

Identification and Remediation of Barriers and Silos Impacting Hybrid Group Performance: A Lencioni Perspective

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[Abstract] Traditional group formation is a well-understood practice with many well-established theories to guide one's understanding of the process. With the increase in hybrid work arrangements across the industry, many have struggled to find solutions for creating high-performing groups. This qualitative study aimed to identify barriers managers face in building high-performing hybrid groups and examine mechanisms to break down silos that negatively impact the quality of outcomes from the hybrid groups they manage. Additional insight has been gained by exploring group members' sense of inclusion and how hybrid work has affected their performance compared to entirely onsite work. Results from the semi-structured interviews were processed using open, axial, and selective coding to identify and explore emergent themes. Several thematic findings suggested that hybrid groups experience many of the same issues and respond to the same mechanisms as in-person groups, suggesting that traditional group formation and management theories are effective at diagnosing and resolving these issues.

[Keywords] Hybrid work, WFH, work from home, group formation, Lencioni, Tuckman, Maslow

Introduction

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which reached a critical stage in March 2020 in the United States, organizations took proactive measures by swiftly adopting a work-from-home hybrid model to curb the spread of the virus (Suri & Bajpai, 2023). The concept of remote work was not new, dating back to 1972 when teleworking was promoted to ease traffic congestion and encourage environmental conservation (Nilles, 1976). The proliferation of advanced information and communication technologies facilitated relatively seamless transitions for many organizations, yet the challenges of building and sustaining high-performing groups in distributed environments have proven considerably more complex than initially anticipated (Adisa et al., 2023; Rañeses et al., 2022).

Group development has become well understood since the publication of Tuckman's stages of group development. In the research, five stages were identified as necessary for group formation: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman, 1965). Contemporary research suggests that hybrid groups follow a similar formation sequence as traditional in-person groups, with many of the same traits observed (Wheelan et al., 2025). While hybrid and virtual collaboration arrangements have long enabled innovation among geographically dispersed experts (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021), the pandemic transformed these optional configurations into mandatory operational frameworks, exposing limitations in existing management approaches and revealing critical gaps in leadership preparedness for distributed team management. In recent years, fueled first by a global pandemic, hybrid groups have become a mandatory working environment.

During the pandemic, these groups gained more acceptance in business. Unfortunately, building and maintaining high-performing hybrid groups has proved problematic (Adisa et al., 2023; Rañeses et al., 2022). With adaptability and resilience, managers must learn to recognize and address issues in their hybrid groups' performance stages, ensuring their smooth functioning.

This study addresses the pressing need for empirically grounded guidance on hybrid group management by examining barriers to high-performing team development and identifying effective remediation mechanisms. The research synthesizes established theoretical frameworks with qualitative interview data to contribute actionable insights for organizational leaders navigating the complexities of contemporary hybrid work environments.

Purpose of the Study

This general qualitative study intends to identify barriers managers face in building high-performing hybrid groups and examine mechanisms to break down silos that negatively impact the quality of outcomes from the hybrid groups they manage. Additional insight will be gained by exploring group members' sense of inclusion and how hybrid work has affected their performance compared to entirely onsite work. Hybrid work has emerged as the new normal for many businesses and will likely continue to exist. Since the advent of the new standard, many managers are faced with the challenge of how to solve issues that resulted from increased isolation, deterioration of social skills, and problems arising from poor integration into organizational groups and silos. This study posits that hybrid groups operate similarly throughout various organizations.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation for this investigation draws upon three complementary frameworks: Lencioni's (2002) Five Dysfunctions of a Team model, Tuckman's (1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) stages of group development, and Maslow's (2013) hierarchy of needs. These frameworks provide complementary lenses for understanding group dynamics, developmental progression, and fundamental human motivational requirements within organizational contexts.

Clarification of Terms

The literature employs the terms "group" and "team" interchangeably, necessitating conceptual clarification. Groups are defined as "two or more people interacting (i.e., responding to or having the capacity to influence each other's behavior) for the purpose of accomplishing some goal" (Kerr, 1979). Teams represent a specialized subset: small groups of individuals with compatible skills who share common purpose, approach, and goals for which they maintain mutual accountability (Aggarwal, 2023; Lencioni, 2002; Smith & Katzenbach, 2015; Tuckman, 1965). The substantial conceptual overlap between these constructs supports their interchangeable application within the theoretical frameworks guiding this investigation.

