

Causal Looping Team Traps

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Twelve Team Traps

1. False Consensus
lack of real buy-in
2. Inability to Reach Closure
*ineffective problem solving
and decision making*
3. Rigid Hierarchy
operation by power and control
4. Weak Leadership
*inadequate direction from
the top*
5. Uneven Participation
underutilized resources
6. Calcified Interactions
*predictable patterns of
behavior*
7. Lack of Mutual Accountability
*absence of evaluation
and consequences*
8. Unrealistic Expectations
burn out
9. Forgetting the Customer
becoming too insular
10. Leaving Key Stakeholders
Out of the Loop
getting shot down
11. Unresolved Overt Conflict
personality conflicts
12. Undiscussed Covert Conflict
underground conflict

Trap #1

False Consensus

Symptoms

- Silent head nodding substitutes for real agreement
- Lack of discussion and challenge results in sub-optimal decision
- Controversy is discouraged out of fear of slowing down process
- People say one thing but think or do another
- People undermine the decision after the meeting
- Lack of real buy-in results in people not following through on tasks

Tools for a Turnaround

- Opinion Polling
Give everyone an opportunity to hear and be heard before making decisions
- Quick Closure
Employ a short five-step template for making team decisions effectively
- Temperature Check
Diffuse tension before it begins to interfere with work
- Core Purpose
Clarify team mission, goals, and expectations

Trap #2

Inability to Reach Closure

Symptoms

- Conversations are circular and never end, without anything getting done
- Frustration results from going around and around on the same issue
- Taking charge to reach closure is discouraged
- Politeness is substituted for real give-and-take team process, or members can be in “violent agreement”
- Moving to action is stalled
- People revert to individual action or off-line behavior

Tools for a Turnaround

- Quick Closure
Employ a short five-step template for making team decisions effectively
- Rules of Engagement
Define a behavioral contract along six critical dimensions
- Core Purpose
Clarify team mission, goals, and expectations
- Decide and Announce
Use hierarchy effectively for efficient decision making

Trap #3

Rigid Hierarchy

Symptoms

- The organization operates by power and control, stifling creativity and communication
- Cynicism sets in from all the “politics”
- Cross-functional cooperation is rare
- Decisions are made by rank rather than merit
- Employees are afraid to speak out and take risks
- “Slow rolling” may occur from the lack of true buy-in

Tools for a Turnaround

- 4-Player Role Rotation
Adjust the balance of interaction among team members
- Temperature Check
Diffuse tension before it begins to interfere with work
- Rules of Engagement
Define a behavioral contract along six critical dimensions
- 360° Culture Alignment
Align the various cultures within a team and in its environment
- Stages of Progress
Determine whether a team is developmentally on track

Trap #4

Weak Leadership

Symptoms

- Leaders do not provide adequate vision, direction and motivation
- Staff meetings are poorly structured and facilitated
- Leaders do not provide direction in problem solving, decision making and conflict resolution
- Leaders do not act quickly and decisively
- Team cohesion does not occur
- “Invisible” and inaccessible leaders are not respected by subordinates

Tools for a Turnaround

- Rules of Engagement
Define a behavioral contract along six critical dimensions
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Determine whether a team is developmentally on track

Trap #5

Uneven Participation

Symptoms

- Small subgroup dominates the team's interaction
- Some team resources are under-utilized
- Subject matter experts dominate, and divergent perspectives are discouraged
- Loss of valuable input and dialogue creates frustration and lack of buy-in
- Quiet members fall to the side

Tools for a Turnaround

- Opinion Polling
Give everyone an opportunity to hear and be heard before making decisions
- Temperature Check
Diffuse tension before it begins to interfere with work
- 4-Player Role Rotation
Adjust the balance of interaction among team members
- Whois?
Determine who should be on a team and in what capacity
- Creating a Third Culture
Bridge differences to provide a comfortable working climate for all
- Communication Menu
Ensure cohesion with an explicit communication plan

Trap #6

Calcified Interactions

Symptoms

- Patterns of relating become predictable and frustrating, resulting in a feeling of *deja vu*
- People are stuck in predictable roles
- Meetings are dominated by a small, powerful minority
- Other people “check out” and feel disempowered
- People may notice the process silently, but do not feel safe to challenge it
- Lack of stimulation stifles creativity, and underutilizes resources

Tools for a Turnaround

- Temperature Check
Diffuse tension before it begins to interfere with work
- 4-Player Role Rotation
Adjust the balance of interaction among team members
- Whois?
Determine who should be on a team and in what capacity

Trap #7

Lack of Mutual Accountability

Symptoms

- Members do not speak up when commitments are broken
- Unclear product focus, work processes and evaluation cause the team to drift
- Schedules are absent or ignored, deadlines are frequently missed
- Team members do not give each other feedback or negotiate for what they need
- Team members routinely feel offended and abused by each other
- Members feel free to “do their own thing,” without considering overall team goals

Tools for a Turnaround

- Requests and Commitments
Contract explicitly to reach mutually agreeable solutions
- Rules of Engagement
Define a behavioral contract along six critical dimensions
- Temperature Check
Diffuse tension before it begins to interfere with work
- Workflow
Track and measure the progress of multiple tasks
- 360° Culture Alignment
Align the various cultures within a team and in its environment

Trap #8

Unrealistic Expectations

Symptoms

- Goals and time frames are too aggressive for the available resources
- Credibility with stakeholders and sponsors erodes as promises are not kept
- Deadlines cannot be met
- Stress and conflict increases to the point of burn out
- Morale plummets as focus and motivation are lost
- Team success measures are not met

Tools for a Turnaround

- Quick Closure
Employ a short five-step template for making team decisions effectively
- Opinion Polling
Give everyone an opportunity to hear and be heard before making decisions
- Workflow
Track and measure the progress of multiple tasks
- Stages of Progress
Determine whether a team is developmentally on track
- Universal Review
Structure the project lifecycle to promote learning and correction at each phase
- 360° Culture Alignment
Align the various cultures within a team and in its environment

Trap #9

Forgetting the Customer

Symptoms

- Team loses focus on primary business goal of pleasing the customer
- Customer input is not regularly solicited or included as having value
- Team loses touch with customer needs, especially when they change
- Customers are not updated on decisions affecting them
- Team becomes insular; project direction is guided only by internal forces
- Internal customers are often not treated as “real” customers
- Lack of customer buy-in is the end result

Tools for a Turnaround

- Structural Mapping
Assess the level of engagement and relationships among key stakeholder groups
- 360° Culture Alignment
Align the various cultures within a team and in its environment
- Stakeholder Relationships
Develop a strategy and tactics for getting real buy-in from key players

Trap #10

Leaving Key Stakeholders Out of the Loop

Symptoms

- Team goes too far down the road without checking back with key stakeholders
- Team fails to communicate their process and does not regularly invite input from stakeholders
- Lack of stakeholder buy-in is the end result
- Team gets resentful if ideas are altered or shot down later on
- Team loses valuable outside perspectives
- Team has incomplete understanding of “empowerment” and inter-teamwork

Tools for a Turnaround

- Structural Mapping
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Trap #11

Unresolved Overt Conflict

Symptoms

- Scapegoating and blame predominate
- Fighting over “positions” takes over the team and meetings
- Personal agendas interfere with team goals
- Members are frustrated over the “personality conflict” that cannot be resolved
- Other team members feel uncomfortable but do nothing about it
- Other inputs and points of view are ignored
- Team tries to accommodate so the parties don’t have to interact

