitude towards teamwork:

- Are you interested in the work quality of a team you are working in or mainly your own work quality?
- When your team is praised for a good job, do you feel proud of the team's achievements or your own?
- When the team in which you work has poor results, is it embarrassing you because of your own poor work or is it the fault of the team?

Do you think teamwork or your own work is more important?

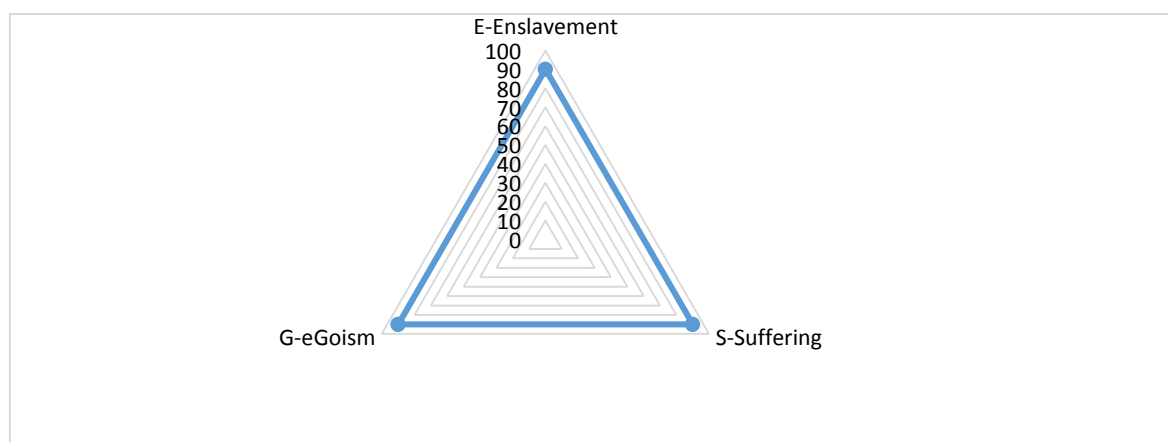


Figure 3. Graphical representation of the strength of 'E' traits [% response rate].

Source: own study.

It should be noted that the results of the answers to the latter questions did not affect the ranking of the respondents in the ranges of variability of the intensity of the 'E' traits. In this way, the attitudes of the respondents towards teamwork were determined in the respective ranges of variability: from an employee not showing 'E' traits to an employee with 'E' traits.

3. Results of research

After collecting all the well-filled questionnaires, the respondents were ordered according to their distance from the pattern. Figure 4 presents the percentage distribution of employees according to distance from the benchmark (no 'E' characteristics to strong 'E' characteristics). For the surveyed group of employees, no one fully met the characteristics of an employee without 'E' traits and with full 'E' traits. Importantly, this group is dominated by employees with weak and medium severity of traits (range 3 and 4). For the analysis of the respondents' declared teamwork behaviour, a comparison of the two groups (range 2+3) and (range 4+5) was adopted.