Lencioni Model

For this study, the Lencioni Model of the Five Dysfunctions of a Team, is used as an instrument for exploring limiting behaviors and mechanisms for suggesting applicable solutions for dysfunctions that occur in Tuckman's stages of group development and impact hybrid group performance (Lencioni, 2002; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). This model explores the five dysfunctions of business groups or teams: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. Although originally developed to address

face-to-face group challenges, researchers have documented the applicability of these constructs to hybrid group contexts (Adisa et al., 2023; Aggarwal, 2023; Godinez, 2023; Rañeses et al., 2022; Suri & Bajpai, 2023; Susilo, 2020). An early and fundamental thrust of the Lencioni work pivots on the concept of conflict, the lack of psychological safety, or the perception of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in the context of environments such as the workplace (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Lencioni, 2002). These researchers offer compelling evidence to support Bradley et al.'s (Bradley et al., 2015) assertion that "Most people consider interpersonal conflict unpleasant and uncomfortable. Yet such conflict, especially when it occurs in work groups, can lead to superior performance" (p. 243). Researchers have noted that this fear of conflict is prevalent within the study data collected since the pandemic-driven widespread adoption of hybrid work environments (Putri & Amran, 2021; Rañeses et al., 2022; Susilo, 2020). This study will evaluate the effects of Lencioni's model within hybrid groups on Tuckman's stages of group development and on group performance (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

Review of Lencioni Model

The primary concept of the Lencioni model is that every group can suffer from one or more limiting factors in group formation or performance (Lencioni, 2002). With the rise of hybrid work, building and sustaining high-performing hybrid groups has proven just as problematic as face-to-face groups (Adisa et al., 2023; Rañeses et al., 2022). Researchers have noted that constructs used with Lencioni's approach provide mechanisms for understanding and remediating many of these same issues as they occur in hybrid groups (Choudhury et al., 2023; Godinez, 2023; Hamlin, 2008). The Lencioni model is built upon fundamental constructs, sometimes called dysfunctions in the model, as they apply to group cohesion and performance.

Absence of Trust

Trust is the fundamental base of any cohesive, functional group, face-to-face or hybrid. Trust is the confidence that group members operate in good faith towards the group's mission and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group (Lencioni, 2002). Inadequate group socialization may cause an absence of trust, leading to issues during Tuckman's forming and norming stages (Godinez, 2023; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

Fear of Conflict

All relationships require constructive conflict to grow and perform (Lencioni, 2002). In a remote environment, group members lacking appropriate socialization often fear any group or personal conflict (Godinez, 2023). Research has shown that avoiding conflict and the reluctance to discuss controversial topics and share perspectives or ideas will lead to lower-performing groups overall (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Lack of Commitment

In the context of groups, commitment is comprised of clarity and buy-in (Lencioni, 2002). Groups must make clear and timely decisions, and members must unite to see the decisions through to completion, even if one voted against them. Suppose management and coworkers feel their ideas and opinions are not valued. In that case, they can become detached and resentful and fail to commit to the group's shared goals, impacting Tuckman's performing stage of group development (Lencioni, 2002; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

Avoidance of Accountability

Group members must be willing to call their peers on behaviors or performances that hurt the group's objectives (Lencioni, 2002). When management and coworkers avoid accountability for shared goals or commitments, it directly impacts Tuckman's performing stage of group development (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). This often occurs when adequate group socialization fails to occur during the storming, forming, and norming stages of group development with hybrid group members (Godinez, 2023; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

Task Processes

The task processes of hybrid groups are critical in developing alignment between tasks and communication and their impact on the group (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021; Lencioni, 2002). They allow the establishment of suitable communication styles, group coordination, and task-technology fit to allow the group to accomplish the collective goals of the group (Lencioni, 2002). Through comprehensive and thorough alignment of the task processes of hybrid groups, researchers find success in accomplishing Tuckman's performing stage of group development (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021; Hamlin, 2008; Nilles, 1976).

Psychological Safety and Conflict Dynamics

The Socio-Emotional processes function within the Lencioni model as a catch-all process to invoke and build group trust and communication. This process fulfills the Belonging-Needs necessary to allow relationship building, group cohesion, and trust building, which is vital to the Lencioni model's success (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021; Lencioni, 2002). It provides researchers with additional levels of behavior and understanding by which the Lencioni model can influence hybrid group development and performance (Choudhury et al., 2023; Garro-Abarca et al., 2021; Godinez, 2023; Hamlin, 2008). Social belonging, as outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, provides the foundation for this process (Maslow, 2013).