Tools for a Turnaround

- Respect Rule
Reinforce good interpersonal boundaries
- Temperature Check
Diffuse tension before it begins to interfere with work
- Rules of Engagement
Define a behavioral contract along six critical dimensions
- 3rd Party Arbitration
Resolve conflicts between team members by involving a third party

Trap #12

Undiscussed Covert Conflict

Symptoms

- Secrets and undiscussables abound
- “Real issues” are not talked about
- Gossiping and backstabbing outside the meeting replace dealing directly with issues
- Work slows down as time and energy is spent on anger
- People avoid each other
- Trust and safety continues to erode

Tools for a Turnaround

- “24-Hour” Rule
De-escalate and resolve covert conflict by communicating directly within 24 hours
- Temperature Check
Diffuse tension before it begins to interfere with work
- Rules of Engagement
Define a behavioral contract along six critical dimensions
- Creating a Third Culture
Bridge differences to provide a comfortable working climate for all
- Communication Menu
Ensure cohesion with an explicit communication plan

Four Team Roles

A 4-part interactive human systems approach

Mover 
Initiates action

Does:

- Initiate action
- Propose ideas
- Take responsibility
- Voice an opinion
- Facilitate meetings

Says:

- “I propose the following.”
- “I have an idea.”
- “Let’s take a vote.”
- “Would anyone like to volunteer?”

Supporter  
Promotes action

Does:

- Piggyback on creative ideas
- Promote popular solutions
- Listen to and understand others’ ideas
- Record on a flipchart

Says:

- “That’s a great idea.”
- “I’ll record these ideas.”
- “I’ll try that.”
- “What do you mean by that?”
- “Let me see if I understand what you just said.”

Four Team Roles

A 4-part interactive human systems approach

Challenger 

Promotes action

Does:

- Add divergent viewpoints
- Oppose popular opinions
- Play devil's advocate

Says:

- "Let me play the devil's advocate."
- "I have another idea."
- "I don't think that will work."

Mirror 

Team learning function

Does:

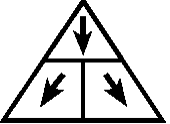
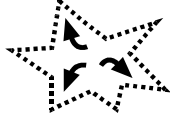
- Observe
- Reflect
- Correct

Says:

- "Let's revisit that decision."
- "What worked? What didn't?"
- "Let's do a process check."
- "Am I the only one who's frustrated with this discussion?"

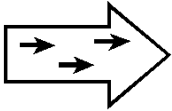

System Types

Quick Reference Guide

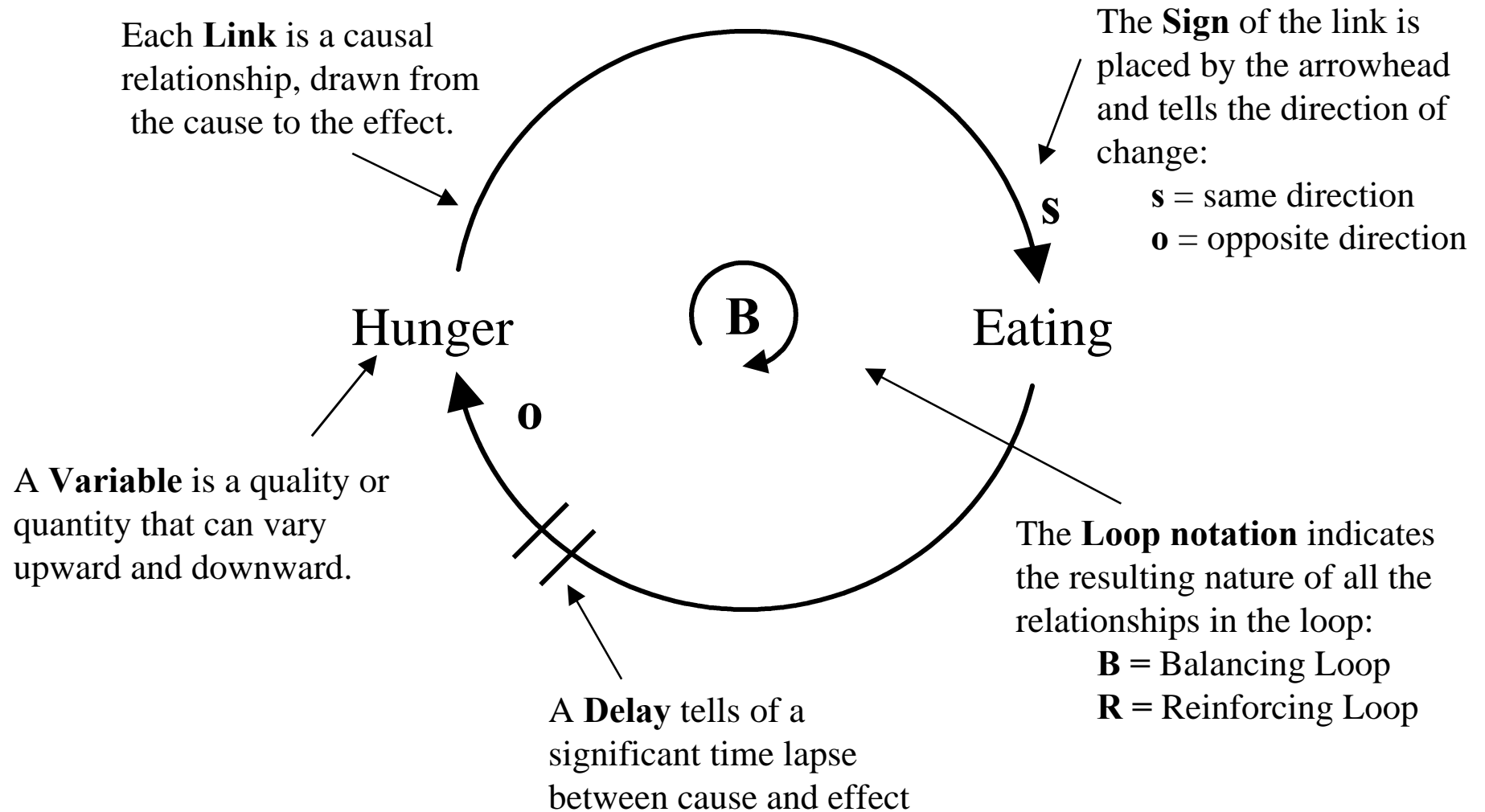
 <p>Closed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Hierarchy •Policies & Procedures •The organization comes first 	 <p>Random</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Individual and Autonomy •Creative Excellence •The individual comes first 								
<table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="262 625 535 698">Functional (Enabled) Version</th> <th data-bbox="682 625 966 698">Extreme (Disabled) Version</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="220 730 598 1380"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear chain of command • Strong leadership • Quick decisions • Efficient work processes • Low error rate • Cyclical goal setting • Predictable service • Specific performance metrics • Effective performance management </td> <td data-bbox="651 730 1008 1380"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tyrannical leadership • Disempowerment • Secrecy • Fear • Resistant to change • Lack of innovation and creativity </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Functional (Enabled) Version	Extreme (Disabled) Version	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear chain of command • Strong leadership • Quick decisions • Efficient work processes • Low error rate • Cyclical goal setting • Predictable service • Specific performance metrics • Effective performance management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tyrannical leadership • Disempowerment • Secrecy • Fear • Resistant to change • Lack of innovation and creativity 	<table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="1123 625 1396 698">Functional (Enabled) Version</th> <th data-bbox="1543 625 1827 698">Extreme (Disabled) Version</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="1102 730 1459 1380"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurial • Responsive • Competitive • Flexible • Respectful of individual needs </td> <td data-bbox="1501 730 1858 1380"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaotic • Conflict-ridden • Duplication of effort • No mutual problem solving • Crisis oriented • Hard to get closure • Lack of direction </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Functional (Enabled) Version	Extreme (Disabled) Version	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurial • Responsive • Competitive • Flexible • Respectful of individual needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaotic • Conflict-ridden • Duplication of effort • No mutual problem solving • Crisis oriented • Hard to get closure • Lack of direction
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System Types

