

# Towards a Seamless Transition to Virtual Teams

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*Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology.*

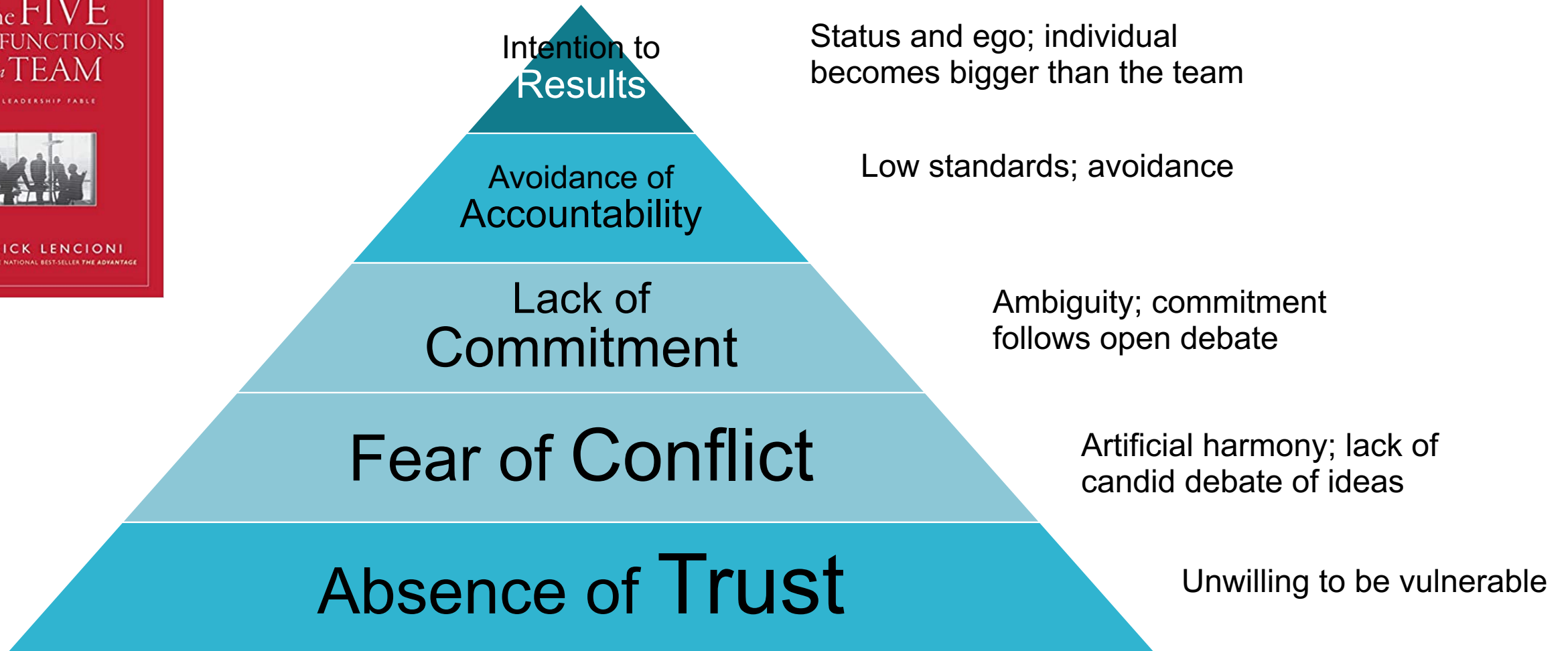
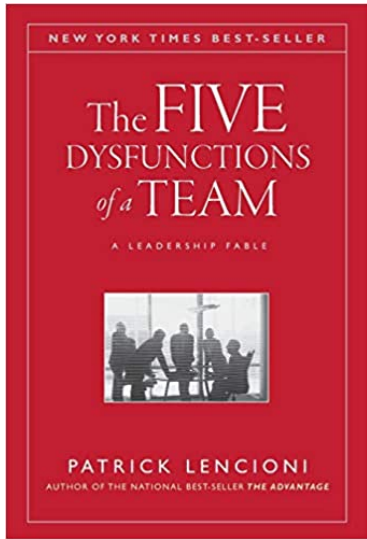
*It is **teamwork** that remains the **ultimate competitive advantage**,  
both because it is so **powerful** and so **rare**.*

- Patrick Lencioni, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

# Challenges

- An abrupt transition from **ad-hoc** remote work to **full-time** remote work
- Unexpected and unusual challenges due to **connectivity** issues, caring for **children** and **health**
- Response to **isolation** has been diverse, especially for foreign nationals
- Lack of an **ergonomic** workplace at home
- Rapidly **evolving** situation with lot of **confusion** and anxiety
- Excessive **meetings** across all levels of the management hierarchy (was essential)
- Missed deadlines and project goals

# A Model: Five Dysfunctions of a Team



*That which has **form** is **not real**; only the **amorphous** endures.*

*When you understand this, you will **not** return to **illusion**.*

- Ashtavakra Gita

Source: K. Pingali, "Towards a science of parallel programming," *2010 19th International Conference on Parallel Architectures and Compilation Techniques (PACT)*, Vienna, 2010, pp. 3-4.