Methods

This study uses data gathered under IRB approval from semi-structured qualitative interviews of six participants. The modest sample size, constrained by study timeframe, limits generalizability of findings. The criterion for participants included at least four participants who have managed hybrid groups for at least one year, and two additional general staff members of hybrid groups. Semi-structured interviews allowed systematic exploration of predetermined topics while accommodating emergent directions. The population demographics are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Study Participant Population Demographics

Study Participants	Manager	Staff	Technology	Construction	Consulting	Social Services
Participant 1	x		x			
Participant 2		x			x	
Participant 3	x					x
Participant 4		x	x			
Participant 5	x		x			
Participant 6	x			x		

Note. The study population was sourced from LinkedIn, subreddit, and Facebook public posts.

The interviews were analyzed by applying an open coding process (Williams & Moser, 2019) to identify general themes. Then, axial analysis (Williams & Moser, 2019) classifies these generalities into specific codes. Next, the researcher identifies similar concepts using selective coding, thus reducing the number of codes to more than six inferential themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). Lastly, the inferential themes with the most responses become the major themes of this study, while the other three serve as supporting minor themes, representing limitations, barriers, and remediating influences in hybrid teams.

Results

The interview process conducted in this general qualitative study established a foundational basis from which major and minor themes relevant to the study's purpose have been revealed. The primary and secondary interview questions were used to support the research questions and guide the study. The researcher employed a Grounded Theory coding process using deductive and inductive approaches that optimized data analysis to ensure a means to "maximize analytic acuity and enable precise thematic categorization" (Williams & Moser, 2019). The outcome of this approach, depicted in Table 2, identified three major themes, each supported by a series of minor themes.

Table 2

Major and Minor Study Themes

Case Study Themes	Theme Names	Research Question	Interviewee Total Sample
Major Theme 1	Leadership	1 & 2	100%
Major Theme 2	Information Reliability	1 & 2 & 3	100%
Major Theme 3	Visibility	1 & 2 & 3	100%
Minor Theme 1	Organizational Job Refinement	1 & 2	66%
Minor Theme 2	Availability	2 & 3	66%
Minor Theme 3	Honesty & Transparency	1 & 3	66%

Note. This table outlines the major and minor themes from interviews and maps to the research questions.

Major Theme: Leadership

Throughout the interview process, the researcher gathered responses from participants on the barriers, limitations, and silos that may impact hybrid group formation and performance, as well as paths to remediation of these issues. All six participants interviewed communicated the strong belief that leadership was a critical factor in hybrid group formation and performance. All participants inferred that the primary barrier to building functioning and performing hybrid groups is the need for leadership knowledge to address challenges in the hybrid work model. Interview participants felt that leadership was not aligned to support and ill-prepared to communicate effectively in a non-judgmental manner with hybrid teams.

Major Theme: Information Reliability

The theme of information reliability emerged as a factor in the formation of hybrid work groups and played a role in not only barriers within hybrid groups but also proved to be a factor in remediating group challenges. The six study participants felt that information reliability in metrics, job expectations, and the richness of employee interactions was critical in establishing well-performing hybrid groups. The participants stressed the importance of team metrics as being fundamental to success and identity, creating a policy and procedures that guide the conduct of remote meetings to reinforce best practices.

Major Theme: Visibility

All study participants expressed a recurring theme of visibility throughout the study interviews. Visibility is defined within this context as a means of improving communication, providing a sense of inclusion and alignment, and increasing tacit hybrid communication within hybrid groups. By their very nature of being a distributed group, hybrid groups suffer from visibility problems that impact both leadership and staff. Management had to redefine processes to better define outcome expectations. Because groups did not know how to interact in hybrid environments, processes were integrated into the onboarding process, to explain not only the way to respond on screen but also why the interactions need to take place.

Minor Theme: Organizational Job Refinement

Organizational job refinement was a prevailing minor theme throughout the interview sessions, with 66% of participants stressing the need to redefine jobs within a hybrid context to ensure success. Departments must work closely with other non-hybrid groups and that the closeness of operation has driven the need to implement additional requirements to hybrid job descriptions and organizational processes. This has allowed staff to function such that unless ones happen to be in the corporate headquarters where they are based during the in-office days, nobody notices if the staff is in or out of the office as business is conducted. Hybrid groups function more efficiently if in-office anchor days are synchronized between members of the hybrid group because the shared in-office time builds the ability to read body language that appears in later remote meeting situations.

Minor Theme: Availability

Availability as a theme was shared among the study participants. Participants felt the need for better availability amongst hybrid group members, citing how the current hybrid environment impacts their day-to-day job success compared to a previous in-office group paradigm. Finding a way to re-develop the ability to have an unofficial work conversation to build connections to drive future projects is needed. For the hybrid environment, visibility equates to can that person be reached, are they responsive. Visibility can be established by syncing workdays and hours with traditional in-office groups such that hybrid groups still interact as if they were in the office.