Quick Reference Guide (continued)

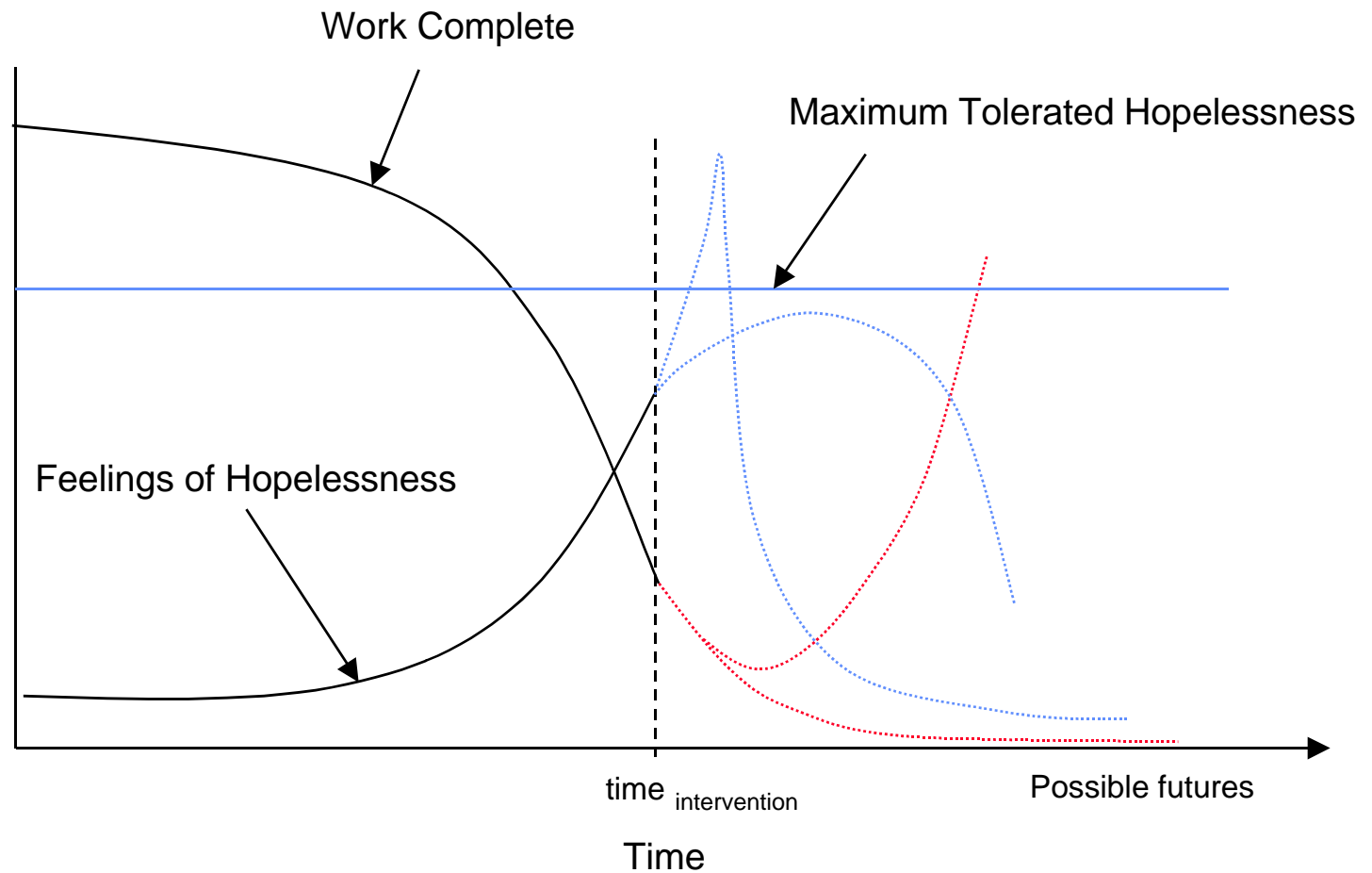
 <p>Synchronous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Alignment •Vision Driven •The value comes first 	 <p>Open</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Collaboration •Teams & Consensus •The process comes first 								
<table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="247 607 525 683">Functional (Enabled) Version</th> <th data-bbox="667 607 945 683">Extreme (Disabled) Version</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="184 716 590 1398"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong purpose and vision • Aligned values and beliefs • Harmonious interactions • Low maintenance • Safety and acceptance • Efficient and effortless teamwork • Implicit understanding • Clear roles and responsibilities • Roles implicit and understood </td> <td data-bbox="636 716 978 1382"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cult-like • Inbred • Discounts individual differences • Minimal communication • Low tolerance for ambiguity • Early closure on problems • Uninvolved and disconnected from each other • Set in ways </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Functional (Enabled) Version	Extreme (Disabled) Version	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong purpose and vision • Aligned values and beliefs • Harmonious interactions • Low maintenance • Safety and acceptance • Efficient and effortless teamwork • Implicit understanding • Clear roles and responsibilities • Roles implicit and understood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cult-like • Inbred • Discounts individual differences • Minimal communication • Low tolerance for ambiguity • Early closure on problems • Uninvolved and disconnected from each other • Set in ways 	<table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="1136 607 1413 683">Functional (Enabled) Version</th> <th data-bbox="1551 607 1829 683">Extreme (Disabled) Version</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="1087 716 1451 1008"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion • Diversity • Empowerment at all levels • Trust • Direct communication </td> <td data-bbox="1503 716 1877 1049"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't make a decision • Reaches false consensus • All talk, no action • Members frustrated • Only vocal few reach "consensus" </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Functional (Enabled) Version	Extreme (Disabled) Version	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion • Diversity • Empowerment at all levels • Trust • Direct communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't make a decision • Reaches false consensus • All talk, no action • Members frustrated • Only vocal few reach "consensus"
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Causal Loop Language

