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Future Farm Workplaces

The nature of work is changing and those that complete the work are changing too. The future of work is the opportunity to evolve our workforces and workplaces to thrive in this environment.

By Hamish Murray

2019 Nuffield Scholar

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ph: 021 1396 881.

Scholar Contact Details

Name: Hamish Murray

Phone: 0211620717

Email: hamish@bluffstation.co.nz

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Nuffield New Zealand

PO Box 85084

Lincoln 7647

admin@ruralleaders.co.nz

+64 27 431 7575



Executive Summary

Agriculture is awakening to the challenges of an ageing population and those entering the workforce with a new or differing attitude to work and life. That automation and technology is removing much of the mundane and labour-intensive work, outdated work structures and traditional ways of doing things are not providing the fulfilling work experience that is required to attract, train and retain the people required to power our industry. We are faced with the challenge of adapting our practice to meet the needs of those we employ or risk becoming irrelevant as employers and as an industry. I set out looking into what makes workplaces motivating and engaging so that they are providing the best work environments for those involved.

My intention with this report and research is to spark small and subtle shifts in the way a leader or participants in a team operate, that lead to a more fulfilling and enjoyable working experience. Then to direct people to some of the resources that have helped shape my learning. My travel and experience have been an opportunity to look at businesses outside of agriculture, both large and small. I have been able to discover examples of reorganising and operation in industries from computer game development to healthcare and professional sport that address changing values and expectations of today's workforce allowing greater engagement and motivation from those employees.

I have been looking for and have come across great teams who are meeting all the needs of their members and producing great results. I discovered that the most important factor in determining effectiveness is how teams work together. Team members awareness of each other and of the team roles that they fulfill, combined with the group held belief that the environment is safe for interpersonal risk ultimately leads to great trust and dependability illustrated as a mutual accountability.

Reflecting on interviews and notes, four other key elements emerge strongly as significant factors in those successful businesses and teams. Alignment of members on the culture, values and purpose of a business creating shared belief, expectations and responsibility, with the greatest results when real clarity from team members on what that looks, sounds and feels like as actions.

Exposure to the processes, tools and methods used in Design Thinking, Lean and Agile ways of working combine diverse individual thoughts, promotes collaboration and inclusiveness, and operates using a rapid experiment and feedback loops promote fast progress rather than being stifled by the need for consensus and perfection.

Time spent with computer game developers made me aware of the importance of feedback in our lives and especially for providing engaging workplaces where employees have a desire to grow. It highlighted our ability as employers to give feedback is limiting our ability to provide the crucial feedback required to fuel the desire for learning and growth in our employees.

Tied into all the above elements is the requirement for strong leadership from our farm owners and managers. Rather than in the traditional sense of leading from the front, I witnessed the importance



of a shared and supportive style where all members of a team exhibit greater awareness and are able to help each other solve their own problems, handle conflict and monitor performance.

I believe that recognizing the importance of the soft skills in our farm businesses and that learning, teaching and practicing them is crucial in creating those workplaces that are engaging and motivating. This is essential if we as agricultural businesses wish to be able to attract, retain and train people. I believe that small and subtle shifts in each of the areas and strengthening of the connections add like drops to a bucket, to create environments that provide fulfilling work experience for those involved and ultimately happy, healthy and strong communities. This stuff is hard, takes courage to do differently, lead differently and have those courageous conversations.



Foreword

I set out looking at how to attract, train and retain people to Agriculture. A common question being asked by many as it gets harder and harder to find the dedicated and skilled resources to help us run our farming businesses. It used to be high country properties like ours, had a stream of single shepherds lining up to gain experience. The things that were attractive and gave opportunity for people in agriculture in the past seem like the same ones that make our industry unattractive to the next generation in this current environment as we grapple with changing technology, values and aspirations.

As people we often choose to take an outward focus when assessing these challenges, blaming others and those things outside our control. In my position running a farm employing several staff, I have limited influence over the earlier education and training of those we employ so I have chosen to focus on those elements I can have direct impact over and question “how we might create the best and most enjoyable experience for those people we employ, while still get all of the work completed on time, and to a high standard?”