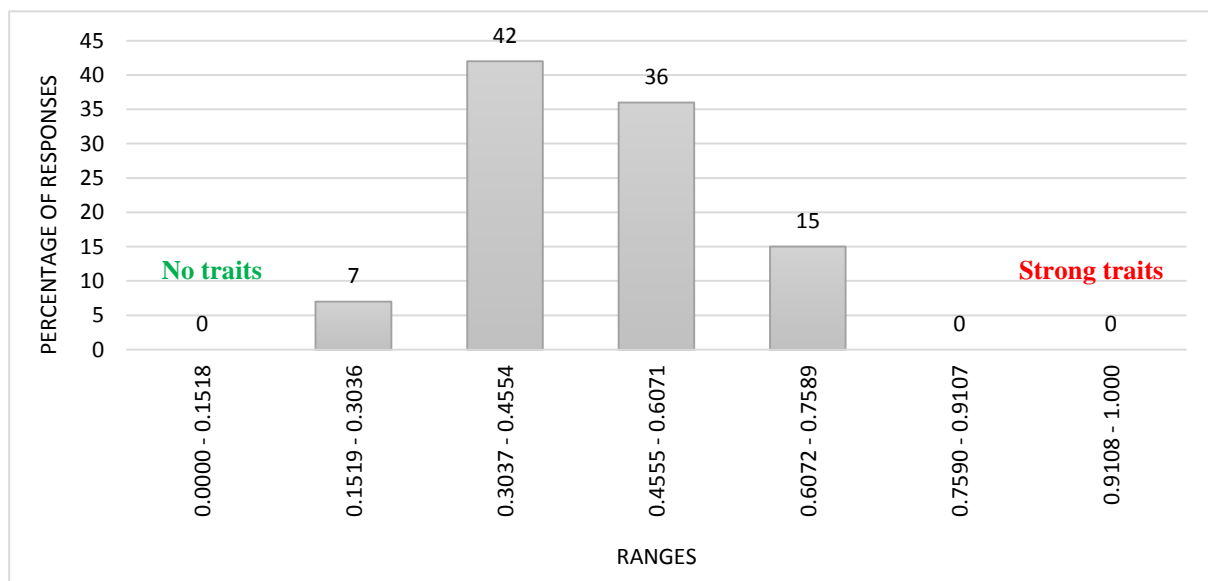


Figure 4. Percentage distribution of workers according to distance from the pattern (no 'E' features to strong 'E' traits).

Source: own study.

Figure 5 shows a radar chart of the severity of the E, S, G traits latent in the various 17 questions of the survey questionnaire for the group in band 5, which represents 15% of the respondents. These employees mostly exhibit traits E and S. Trait G is present, but in lower intensity.

Next, responses about attitudes to teamwork were analysed in groups with weak 'E' and strong 'E' characteristics. The results of the comparison are presented in Fig.6-9. As can be seen, there is a visible difference in the responses in this division of respondents.

To the question - Are you interested in the quality of the team in which you work or primarily in the quality of your own work? (Figure 6) respondents with weak 'E' characteristics answered that the quality of the team's work was important to them, while those with strong 'E' characteristics mostly indicated that they were interested in the quality of their work.

Then to the question - When your team is praised for good work do you feel pride in the team's achievements or in your own? respondents in the first group answered unanimously that they are proud of the team's achievements (Figures 7). On the other hand, in the ranges where employees show 'E' characteristics, the predominant answer was that they are proud of their own achievements.