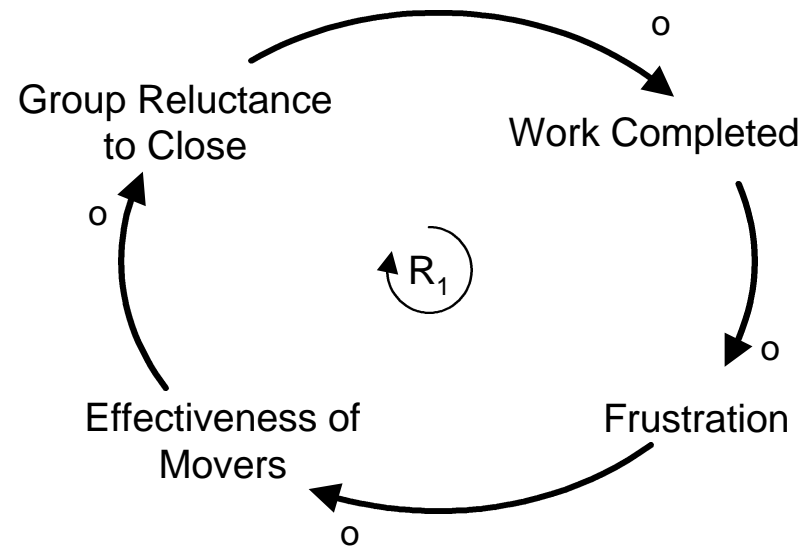


Causal Looping the
Inability to Reach Closure
Team Trap

Inability to Reach Closure: Behaviors Over Time

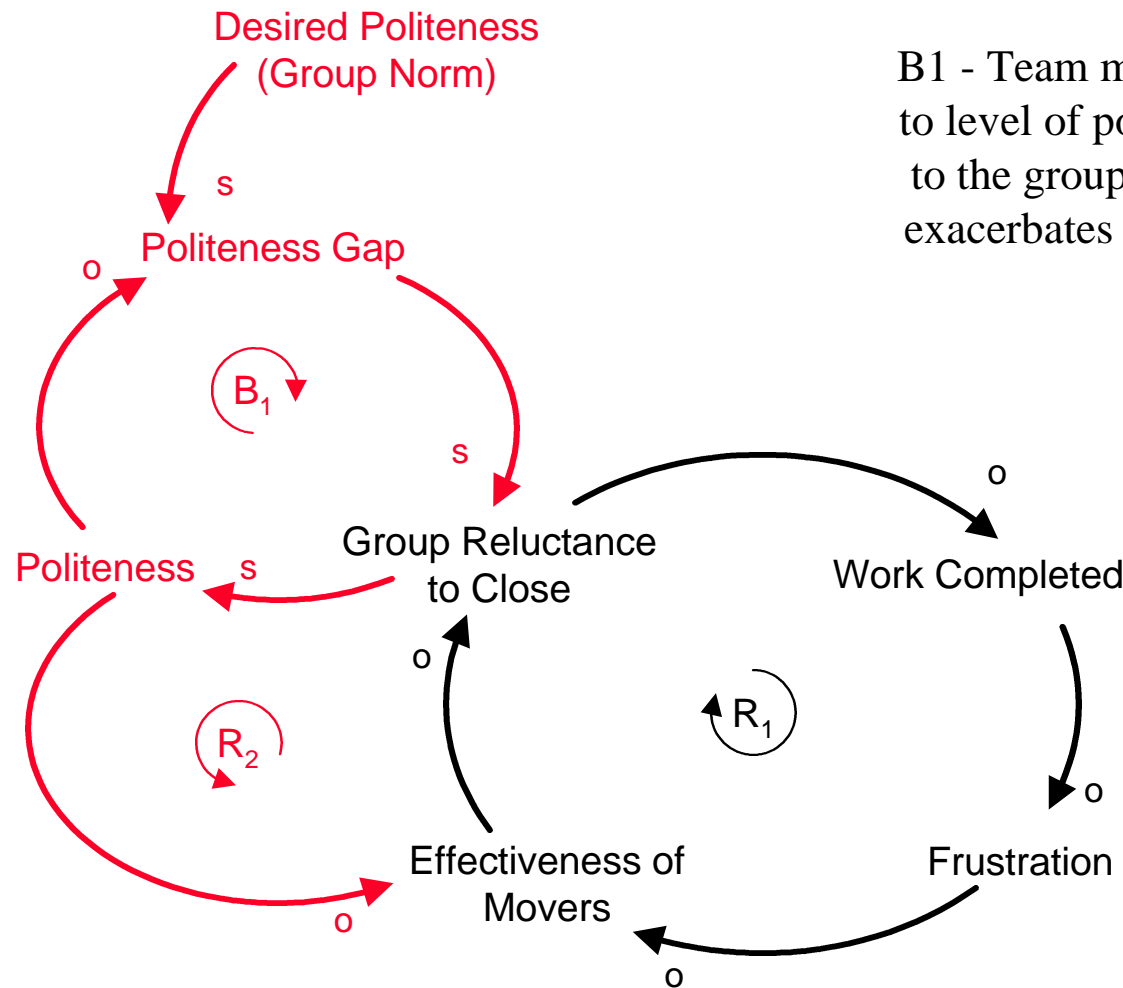


Inability to Reach Closure - A Reinforcing Cycle of Rejected Ideas and Frustration



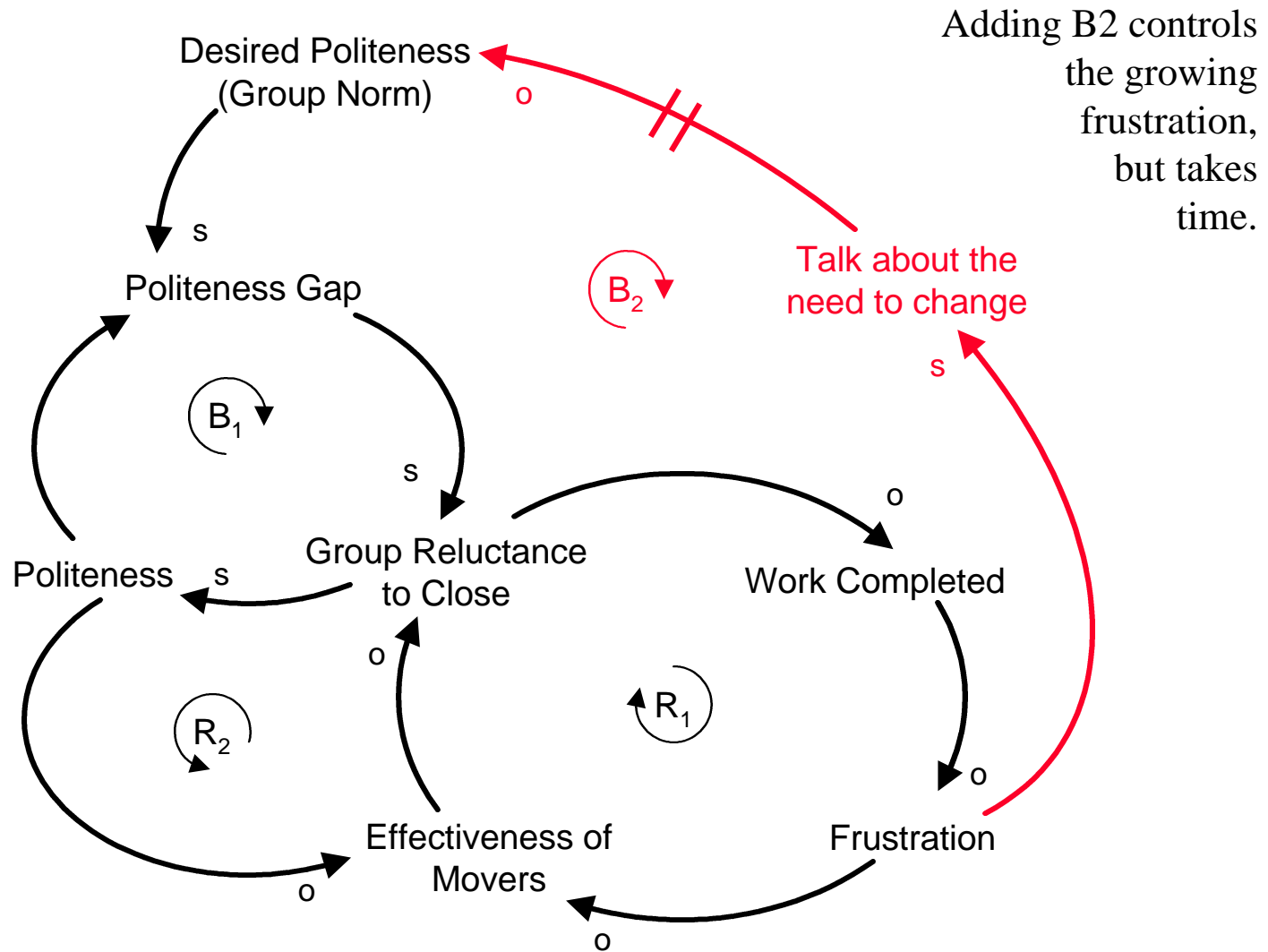
R1 - Initial reluctance to support ideas slows progress which leads to frustration. This causes ideas to be presented more forcefully which causes reluctance to increase further.

