

Here's a good one...

What do software teams and  
improvised comedy groups  
have in common?

Paul Hammond & Dan Attfield

# Agenda

## **Introduction**

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

The Core Principles of Improvisation

## **Workshop**

Fundamentals of Improvisation

# Who are these guys?

## **Dan Attfield**

### **Software Engineer**

Ex-Microsoft / Skype  
Consultancy

### **Comedy Performer**

Edinburgh Fringe, Glastonbury  
Trained with The Second City  
Abandoman, The RH Experience

## **Paul Hammond**

### **Engineering Manager**

Director, European Product Development at eBay  
Almost 15 years at Microsoft

### **Extra-Curricular**

Agile Coach and Mentor  
Microsoft, Google, Alaska Air, Amazon  
Musician

Revisited:

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team  
(2002)

# Content Overview

- Business fable by **Patrick Lencioni**
- **Root causes** of problems in teams



# Our Team!



# Absence of Trust





# Absence of Trust



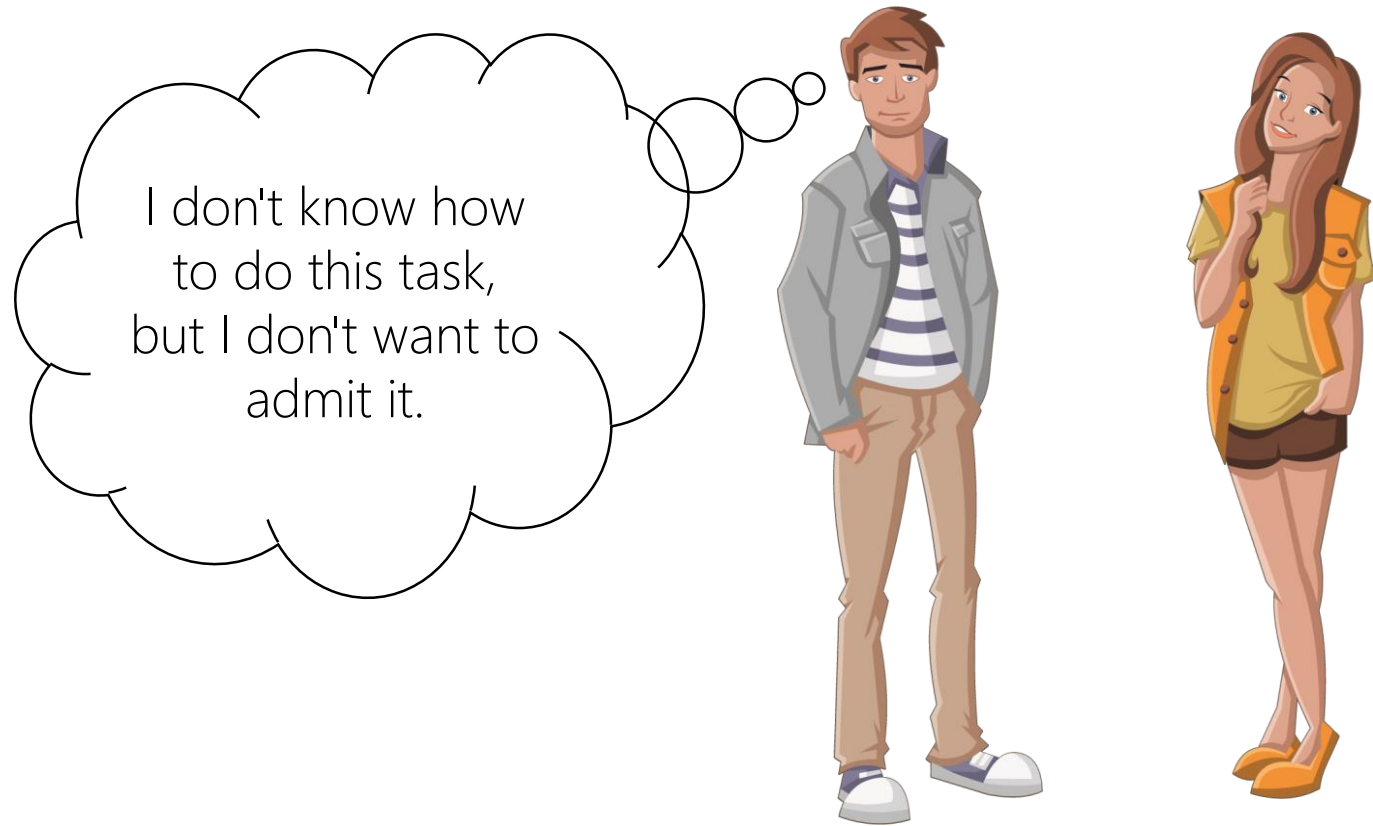
# Absence of Trust

I'm almost finished -  
I'll be done soon.



# Absence of Trust

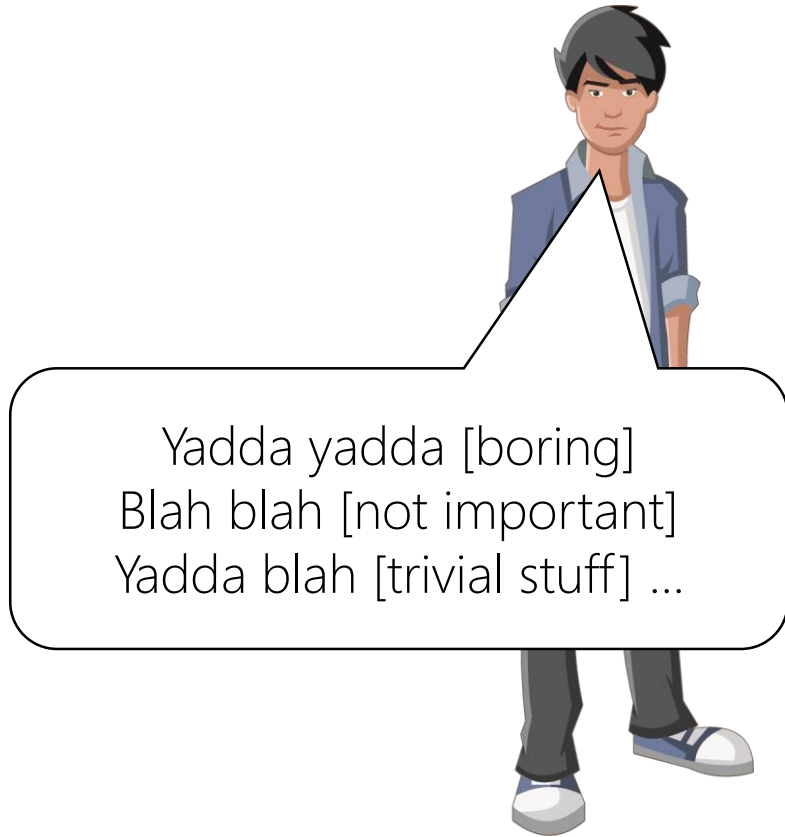
INVULNERABILITY



# Fear of Conflict



# Fear of Conflict



# Fear of Conflict



# Fear of Conflict



But what about  
[key item]? And  
I certainly don't  
agree with  
[other thing].