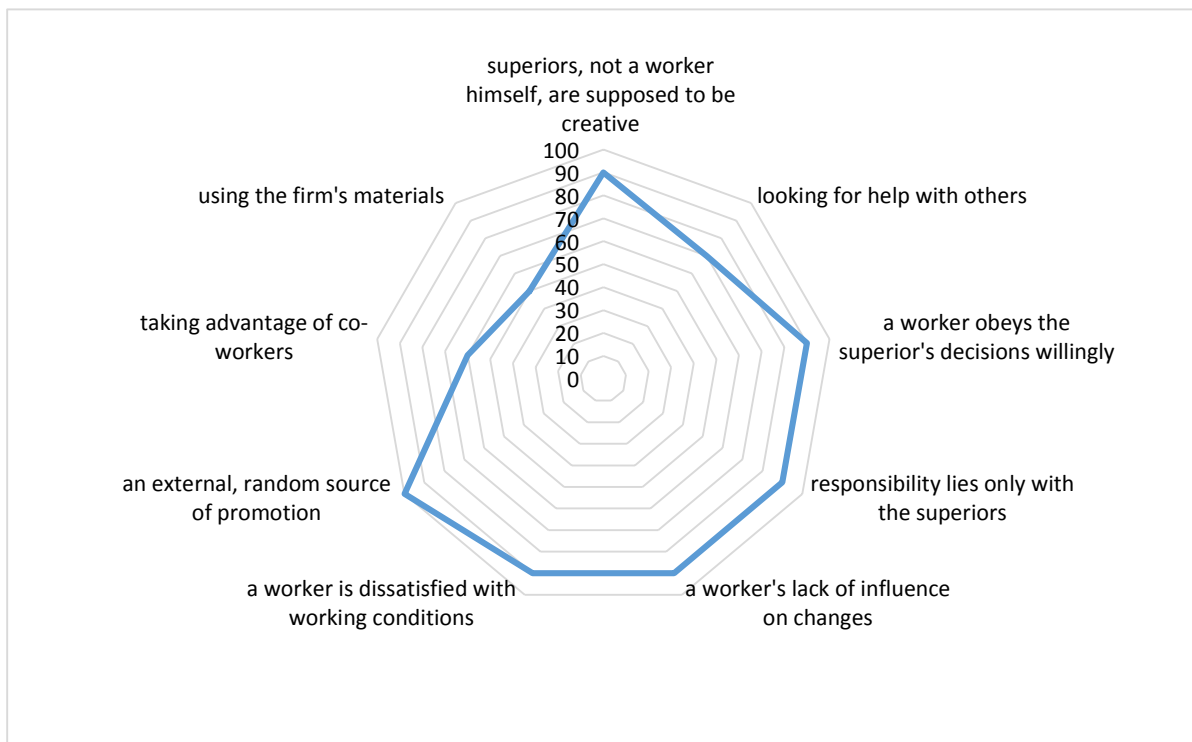


Figure 5. Employee with dominant 'E' trait (range 5) – results of the analysis [% response rate].

Source: own study.

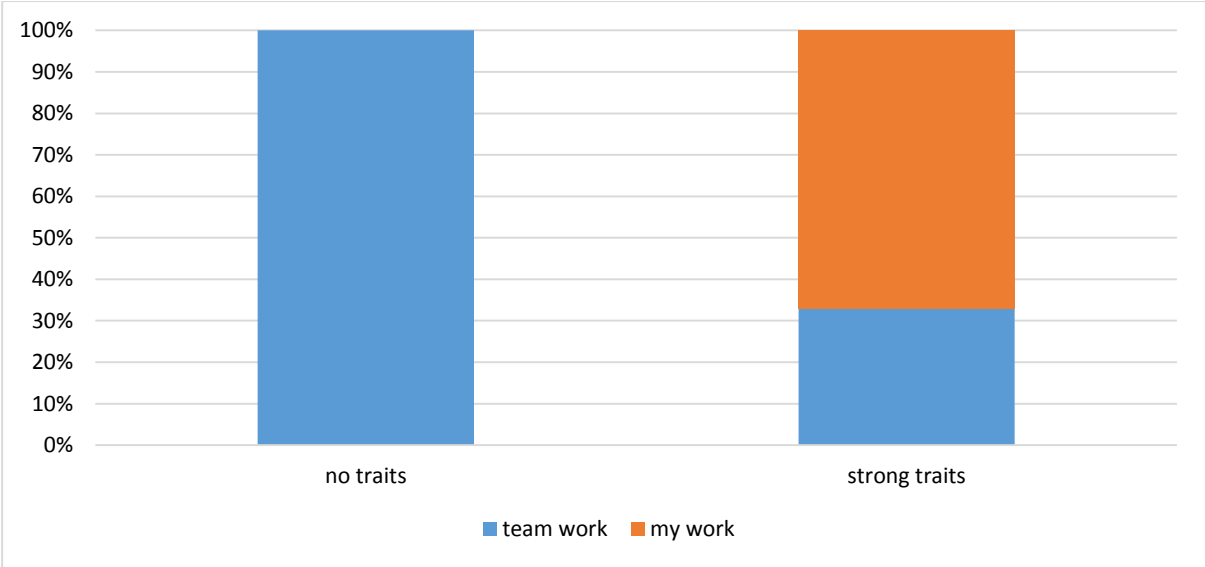


Figure 6. Are you interested in the work quality of a team you are working in or mainly your own work quality?

Source: own study.