Inability to Reach Closure in Open and Synchronous Systems Stems From Politeness Norm

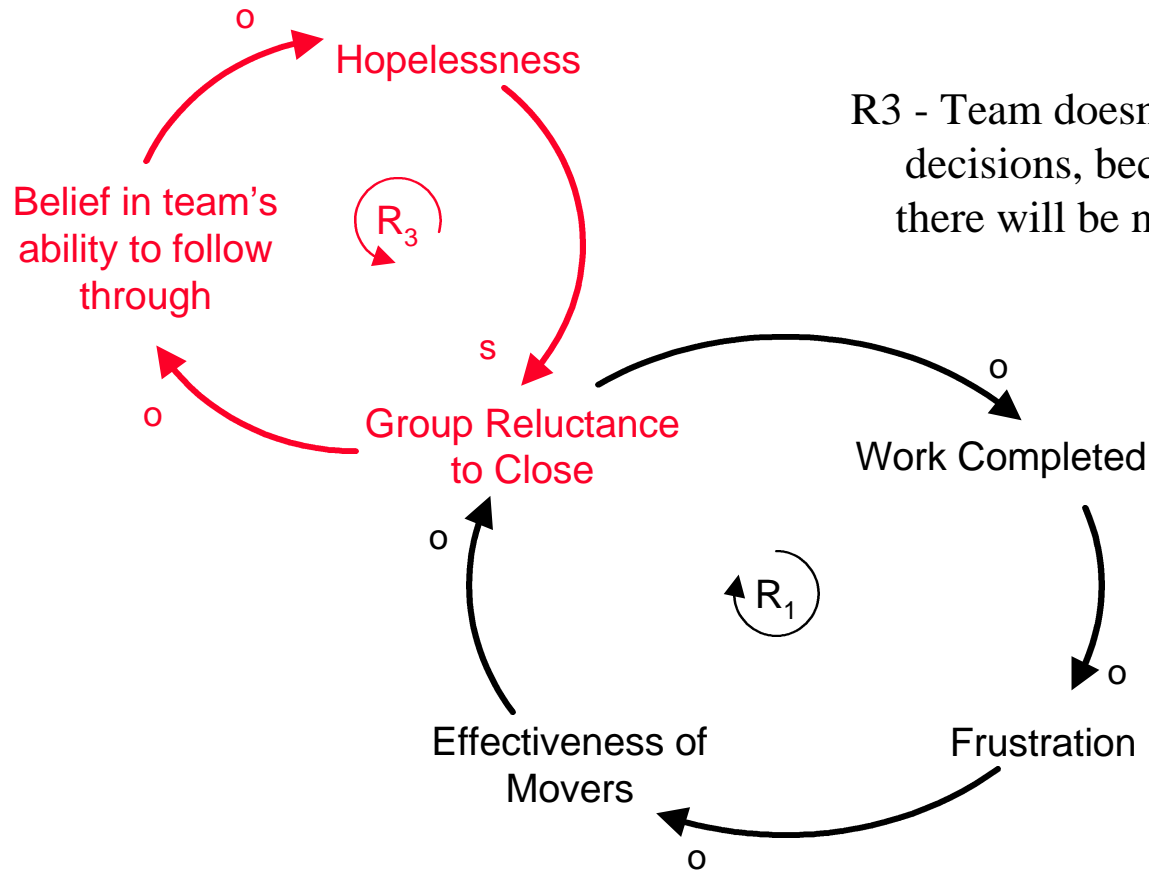


B1 - Team members pay attention to level of politeness as compared to the group norm. R2 - This also exacerbates the ineffectiveness of idea presentation.

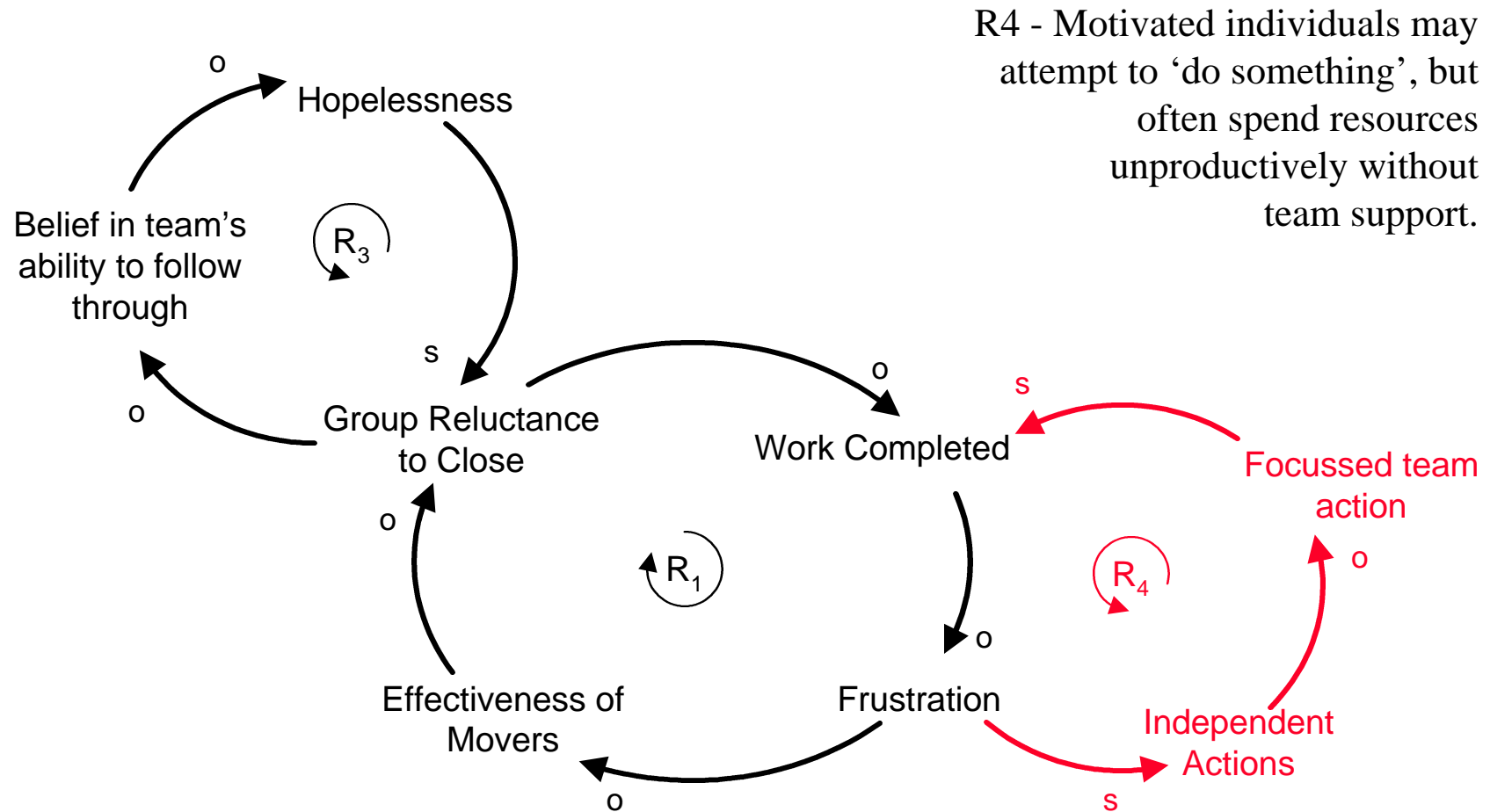
Dialogue As Intervention in Open and Synchronous Systems