# Fear of Conflict

ARTIFICIAL HARMONY

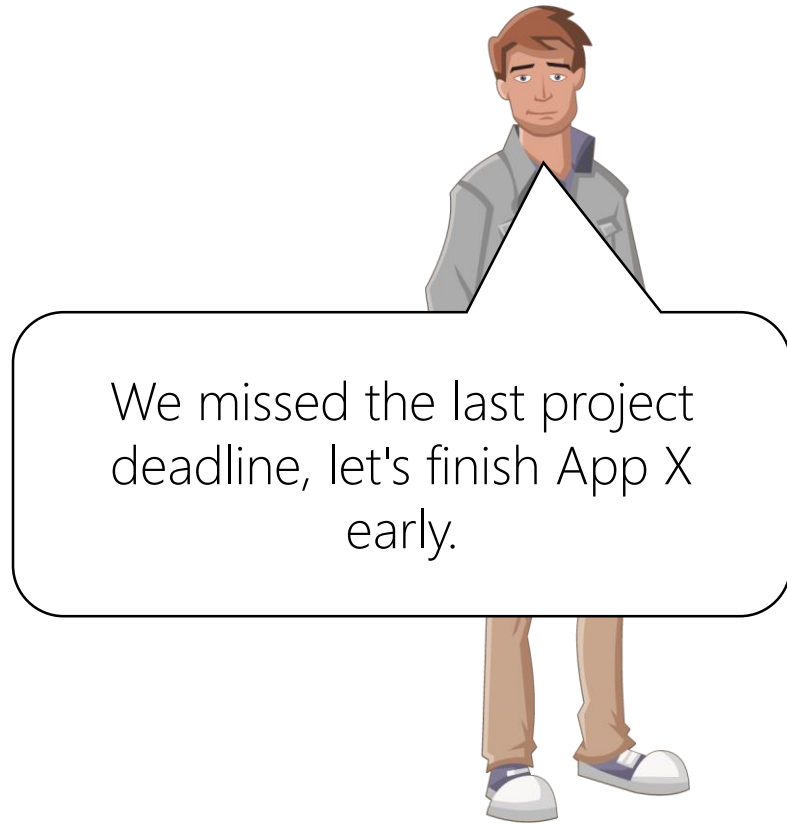




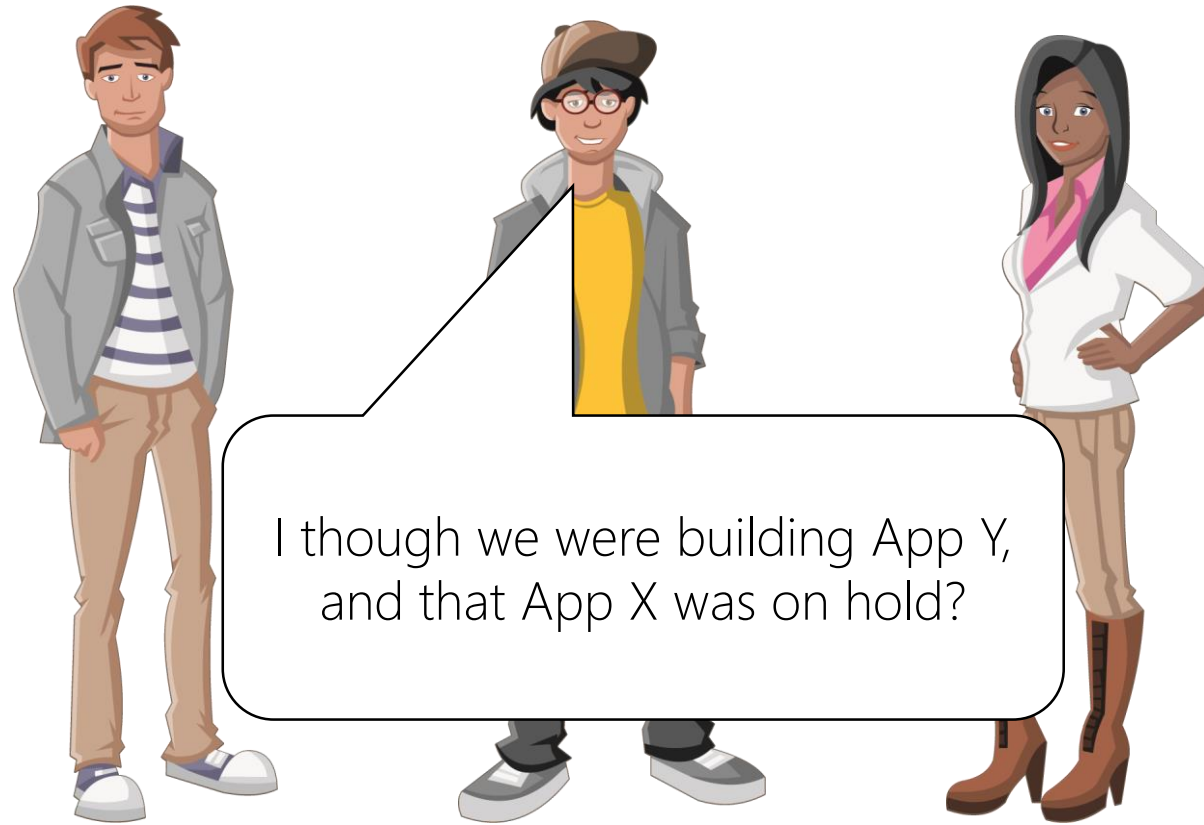
# Lack of Commitment



# Lack of Commitment



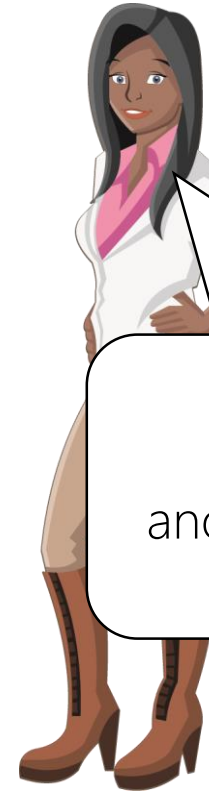