Minor Theme: Honesty and Transparency

Another minor theme identified through the study's interview responses was the importance of honesty and transparency within hybrid groups. Honesty and transparency are critical if a hybrid group trusts one another enough to engage in constructive conflict. Participants felt that hybrid groups of people who knew each other from traditional in-person groups often experience greater

trust and transparency amongst group members than those that never worked in the face-to-face environment together. Participants observed that when bringing a new hybrid group member into an existing group with well-formed trust bonds, the new members struggled to become part of the group, needing extensive socialization of new hybrid group members as deeply as possible in the organization to build the same necessary trust bonds that their long-tenured staff enjoy.

Discussion

Hybrid work has emerged as the new normal for many businesses and will likely continue to exist. Since the advent of the new standard, many managers and staff have been faced with new challenges of how to solve issues that resulted from increased isolation, deterioration of social skills, and problems arising from poor integration into organizational groups and silos (Godinez, 2023; Putri & Amran, 2021; Rañeses et al., 2022). Lencioni's Model of the Five Dysfunctions of a Team has long been a popular instrument for exploring such limiting behaviors as well as a mechanism for suggesting applicable solutions for dysfunctions that occur alongside Tuckman's stages of group development as they impact group performance (Amazon, 2002; Lencioni, 2002; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). While the concept of remote or hybrid work is not new, the global COVID-19 pandemic forced these work modalities into wide use in recent years, and these groups are suffering from many of the same issues as in-person groups (Nilles, 1976; Suri & Bajpai, 2023). This suggests the use of Lencioni's model in hybrid group environments is a reasonable consideration.

These responses indicated that the primary barrier to building functioning and performing hybrid groups is the lack of leadership skills and knowledge to address shortcomings in the hybrid work model. All interviewed communicated the firm belief that leadership was a critical factor in hybrid group formation and performance. When asked about what barriers or limitations to high-performing hybrid groups are in their organization, many felt that leadership did not know how to handle remote or hybrid teams, needed to work to establish solutions that engage staff, create in-office anchor days, and commit to the new culture of hybrid work (TED., 2023). Participants also felt that new metrics are needed to set expectations and ground rules for hybrid staff as critical for achieving functional hybrid groups.

Many indicated that organizational and employee silos impact hybrid groups due to the lack of information reliability impacted by metrics, job expectations, and the richness of employee interactions. All felt strongly that information reliability played a role in barriers within hybrid groups and proved to be a factor in remediating group challenges between hybrid and in-office groups. Many stressed the need for enhanced metrics to establish clear job expectations and performance criteria to build a mechanism of "touchpoints" such that hybrid groups can be evaluated relatively against each other. This overcomes the lack of tacit observational performance data generated by the ability to manage by walking about inherent with in-office groups. Many explored how hybrid work erodes the social fabric originally built during in-person onboarding, leading to distrust and increased feelings of isolation by hybrid workers (Mortensen, 2021). The need for specific guidance for hybrid groups on how best to communicate within the new model is underlined by the fact that there is "no font for sarcasm" and "no font for anger," underlining the critical importance of good communication to enhance information reliability.

All indicated that visibility is the primary mechanism for breaking down barriers to producing outcomes for hybrid teams by improving communication, providing a sense of inclusion and alignment, and increasing tacit hybrid communications. They felt that by their very nature of

being a distributed group, hybrid groups suffer from visibility problems that impact both leadership and staff. Visibility in this context is defined as a means of improving communication, providing a sense of inclusion and alignment, and increasing tacit hybrid communications within groups. Visibility, trust, and ownership were improved in hybrid groups when in-office anchor days were aligned, reinforcing in-person time with hybrid group members. It is critical to build into the onboarding process a way to explain not only the way to respond on screen but also the way we need the interactions to take place. By implementing a policy to have the camera on and a requirement to respond interactively to hybrid group meetings.

Leadership themes, information reliability, and visibility are well represented within the Lencioni Model as they relate to vulnerability, accountability, trust, commitment, and feedback (Tolbert, 2023). Additionally, Tuckman's stages of group development and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs have direct corollaries to the study findings of the importance of employee comfort with their job duties, interpersonal relationships, and attachment to the socio-fabric of the organization (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021; Godinez, 2023; Maslow, 2013; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs establishes that the need for social belonging for group members that has been observed in the study data must be created during the critical group socialization stage that occurs at the storming and norming stages of group development (Maslow, 2013; Stewart et al., 2018; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). These mechanisms prove helpful in managing and mitigating issues uncovered in hybrid and remote teams.