Now and into the future we must think carefully about the environment we create to retain and train our current staff and attract those potential future staff. For me looking to engaged and motivated teams of people working in different ways provided insight into the future of work in agriculture.



Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge Nuffield New Zealand and the Trustess for giving me the chance to take part in this unique and unrivalled experience. It is only with the support of the Trust and Strategic partners that the opportunity is possible, and I am very grateful of the faith they have shown in me.

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Thank you to our team at home, the farm and business has run smoothly in the months I have been away, and they continue to grow, develop and carry on in the time I have been home.

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To my sisters for their support and assistance during the year with our family, and when it came to pull this together, especially Amanda who had the courage to speak up in the beginning and continues to coach me in many of my challenges along the way.

Finally, to Jess for the sacrifices she has made to allow me this opportunity to travel and study. It is only possible because you have taken on those challenges with the courage and resolve that makes you the anchor to my life.



About the Author

I have grown up on a high-country farm, mustering and physical work combined with a large amount of competitive sport. This has taught me how to push my body to its physical limits. Simply, how hard I could run until throwing up. Two years at prestigious UK University reading Economics, pushed me mentally to an academic limit also. The realisation that no matter how much harder I studied I would not pass my exams showed me this breaking point.

I felt able to face most challenges until our business was affected by the 2014/15 Marlborough and North Canterbury drought. Those of you who have been in similar situations will know the feeling. I exhausted myself trying to keep everybody else around me going in what was a challenging time. It was here I reached a third and most significant breaking point where I was depressed. After a conversation with my sister and some reflection I realised there must be a better way to look after myself and those staff we work with!! So began a journey to discover my own values and source of energy, learning to lead myself before I could lead our team.

This has ultimately led me on a search for those important elements in creating and leading motivated and engaged workplaces. I feel human interactions done well are the most rewarding and ultimately belonging as part of family, team or community, is what life is about.





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1. Introduction

The nature of work is changing and those that complete the work are changing too. The future of work is the opportunity to evolve our workforces and workplaces to thrive in this new environment!¹

As an employer of people in our small business, ranging from school leavers to those nearing retirement and everything in between, I am aware of many generational differences that exist between these groups. I have witnessed changes in technology on farm to improve productivity and supply product to markets with growing consumer expectations. I hear of farm businesses, questioning the changes that are occurring and struggling to find enough of the right people to employ on farm or frustrated with staff performance and their ability to retain younger generations.

Agriculture is awakening to the challenges of an ageing population and those entering the workforce with a new or differing attitude to work and life. That automation and technology is removing many of the mundane and labour-intensive work. There is a subtle shift as we are learning about the increasing importance of soft skills, problem solving and critical thinking in our skill set and of those we employ.

Business success has always been about good people and this is increasingly becoming dependant on our ability to understand the social and demographic changes that are occurring and awareness of how to manage those differences, especially when we look to recruit, retain and manage greater diversity in modern agriculture.

Changing Work Force

From 2019 there are more New Zealanders born since 1980 than before it, and those in the younger generational groupings make up more of the workforce than those older². Inherent in every generation is a set of characteristics that are associated with life's stages and they are felt by every group. People act in different ways because of the age and life stage; however, teenagers today are different from the teenagers of the 1950-60's, therefore age and life stage do not account for all differences. Economic, social and political conditions experienced as people grow up all divide the generations. They shape the values and characteristics and group generations together as they experience similar types of education, technologies, major events and cultural trends. This in turn generates differences in their beliefs and behaviour and has an impact on how they approach work and life.

¹ Future of Work February 2019 Sustainable Business Council

² Statistic NZ (Household labour force survey).



As health improves and the cost of living increases, the age people retire is extending, leading to more and more multigenerational teams. Over the last 30 years the employment rate of over 65 has risen from 7% to 24% ³. It is possible for a team to include up to four different generational groupings with vastly different life experiences and motivators for what they want out of their work.