# Lack of Commitment



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# Lack of Commitment



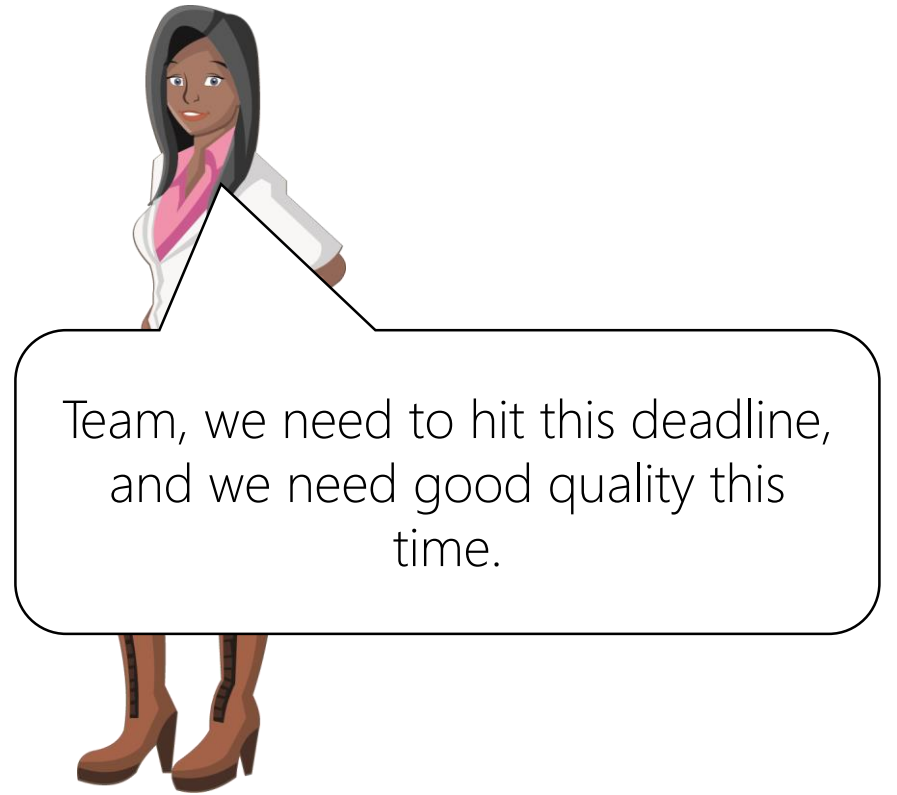
I'm confused. Let's set up another meeting to revisit this.