Recommendations for Application and Research

The interviews revealed that the challenges associated with group formation and dynamics within hybrid groups are similar to those experienced within traditional in-person groups. Thus, many established theories of in-person group formation and management can be leveraged with hybrid groups. As many organizations have continued to promote hybrid work environments to save organizational costs, increase productivity, and offer employee benefits, finding a ready source of applicable literature that leadership can leverage to establish and maintain hybrid groups will serve to more easily remediate issues (Choudhury et al., 2021; Rañeses et al., 2022).

Practical Implications

The concept that in-person and hybrid groups respond similarly enables the application of a well-established group of theories, such as Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team, Tuckman's Group Formation Theory, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, to influence hybrid groups. Delving into issues revealed during the qualitative survey highlights an emotional disconnect between employees and leadership, contributing to weak socio-fabric relationships in hybrid settings. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, social belonging is compromised in hybrid environments when efforts to establish one-to-one and one-to-many group connections are insufficient, ultimately impacting Tuckman's forming and norming stages of group formation (Maslow, 2013; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

These challenges are evident through the lens of Lencioni's model, which identifies the absence of trust, fear of conflict, and a lack of commitment as key factors undermining group cohesion. The interview data offers practical solutions aligned with existing literature, providing a roadmap for leadership. Key actions include prioritizing effective onboarding to integrate new hybrid team members with the groups and organization, enhancing job descriptions and training to clarify expectations, and scheduling consistent in-office anchor days within the group. These

strategies foster the tacit connections and communication channels necessary for building trust and developing functional and efficient hybrid teams (Godinez, 2023; Hejl, 2024; Nilssen, 2024; TED., 2023).

As many leaders, managers, and supervisors are still adapting to leading hybrid groups, a guidebook could be developed to help leadership link unfamiliar hybrid group behaviors to their more easily understood in-person counterparts. This information mapping tool would serve as a resource to help diagnose what may initially seem like novel or confusing hybrid issues, connecting them to established models and theories that leadership is more comfortable applying to traditional in-person groups. As the study's findings have shown, hybrid groups can be observed, managed, and enhanced using the same theories and models typically used in in-person groups, which are more familiar to traditional leadership.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study identified several opportunities for future research. Notably, some participants in the qualitative survey remarked on their perceptions of increased productivity in the hybrid group model compared to the traditional in-person modality. Given the impact of interruptions and distractions, further research could explore whether employees are more productive in a hybrid environment. Such findings could provide valuable insights into potential productivity benefits for employers.

“Visibility” consistently emerged as a central theme throughout the qualitative study. The concept of visibility has been a powerful influence on the philosophical musings of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, emphasizing that objects, entities, and ideas only fully instantiate into existence when they are observed or perceived (Heidegger et al., 2008). In other writings, he explored the concept that “Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where truth happens” (Heidegger, 2004, p. 12). There was substantial dialogue around visibility and how the lack of visibility creates fear along all sides of the hybrid group environment. Many in this study felt that if something were not observed, it was not being accomplished or linked to a person, and that concept plays a significant role in driving many challenges faced by hybrid groups. Further research could involve a more extensive study of hybrid populations to investigate whether a fundamental connection exists between Heidegger's principle of object instantiation through visibility via technology and its underlying relationship with the dynamics of hybrid groups.

Conclusion

Hybrid groups became widespread due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and have persisted as a new normal due to industry cost savings, better employee work-life balance, and employment flexibility (Klopotek, 2017; Putri & Amran, 2021; Rañeses et al., 2022; Susilo, 2020). However, with hybrid groups came dysfunctions that many struggled to understand or remediate. Investing in the onboarding process of hybrid employees, leadership can help staff form deeper one-to-one and one-to-many relationships that will foster tacit communication channels that allow an increase of group and organizational cultural uptake, the building of trust and provide the needed visibility that staff and management need of each other to build high-performing groups (Choudhury et al., 2023; Godinez, 2023; Hejl, 2024; Nilssen, 2024). Understanding that increased attention needs to be paid to the socio-fabric of a hybrid group to establish and maintain relationship bonds, leadership can leverage the knowledge that hybrid groups respond much the same as traditional

in-person groups. This allows leadership to observe, diagnose, manage, and enhance many seemingly novel or confusing hybrid issues with more familiar traditional theories and models as business explores the new normal of hybrid groups.

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