Inability to Reach Closure in Random Systems Reinforced by Building Sense of Hopelessness

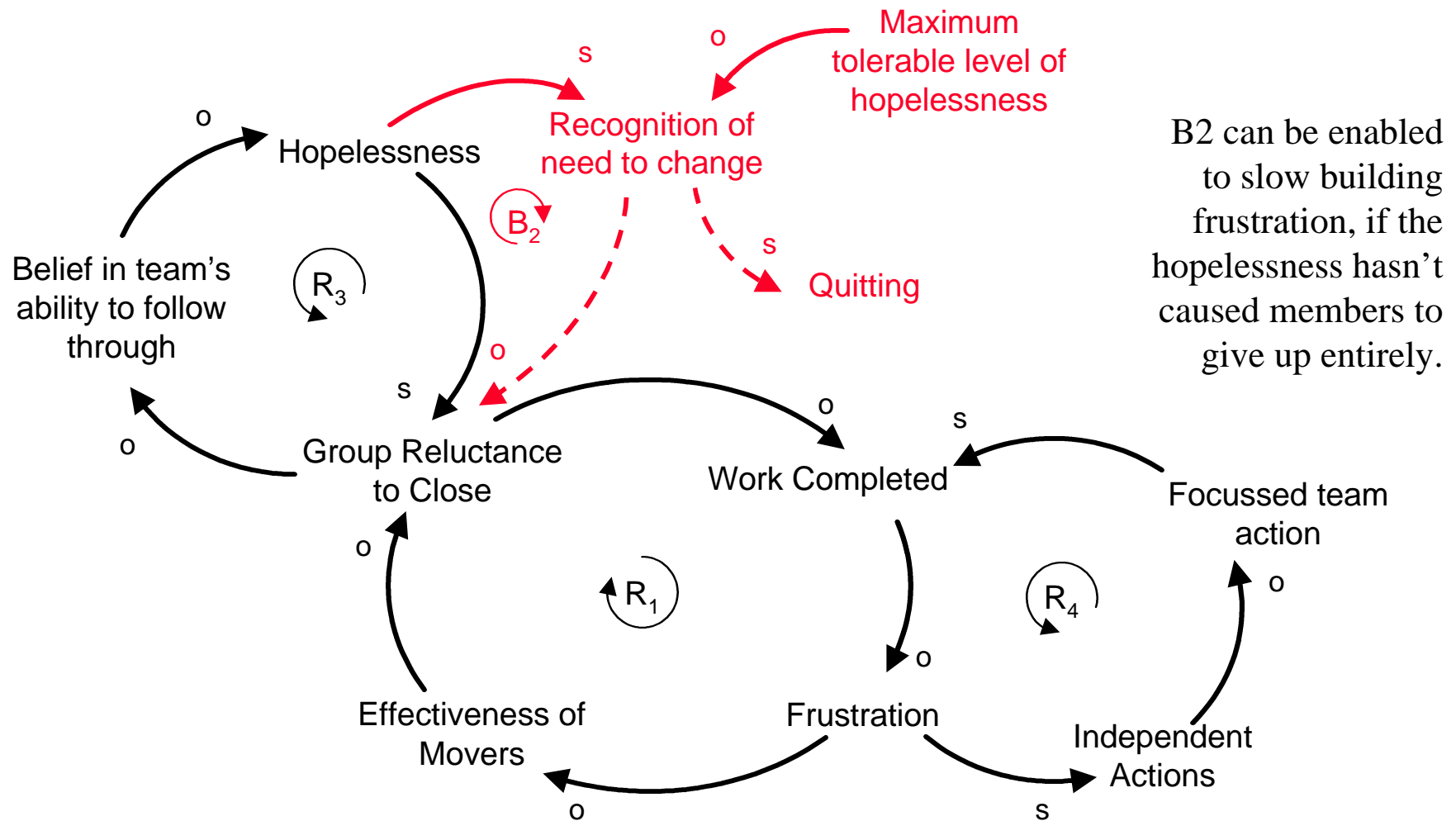


Inability to Reach Closure in Random Systems Gives Rise to Heroic Actions - Ineffective, but Heroic.



R4 - Motivated individuals may attempt to 'do something', but often spend resources unproductively without team support.

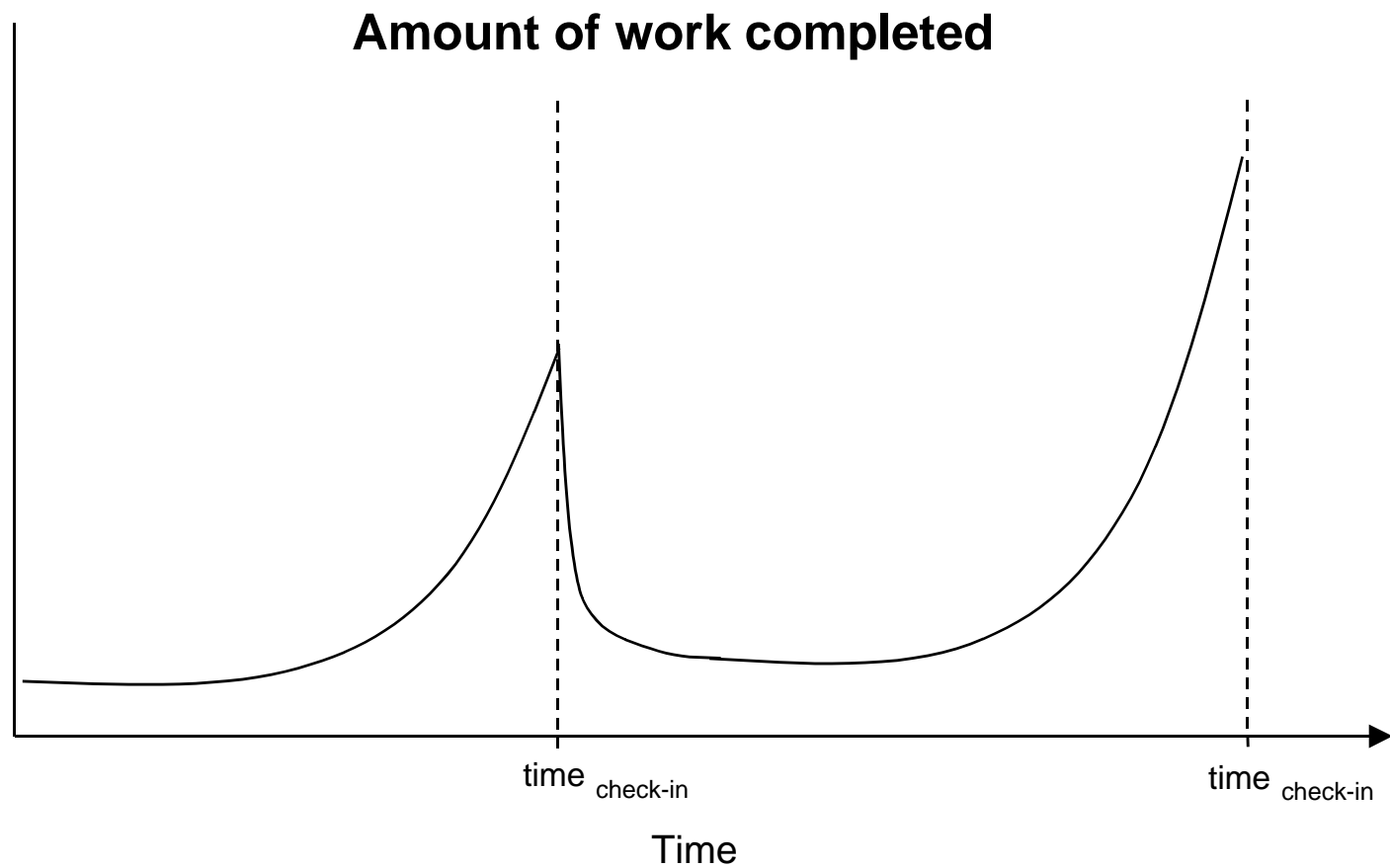
Successful Intervention Depends on Team's Readiness for Change, If It's Not Too Late