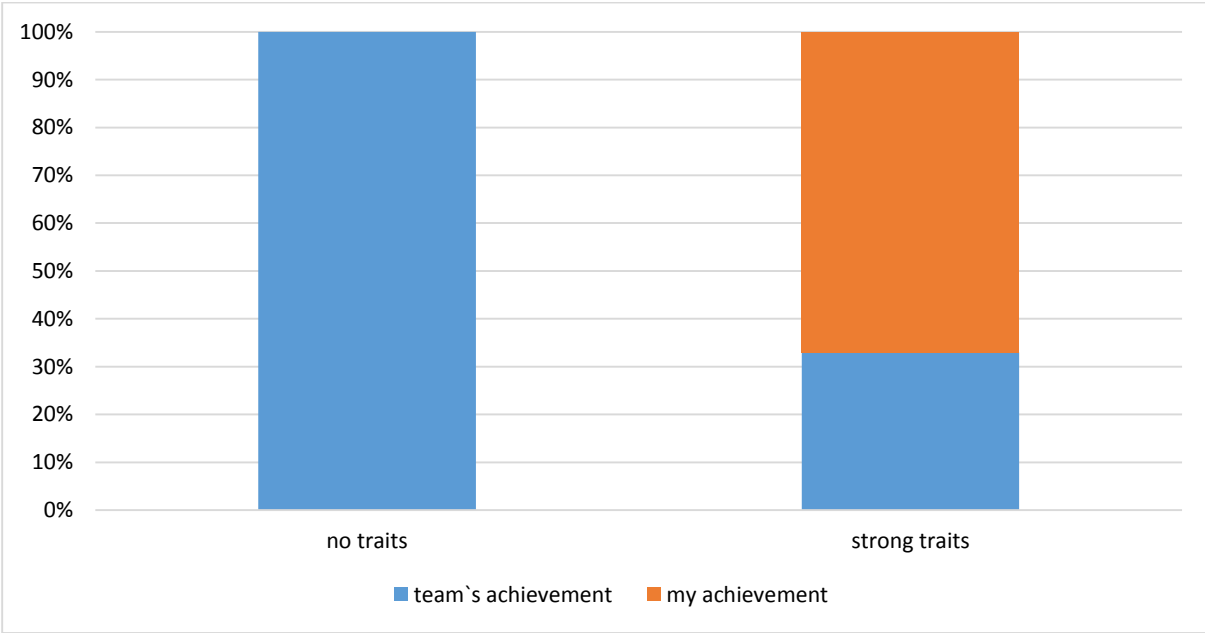


Figure 7. When your team is praised for a good job, do you feel proud of the team's achievements or your own?

Source: own study.

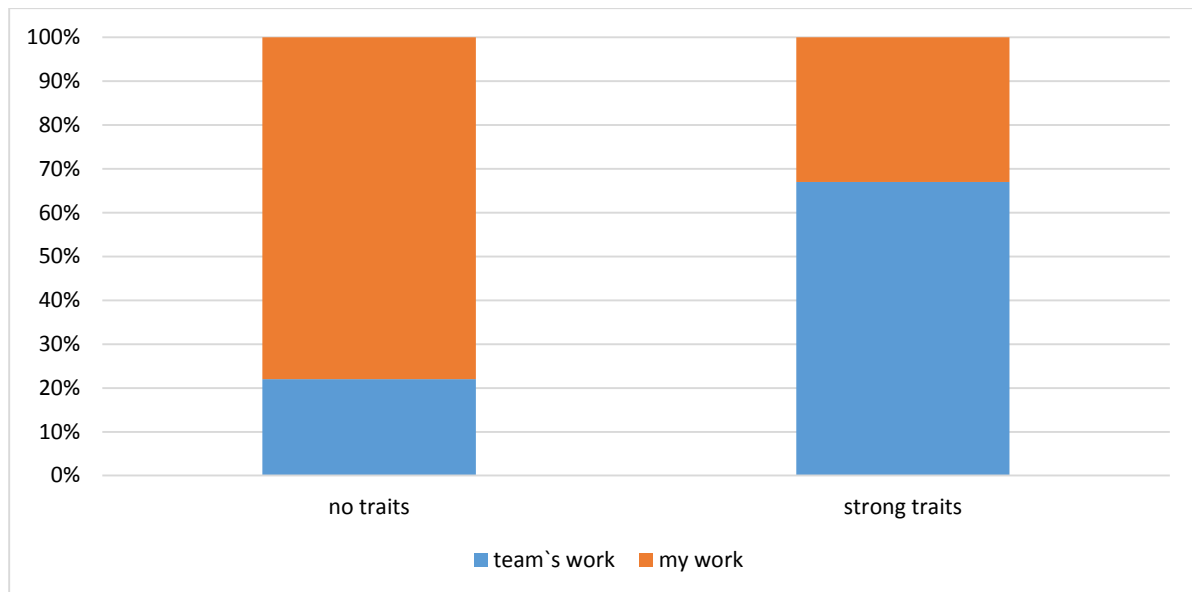


Figure 8. When the team in which you work has poor results, is it embarrassing you because of your own poor work or is it the fault of the team?