Changing values and circumstances have greatly increased the female participation rate in the official statistic for NZ workforce. The proportion of working age women working has risen from 55% in 1986 to 64% in 2016. This is noticeable in agriculture given the number of female applicants and employees compared with the past.

Increasing labour mobility around the world due to increased ability to travel has seen rising numbers of employers utilise international labour. For example, the large number of Pilipino and Irish working in our dairy industry. The different cultural backgrounds increase complexity and raises the importance of empathy and understanding of those differences. The diagram figure 1 gives a brief visual summary of the key challenges.

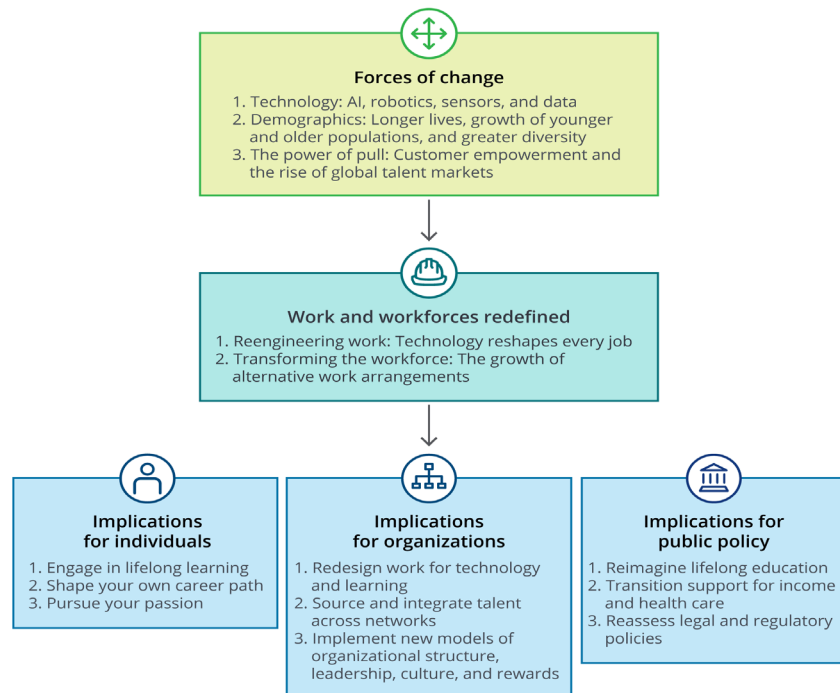
For my grandfather and to a certain extent father, farm employees due to the social norms of the time and manual physically demanding nature of the work, would have been made white men between 15-50 with previous experience in agriculture, either off farms or with strong connections to agriculture.

It is real in our employment situation today that our team could be made up of a number of females, and international recruits with a far greater range in age than previously, drawing from a population with little or no knowledge of Agriculture. to form a multi-dimensional team requiring to be effective completing work that is technical and diverse. Due to this diversity it is a much greater challenge to manage effectively.

³ Statistic NZ (Household labour force survey).



Figure 1. A framework for understanding the future of work



Source: Deloitte analysis.

Deloitte Insights | deloitte.com/insights

Changing Type of Work

Technology is changing the nature of work on farms. Increasing scale of dairy sheds, size of tractors and ability to capture and use information are vastly different than in past years. Growth in technology is moving at lightning speed with robotics finding place in our systems and people and business looking at AI (artificial intelligence) for efficiency. The effect is decreasing the demand for manual and menial labour employed in Agriculture and is changing the structure, increasing demand towards more highly skilled people with the ability think creatively, solve problems and collaborate with others.

Technology has brought the rise of differing jobs, structure or ways to work and ability to work from multiple locations. For example, the platforms like Uber and Lyft that have disrupted the taxi industry allowing people to make or supplement a living and compete with the traditional cab companies. The effect being an increasing demand in alternative work arrangements. Farm work will never get around the location element in the nature of work completed however alternative structures in our farm businesses must recognise the trend and consider where some of these elements that may have a role or the division of tasks differently to meet people needs.