B2 can be enabled to slow building frustration, if the hopelessness hasn't caused members to give up entirely.

Causal Looping the
Leaving Key Stakeholders
Out of the Loop
Team Trap

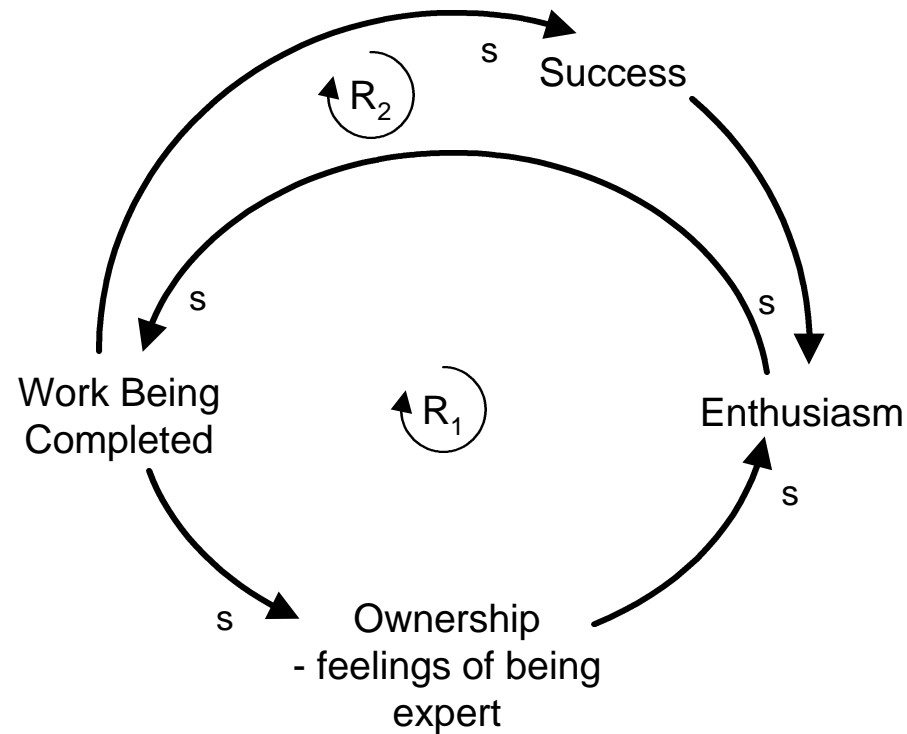
Leaving Key Stakeholders Out of the Loop: Behavior Over Time



Leaving Key Stakeholders Out of the Loop Begins with Building Enthusiasm and Ownership

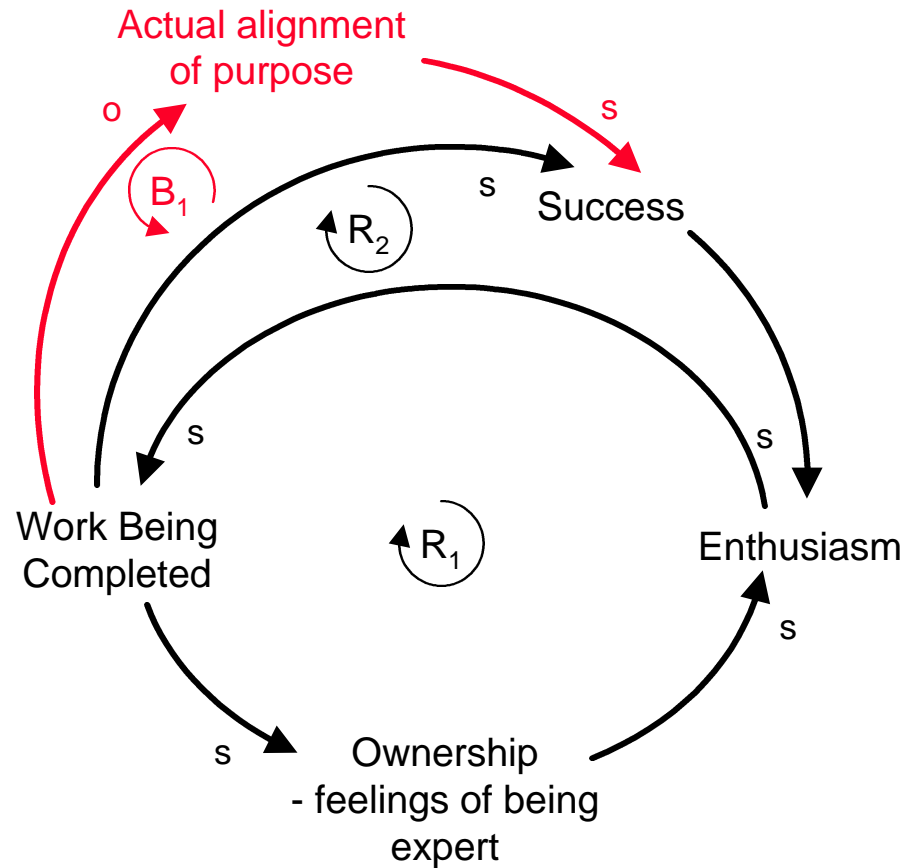
R1 - The more progress s the team makes, the more the feeling of being expert. This feeling increases enthusiasm for the project, which fuels work completion.

R2- Meeting project milestones also builds enthusiasm and completion rate.

