

# Gagnon Associates

## Management & Organizational Consulting

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### A Nine-Point Checklist for Effective Teaming: It Doesn't Just Happen!

By Ray Gagnon (<https://thinkgagnonassociates.com/author/admin>) on December 10, 2014

There's no doubt that teaming is a fact of life in contemporary business. The complexity and cross-functionality of business life require it. But whether you're talking about your executive team or project or task teams, you're dreaming if you think that just *declaring* a group to be a "team" because they've been assembled against a problem or "plugged into" the same "org" chart really makes them a "well-oiled machine."

So what *does* make the difference between just a group of people and an effective, efficient, functioning *team*? Here are nine elements that, when consciously practiced by a management or project group, can help ensure that they are functioning as an integrated, high-performing team.

- 1. Shared Goals and Objectives** The important thing here is not just to "assume." Instead, it's important to be clear and careful in defining these in a *sufficiently collaborative way* that ensures group commitment. Remember the old saw: "People support what they help create."
- 2. Effective Use of Resources** The reason you've assembled this group in the first place is to apply their *collective* talents against a given situation. Therefore, make sure you create and maintain a team atmosphere that allows for and encourages the full participation of every member. No "500-pound gorillas" or "wallflowers" allowed!
- 3. Trust and Conflict Regulation** Reality dictates that conflict among members of a group is inevitable. The point is not to avoid conflict; that's impossible. Instead, you need to ensure that your group has a way of identifying conflict quickly *as it emerges* and resolving it in a manner that maintains good relations while building openness and trust.

**4. Shared Leadership** Members of a group should ask themselves regularly: *Are all team members accepting the shared responsibility to establish team direction and keep the team moving productively toward its goals?* And if not, why not? You wouldn't want your eight-cylinder car to be running on only six cylinders, right? So you don't want your team to be sub-optimizing its skills and talents either.

**5. Control Procedures** An effective team doesn't just "play it by ear." Instead, it monitors and controls its own behavior, devising mechanisms and strategies such as schedules, plans, agendas, designated facilitators, etc., etc., whenever appropriate, to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and high levels of commitment. Again, none of this "just happens."

**6. Communication** With your group in mind, ask yourself this question: *Do members of this group exhibit good listening skills, build on each others' thoughts and provide all members an equal opportunity to contribute ideas?* If your answer is "no" to any part of this question, you need to set about fixing this imbalance in "air time," since you can be sure it *won't* balance out on its own!

**7. Problem-Solving/Decision-Making Process** It is impossible for a group to be effective if, at any given moment, they are not "doing the same thing." Effective teams proceed according to consciously-defined approaches to solving a problem, optimizing a process, making a decision, etc., etc. and make certain that "what we are doing right now" has the active support of the whole team. To a greater or lesser extent, anything short of this creates confusion.

**8. Experimentation/Creativity** This is perhaps the greatest pit-fall of long-established groups – the inability or unwillingness – or both – to think beyond or do something different from "the way we've always done it." Teams that remain effective over time demonstrate a willingness to move beyond established procedures and ways of thinking. They maintain flexibility and an experimental attitude, even opening up to new, untried, sometimes even "strange" ideas. Newer group members can be especially helpful here so long as their "strange, new ways of looking at things" are not stifled by more veteran members of a group.

**9. Ongoing Evaluation** Perhaps nothing is as important or healthy for a management or work-group as periodic self-evaluation. Teams that are open to it regularly set aside time to candidly and honestly identify elements that are hindering their effectiveness as a group. These are often called "process checks." Once done, of course, it's important to go the next step and put in place – always in a collaborative, participative manner – the mechanisms that will remove these impediments to team effectiveness.

**Putting the Nine Points to Work for You** Across more than 25 years of consulting experience (<https://thinkgagnonassociates.com/>), we have helped to charter, facilitate and guide the implementation efforts of literally hundreds of teams (<https://thinkgagnonassociates.com/core-capabilities/ge-work-out>) – many in global, cross-cultural settings – in a wide array of industries and for a wide variety of companies (<https://thinkgagnonassociates.com/clients>). As a result, we readily acknowledge that there can often be a significant obstacle to the implementation of the regimen that's implied by our nine points. Many groups are reluctant and feel "awkward" about the prospect of "talking about ourselves." It's not unusual for so-called "hard-nosed business types," especially, to characterize healthy group self-examination sessions as "soft" or even – heaven forbid! – "touchy-feely."

If this reminds you of the culture of your business or organization, here's a quick tip on how you can still stimulate a conversation about all this in a way that's concrete, objective, anonymous and – best of all! – “business-like.”

Just create a single-page checklist using the nine points above. Use phrases from our definitions to ensure that your group members clearly understand what each point means. Then, after each point and its description, add a numerical, five-point scale, which will reflect the degree to which *your* group fulfills the requirements for each of the nine points: 1 = low; 5 = high.

Next, distribute these checklists to your group members and have them complete them thoughtfully, individually and privately – offline. To keep the process entirely anonymous, they should not sign their names.

Now you can have a trusted member of your group collect them, or, if trust is an issue in your group, you can ask members to simply “deposit” their checklists at a designated, safe place. Then compile the ratings. Presto! With minimum effort you have just implemented an objective vehicle for safely and anonymously surfacing issues that may well have been troubling your team members for some time. And, even more importantly, you've facilitated the acquisition of concrete, unbiased data that can serve as the foundation for an open and collaborative discussion about what's wrong and how to fix it.

Don't look now, but you've just conducted a *bona fide* “team assessment.” Nothing “touchy-feely” about *that* at all! It's pure, “business-like” team productivity!

*Posted in Team Effectiveness (<https://thinkgagnonassociates.com/category/team-effectiveness>)*

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Gagnon Associates

133 Pine Hill Rd

Boxborough, MA 01719 USA

(978) 635-9836 (tel:978-635-9836)

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