AMBIGUITY

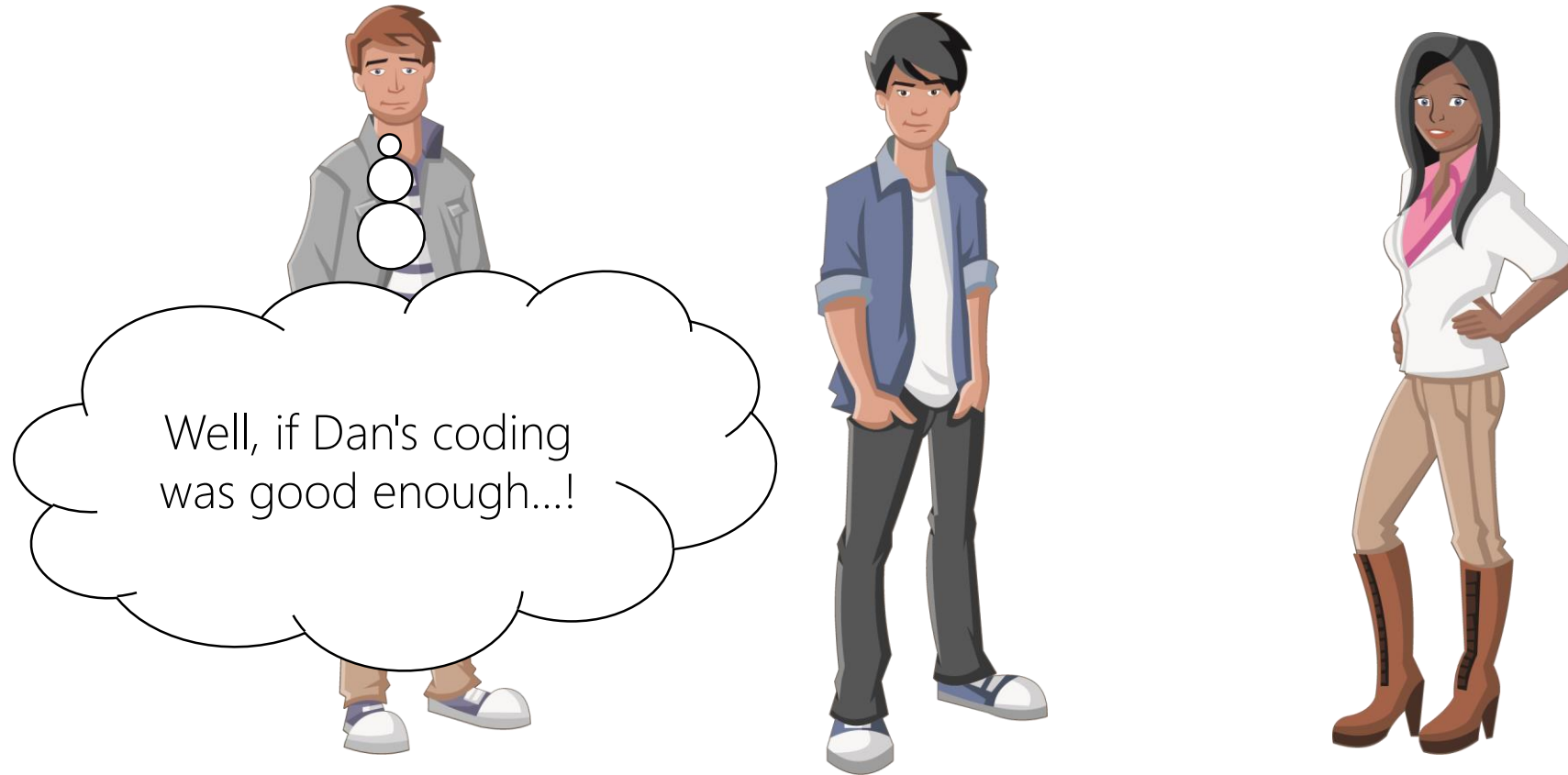
# Avoidance of Accountability



# Avoidance of Accountability



# Avoidance of Accountability





# Avoidance of Accountability

LOW STANDARDS



# Inattention to Results



# Inattention to Results



# Inattention to Results



# Inattention to Results



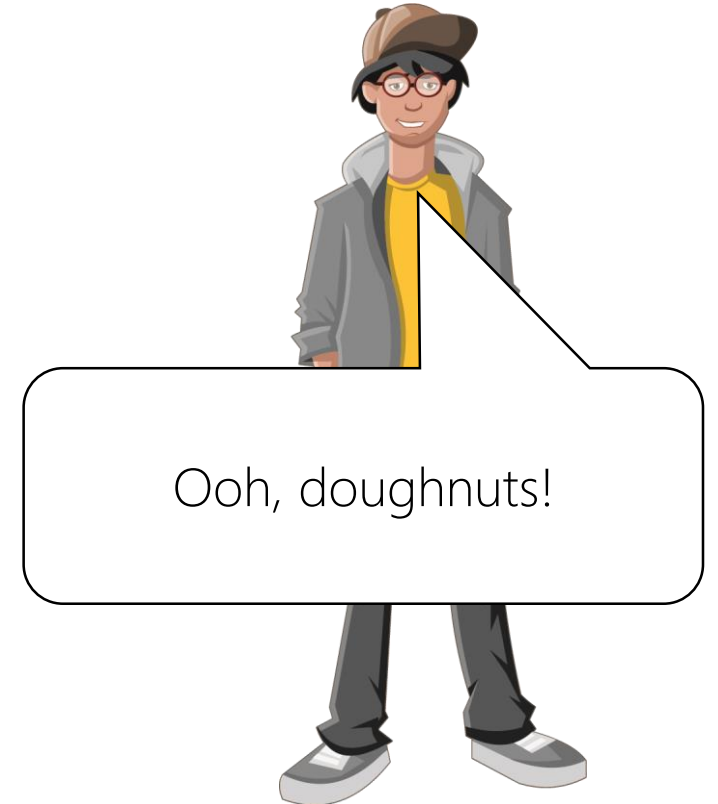
# Inattention to Results





# Inattention to Results

## STATUS AND EGO



# High Performing Teams...

- **Trust** one another
- Engage in **unfiltered conflict** around ideas
- **Commit to decisions** and plans of action
- Hold one another **accountable for delivering** against those plans
- Focus on the achievement of **collective results**



Improvisation

# What is Improvisation?

By following a **core set of values and principles**

Improvisation is...

- A methodology for **working in teams**
- To make a relevant product **in the moment**
- Based on **audience interaction**
- While adapting to **constant change**

# High Performing Improv Teams...

- **Trust** one another and **support unconditionally**
- **Listen actively** to your team
- **Accept and build** on others' ideas
- **Make others look good**
- Focus on the achievement of **collective results**

# Trust & Unconditional Support

Ultimate RPS

Mr. Hit

Eight Things

# Supporting Your Team Unconditionally

- **Failure happens to everyone**
- Generate **positive mentality**
- "We've all got your back!"
- **Builds trust**

# Applying to The Five Dysfunctions

## **Absence of Trust**

- Promote a culture of unconditional support

## **Avoidance of Accountability**

- Give and receive feedback freely
- Everyone has each others' backs unconditionally



# Accepting and Building on Ideas

Point Yes

Tableau

“Yes, and...”

- Creates the strongest **base reality**
- Validates the person – not necessarily the idea
- Demonstrates that you:
  - **Acknowledge and buy-in**
  - **Actively listen**
  - **Contribute relevant ideas**
  - **Respect others**



# Applying to The Five Dysfunctions

## **Fear of Conflict**

- Build strong base realities
- Everyone understands, and can confidently discuss

## **Lack of Commitment**

- Build strong base realities *together*
- Everyone is actively heard and buys-in



# Making Others Look Good

Panel of Experts

# Team Success

- **Think of the team before yourself!**
- Teams full of team-focused improvisers:
  - Set themselves and others up for **success**
  - Appear more **professional**
  - **Attract other supportive improvisers**