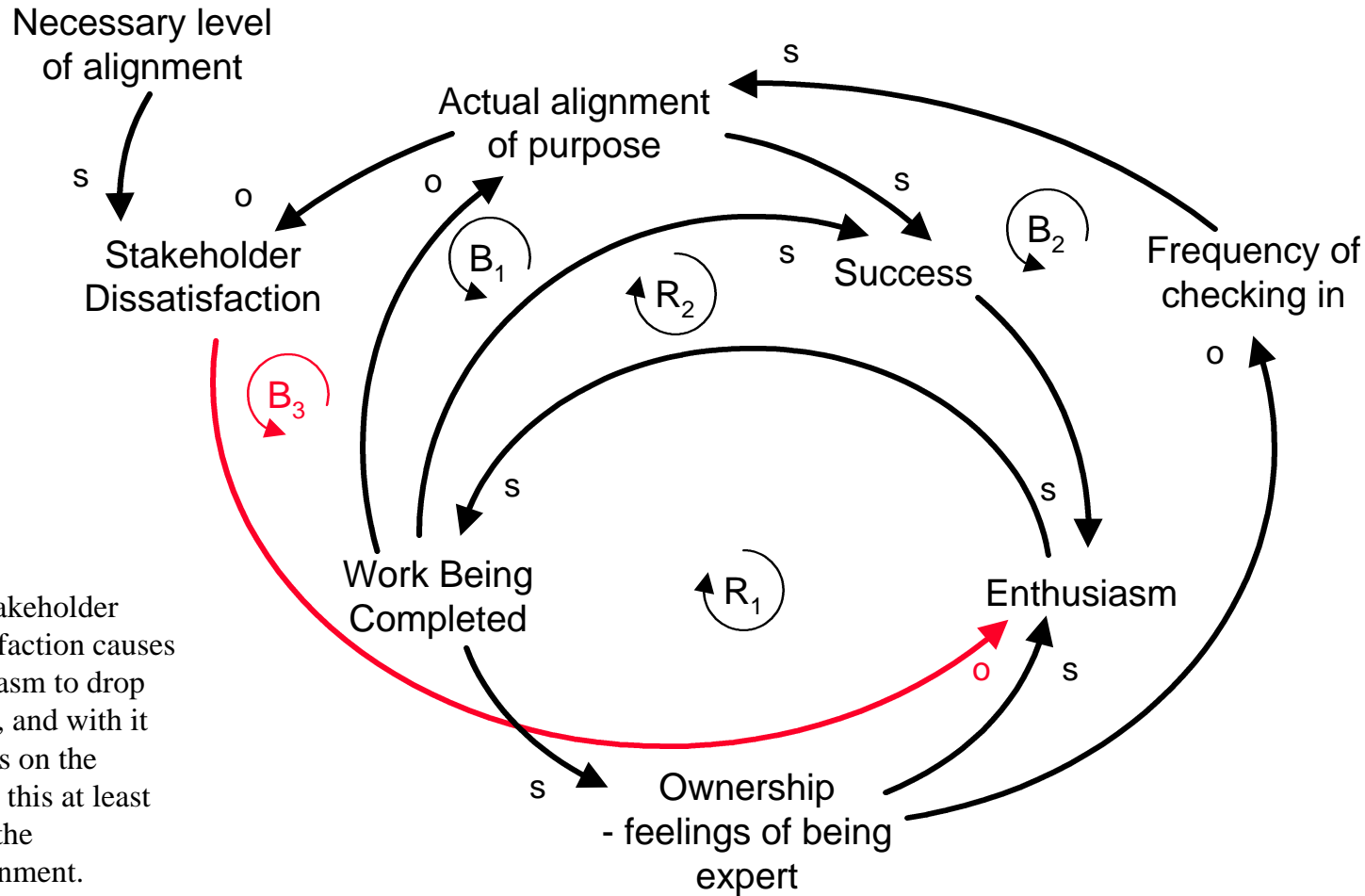


As More Work Is Completed Without Stakeholder Involvement, Alignment Decreases

B1 - All else the same, as more work is completed, the alignment with the original perceived purpose of the project decreases. This decreases the success, which will decrease enthusiasm ... when it is eventually discovered.

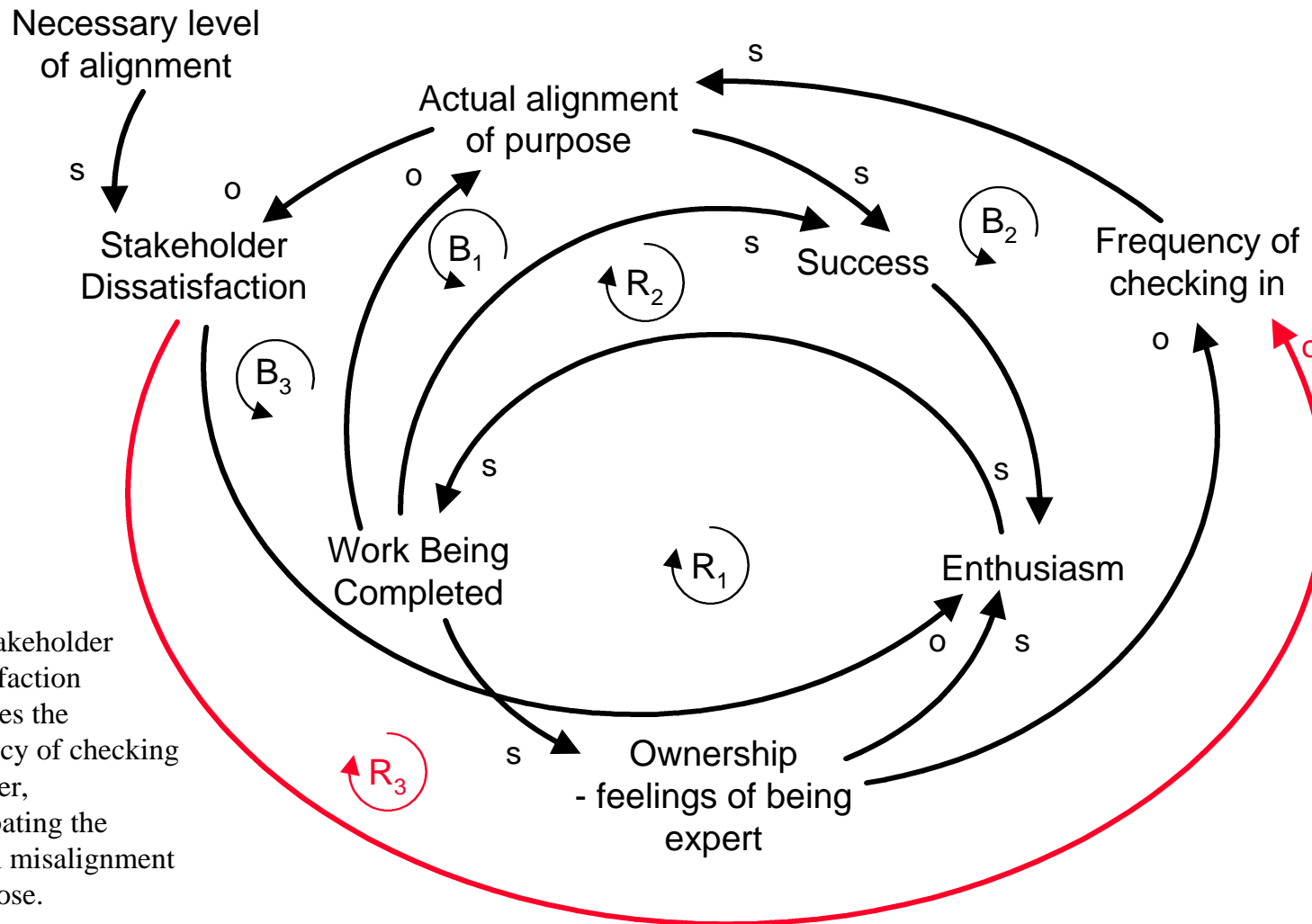


Dissatisfied Stakeholders Dampen Team Enthusiasm



B3 - Stakeholder dissatisfaction causes enthusiasm to drop sharply, and with it progress on the project, this at least arrests the misalignment.

Stakeholder Dissatisfaction Also Tends to Reinforce Team Avoidance



Leaving Key Stakeholders Out of the Loop

- What Intervention Could Lead to a More Satisfying Problem Resolution?
- How and Why Would it Work?