2. Global and New Zealand Context

Significant trends in World Business

My Nuffield experience highlighted that all around us organisations are struggling to motivate and engage staff and employees are questioning what they want out of their work and lives. Gallup workforce engagement surveys ⁴ show that large (over 50%) numbers of the population are not engaged in their work, meaning they are less likely to invest discretionary effort into the business goals or outcomes. Further to this up to a quarter are actively disengaged meaning they are unhappy and unproductive therefore likely to spread negativity to others. We spend a substantial part of our lives working, as a result the quality of our workplace experience is inevitably reflected in the quality of our lives

I have read about, witnessed and had conversations that shaped my thoughts on the outdated structures and old-fashioned principles on which organisations are being run and I saw some that are challenging this as they try to evolve and adapt. From those workplaces that were full of frustration and despair there are some new trends emerging that separate the bold and innovative workplaces from the boring, summarised in the table below.

Table 1 : Significant Trends (adapted from Corporate Rebels)

1. Profit to Purpose and Values - People want to contribute to something that is about more than just themselves.
2. Hierarchical Pyramids to Network of Teams - departments and layers for used to be for simplicity and efficiency but new structures include diverse people and skills managing multidisciplinary business units.
3. Directive Leadership to Supportive Leadership - leadership based on control is moving toward coaching those 'closest to the fire' to make the decisions.
4. Plan and Predict to Experiment and Adapt - as business get more complex, precise predictions are impossible. Experimentation allowing feedback to adjust plans for adaptability is key
5. Rules and control to Freedom and trust - removing bureaucracy as a barrier to engagement and success.
6. Centralised Authority to Distributed Decision Making - with distributed authority and decision-making comes responsibility and accountability.
7. Secrecy to Radical Transparency - trust means better decisions, faster, problems solved sooner, promotes collaboration in and outside the business.
8. Job descriptions to Talents and Mastery - People prefer working on tasks they like; ones that fit their talents and strengths increases motivation and engagement.

⁴ The worldwide employee engagement crisis - Gallup



It is hardly ground-breaking to announce that organisations should reduce bureaucracy, focus on values and purpose, or be more transparent in order to improve aspects of the business. However today where people can access information about anything easily and freely there is a greater demand for flexible and smart ways of working, better work life balance and greater job satisfaction management. Those that are leading are demonstrating brave thinking of how to do things in a different way.

New Zealand Context

Historically our businesses have been places of traditional hierarchical structures and our farmers leaders from the front. Employment was characterised by set job descriptions, work specialisation and directing staff in the hope of trying to maximise efficiency and production. This involved careful planning and control to maintain viable businesses in an unpredictable environment, especially as size and complexity increased, resulting in the decision making concentrated at the centre.

Employment on farm has traditionally been treated as a singular transaction where skills and effort are exchanged for wages or salary. Teams were about selecting the best people in the hope they would combine well and very little if any emphasis placed on how they worked together. High search costs in advertising and the ability to signal and screen for both employers and employees was limited. A signal to the next employer was generally based on length of previous employment and an old schoolwork ethic, so if you got a dud job or employer it was bad luck and tough it out until next time round.

New Zealand agriculture has been built on the idea that if you worked hard, shearing, shepherding, share milking one day you would be able to buy your own farm. The price of land has risen so sharply in the last 40 years that those ideals have all but disappeared and without some help is near impossible. This incentive was enough to hold people to a job or in a situation they didn't enjoy for longer than they would do now. This is no longer the case.

I believe that in today's highly connected environment enabled through technology employees and employer's ability to signal their worth is far greater than in previous years. This connectivity increases competitiveness for the best jobs, raising the stakes for employees and a single bad experience can be transmitted instantly to many more through the right network for those poor employers.

For many the dream of owning their own farm is slipping further away and they are choosing to consider their work/life balance from a different view, focusing on those businesses they can contribute to and have impact with. People with aspirations to grow are far more prepared to take



short term jobs to gain the experience they are looking for and shift if not getting what they want. The result being a more fluid labour market. Business and bosses who focus on employee development and meeting the needs of their team alongside the business aspirations are more likely to have a competitive advantage⁵.