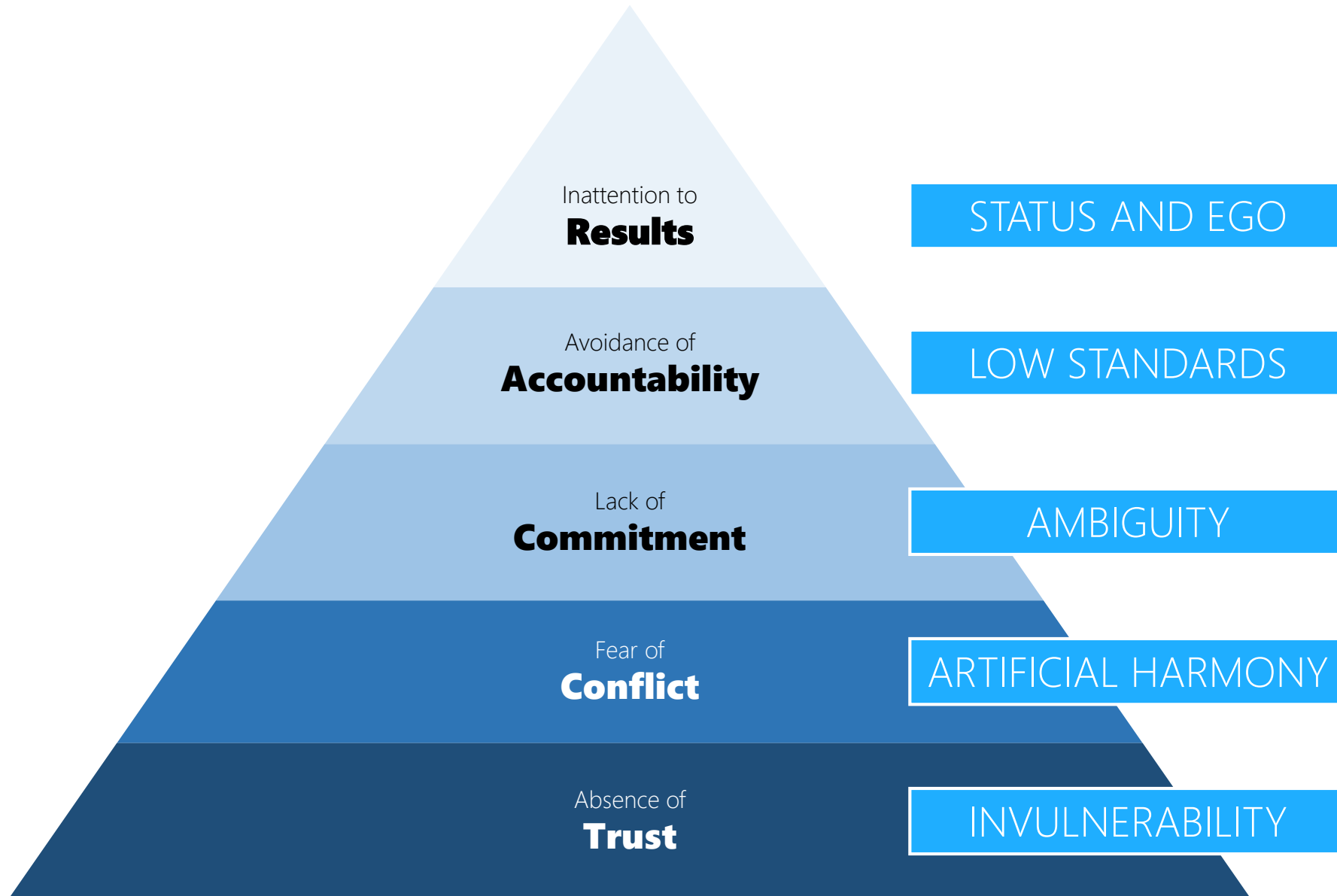
# Applying to The Five Dysfunctions

## **Inattention to Results**

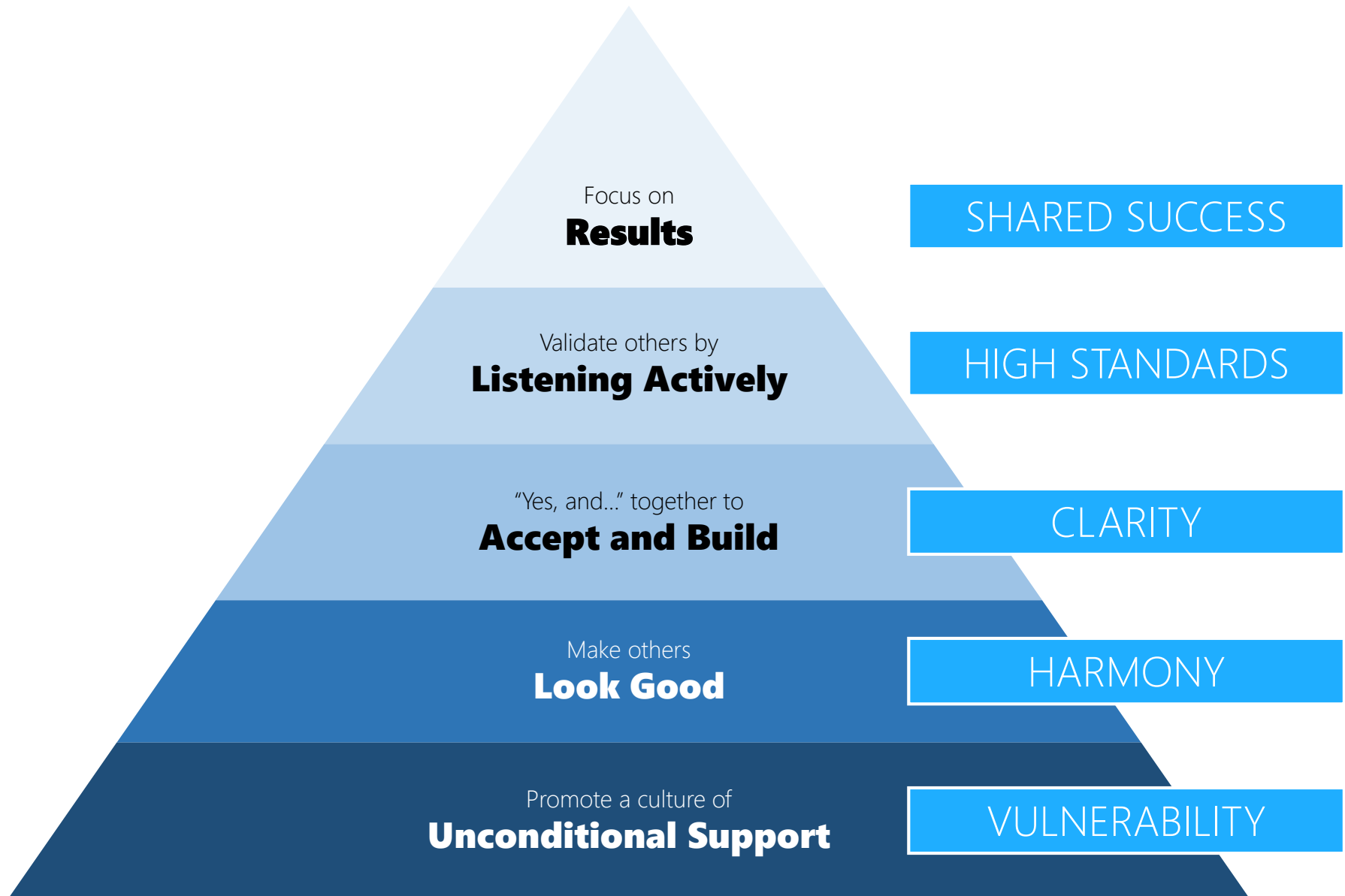
- Consider your actions through a “team-first” filter
- Your goal is to make others look good
  - others will do the same for you



Wrapping Up











## **Purposefully abstract exercises**

- embrace playfulness and nurture happiness

## **Be more vulnerable**

- embrace failure and trust your team

## **“Yes, and...” to build together**

- get everyone on the same page

**Make someone else look good**

- and you'll look great

## **Listen**

- really, actively listen

Questions

# Further Reading

## **Applied Improvisation**

- The Second City – Yes, And
- Mike Bonifer & Jessie Shternshus – CTRL-SHIFT
- Paul Goddard – Improv-ing Agile Teams

## **Pure Improvisation**

- The Upright Citizens Brigade – Comedy Improvisation Manual
- Will Hines – How to be the Greatest Improviser in the World
- Mick Napier – Scene from the Inside Out
- Tom Salinsky – The Improv Handbook



# Thank you!

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