Source: own study.

Question 3 was a sensitive question because of the possibility that the answer might be implied: When the team in which you work performs poorly, does this make you uncomfortable because of your own poor performance or is it the team's fault? (Figure 8). Respondents assigned to the range of poor 'E' characteristics answered mostly that it was because of their own work, while respondents with 'E' characteristics indicated that the team was to blame. The results of the responses to this question support the conclusion that the 'E' employee looks for the fault of their failures in external factors.

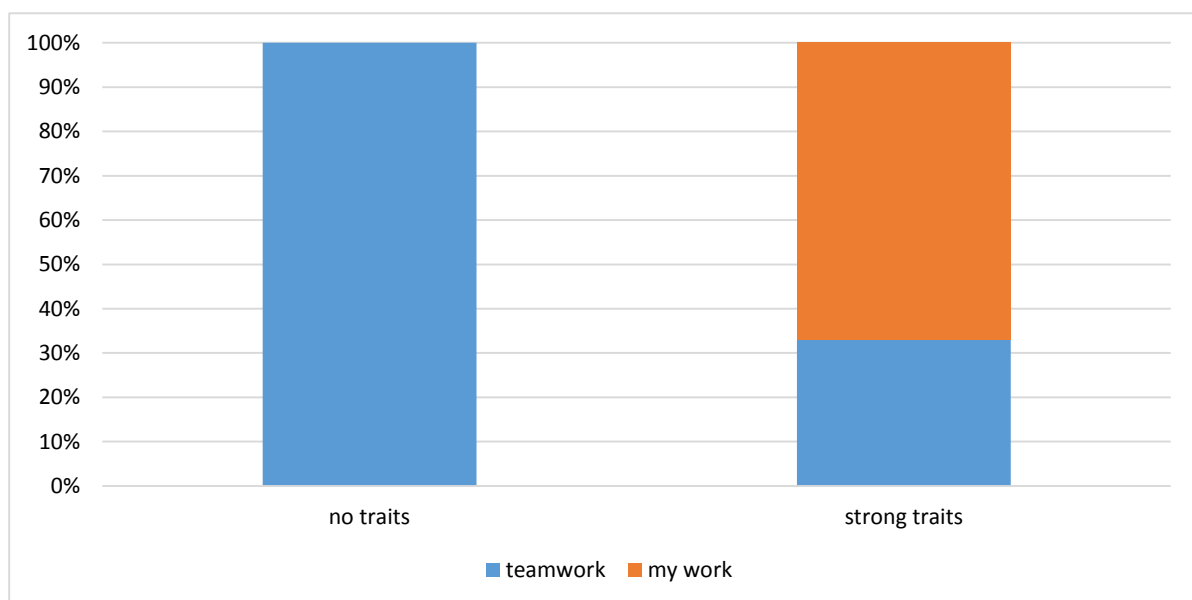


Figure 9. Do you think teamwork or your own work is more important?

Source: own study.

Figure 9 presents the results of the answers to the question: In your opinion, are team achievements or your own achievements at work more important? Respondents in the weak traits 'E' bracket answered that, in their opinion, team achievements are more important. In contrast, respondents in the strong 'E' traits bracket mostly indicated the answer that their own achievements were more important.

After analysing Figures 6-9, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the employees included in the group characterised by the characteristics of a 'E' employee show a markedly different perception of themselves in the work of the team. The performance of the team in which they work, its achievements are less important than their individual work and, at the same time, the team is responsible for failures at work.

4. Conclusions

By comparing the results of the responses presented in Figure 5, then juxtaposing Figures 6-9, and superimposing these responses on the pyramid of dysfunctions according to P. Lencioni, it is possible to formulate conclusions on how a E-type employee can influence the deepening of team dysfunctions at particular levels of their build-up.