# Getting the basics right

- Overcoming **ergonomic** challenges
  - Proper workspace: Noise, lighting, air conditioning, etc.
  - Basic **ergonomics**: Desks, chairs, monitors, keyboards, etc.
- Regular **routines**
  - **Blurring** of the line between work and personal time
  - Disruption of **routine**
  - **Vacations** have become fewer and harder
- Addressing **legal** aspects
  - **Classified**/sensitive work
  - **Immigration** challenges
  - Student **internships**
  - **Experimental** work

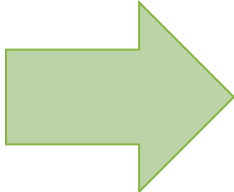
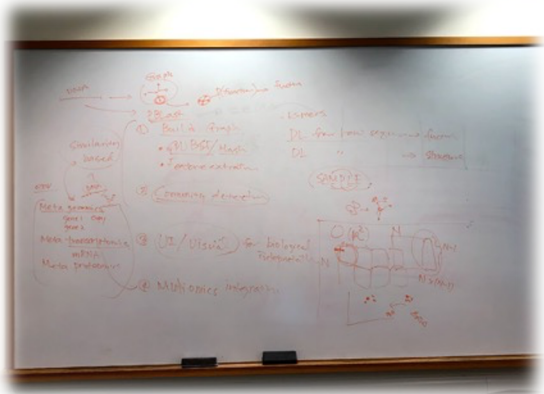


# Getting into the details

- **Collaboration** tools
  - Basic needs: Reliable, usable, secure, scalable
  - An explosion in the number of tools
  - Sharing of **information** is an independent task (**trust**)
- **Communication** challenges
  - **Non-verbal** (body language) communication is mostly absent
  - **Availability** is different for many people
  - **Video**: Challenging due to personal preferences and bandwidth issues
  - Informal **watercooler** moments are hard to replace
- **Recruitment**
  - Significant challenges/delays; **travel** restrictions
  - Also a **blessing** in disguise if we embrace **remote** workers



# Brainstorming: From physical to virtual



<https://www.mural.co/>

Enable a dialogue where everybody is heard

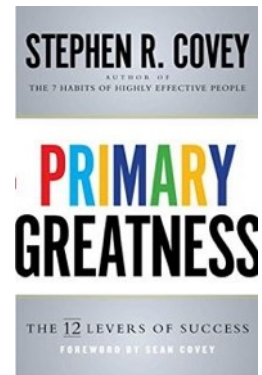
# Rules of Engagement (Innovation Foundry @ PNNL)

- Stay with the discussion
- Question each other in a **constructive respectful** way
- Build on each other's ideas
- Think broadly with Lab-level focus
- Be visual and have Fun!



# Clarity of work

- **Goals** and roles
  - Clearly defined **goals** for the team are essential
  - Well defined **roles** and timelines are essential
- **Team size**
  - Small to medium sized teams work well
  - Enable greater interactions across the team
- **Team composition**
  - **Complementary** skills
- **Leadership & culture**
  - **Trust** and **openness** are essential
  - 12 Levers: **Integrity**, Contribution, Priority, **Sacrifice**, Responsibility, Loyalty, Reciprocity, Diversity, Learning, Renewal, **Teaching/Coaching**



# Recap



# Unforeseen benefits

- **Greater productivity**
  - Significant increase in the number of **technical articles**
  - Significant increase in the number of **new projects**
  - Higher **productivity** for software engineers
  - **Transition** between meetings
  - Elimination/Minimized time to **commute**
- **Leveling** of the playing field
  - A few remote members were often **ignored** on conference calls
  - Adverse impact for some: E.g., lack of **childcare**
- Closer **interactions** and greater **tolerance**
- Opportunities for **learning** (e.g., soft skills, programming skills)



# Concluding thoughts

- An opportunity for organizations to demonstrate that they **care**
- Demonstrated that work from home is a **viable** option
- Regular and frequent **communication** is **essential**
- **Hybrid** virtual-physical modes might become common
- **Kindness & charity**: Find a cause and be a champion
- An opportunity to explore **nature**
  
- *Be resilient, this is far from over...*



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<https://www.exascaleproject.org/strategies-for-working-remotely/>