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# Delegation

## FEATURE ARTICLE

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### A lesson in flocking.

A murder of crows, a gaggle of geese, a murmuration of starlings; no matter which of these collective nouns is your favorite, they all mean the same thing: *a flock of birds*. For 60+ million years, birds have been flying in large groups, employing flocking behavior instinctually – gliding effortlessly in perfect synchronization. Each individual bird follows a simple set of rules that require little-to-no leadership or coordination.

Organizations today work tirelessly to achieve this same level of alignment and autonomy within their teams. We have missions and goals that provide them with guidance on where to go. Procedures and approaches that inform them on what to do. But few organizations have a comprehensive, communicated set of principles that empower ownership and decision making across all facets of the business. So, what is it that birds do differently?

Believe it or not, I'm not the first person to pose this question. Many researchers, scientists, and mathematicians have taken an interest in the study of **flocking**. Basic models identify three simple rules that our feathered friends adhere to. These same rules (or principles) can be applied within the walls of your business to streamline delegation through collective autonomy and ownership.

#### 1. Separation - Avoid crowding neighbors.

We can't expect a task to be completed at the level we would achieve ourselves unless we allow the assignee to take complete ownership of the work. Hovering over their shoulder, correcting their every misstep, and supplying a constant stream of feedback, not only defeats the purpose of delegation, but will undoubtedly be met with resistance and less-than-stellar results.

## 2. Alignment - *Steer towards the average heading of neighbors.*

Conveying a clear description of the work to be completed is required, but that alone is not enough. All assignments must be put into context. Explanation of critical deliverables and outcomes help align the effort with the goals of the organization and provide insight as to how the work will directly affect the rest of the team.

## 3. Cohesion - *Steer towards the average position of neighbors.*

Get everyone on the same page and they all become authors. Organizational goals and objectives must be common knowledge. When everyone on your team is moving in the same direction, delegation simply comes down to availability. Have faith that the other team members will step in to assist as needed.

Alleviating the stress of delegation requires groundwork. Implementing these three principles can provide the necessary structure without losing agility or speed. With some practice and patience, teams become self-sufficient and highly aligned - flying as one.

***Lessons are all around us.***

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