Figure 10 presents the proposed model for linking the 5 dysfunctions of teamwork according to P. Lencionei with the influence of type 'E' traits on an employee's teamwork behaviour. As research has shown, such an employee is a potential source of threats to team effectiveness and efficiency. At the same time, in a situation where dysfunctions build up in the team, an employee with 'E' traits may exacerbate undesirable behaviours and limit the overcoming of these dysfunctions. Individual traits such as Suffering, Egoism and Slavery, on the one hand, hinder the work of the team, but such a high tendency towards extraversion allows managers to influence the behaviour of such employees more easily. This only requires the right choice of forms of motivation.

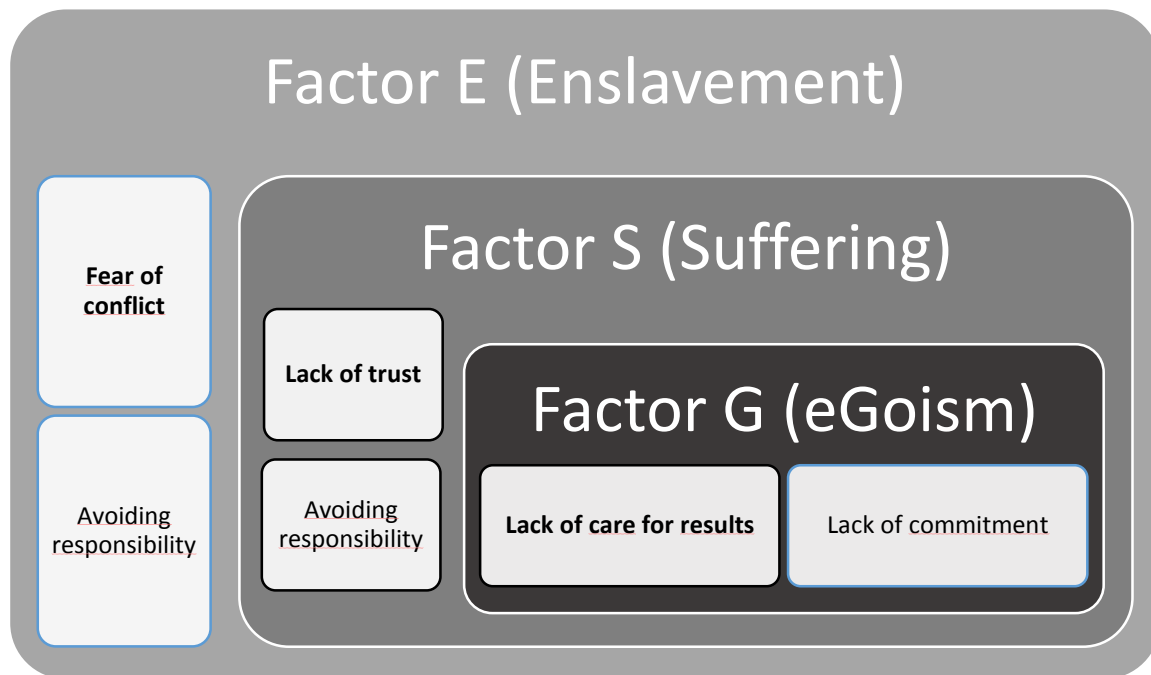


Figure 10. Correlation of 'E' employee characteristics with teamwork dysfunctions according to P. Lencioni.

Source: own study.

Therefore, overcoming dysfunction is the manager's task. Their aim should be to build trust within the team on a basic emotional level. This will make the fear of conflict disappear. Employees are willing and able to engage in discussions, openly sharing their views without disagreeing with the opinions of others. This relegates the 'E' employee to a minority role. Because each individual takes responsibility for his or her own behaviour and that of other team members, the social vanity to which the 'E' employee is prone is reduced. The team is performance- and goal-oriented. Therefore, it will naturally force the 'E' employee to conform or leave the team. Of course, if this is organisationally possible. It should be noted that, according to the authors, the greatest danger is when it is the team leader who exhibits the 'E' traits. Then the appearance of the discussed dysfunctions is very likely. In summary, the extroversion of 'E'-type employees requires strong motivational skills on the part of managers.

Acknowledgements

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