3. Challenge - what happens if we don't adapt?

The one constant in life is change! The nature of work and people are changing, and we are faced with choice. A choice to adapt our practice, evolve and learn to meet the needs of those being employed or risk being left behind struggling to attract and retain adequate people. The cost to industry of the continuing decline in the attractiveness of Agriculture as a career option, further shrinking the talent pool, means we collectively we have a responsibility to each other to evolve.

In a modern era, poor performers risk becoming irrelevant and getting stuck in a cycle of high turnover very quickly. The cost of staff turnover is significant. Some studies estimate between the value is equivalent to 6-9 months of salaried employees⁶. This include not only the financial cost of hiring and training but also the loss of expertise to an organisation.

The alternative and positive side to this is that in a competitive environment, the ability to signal the benefits of being a business with a great reputation are also enhanced!

This challenge left me with an important question to focus on.

How do we create/develop the best environment on farm to attract, train and retain people that drives better engagement, satisfaction and accountability?

Our focus needs to be aiming towards an engaged and motivated workforce that signals to employees and future staff that you are a great place to work and will develop them and their interests.

⁵ Managing talent in the Human Age

⁶ Employee Retention – The Real cost of losing an employee 2019



4. Findings and Discussion

Throughout my travels I visited and interviewed many individuals and teams and was exposed to many great concepts and ideas. I have witnessed engaged and motivated workplaces and successful teams were always at the centre of those businesses. Looking at those teams I could identify three elements leading to their effectiveness and four supporting factors that enhance and contribute to greater success. Individually each are significant topics and have broad and considerable research, therefore I wish to explain them in the context of my own experience.

In the following sections I will introduce the concept of what I have seen and reflected on and outline my insights, introduce an example or a case study when relevant and link that to what small shifts might mean or look like on farm.

4.1 Teams in the Centre

I believe at the heart of any successful organization are great teams. These offer the key to engaging and motivating people in their work as belonging to part of a family or team is essential for human nurturing and development. Any time two or more individual's work together towards a common goal we are engaged in teamwork and this can improve problem solving, motivation and accountability.

We have all experienced what it is like to be part of teams that are functioning well and those that are not! Teamwork is about unity, and unity is a discipline.⁷ It is this discipline around working together that differentiates real teams from those work groups combined and labelled as team. A team is about more than the sum of its parts; it is about individual and mutual accountability⁸.

Looking at successful and enduring teams it has struck me that it matters more how the team works together than who is on the team. Throughout life we are schooled, trained and paid as individuals and little thought is given to the makeup, training and leadership of our teams to improve effectiveness and engagement.

I witnessed highly engaged and effective teams. I believe self-awareness in these teams was what set them apart. They were incredibly aware of their skills and personalities and displayed knowledge and understanding of the other members of their groups. This gave them the ability to operate effectively under pressure. The second factor I thought was important was that they had clear roles and expectations with well-defined goals important for achieving results efficiently. An interesting and surprising element I came to recognize and have since researched further was the safety for members to express themselves, allowing members to bring all of who they are, to their role. When all three are combined, trust and mutual accountability evolved to produce effective teams, proud of their unity and ability to bounce and rise to challenges.

⁷ Elkadeo way

⁸ The Discipline of Teams – Harvard Business Review 1993



Reflecting on the makeup of our farming businesses and teams a lot of the focus goes on selecting the right people for our positions. Attitude is of course a big part of the selection process but from there we rely on the intuition of members to work with each other. I believe that too often members don't have the awareness or knowledge to combine effectively so end up being a collection of individuals filling positions and optimal performance is never reached. Looking to stimulate motivation and engagement within our farming businesses, more emphasis should go on the soft skills and building the capacity for how we work together.

Figure 1. Teams at the Centre, Concentric elements Building Effectiveness and Success



4.1.1 Awareness

The knowledge and understanding of our own personalities and preferences, and the nature of the team members around us is important for good communication and building better relationships. This extends to understanding our strengths and weakness and preferences for learning. The more people become aware of their mindset and behaviors the more they can avoid harmful habits such as dominating conversations, not paying attention to others and imposing their point of view⁹. Awareness helps to overcome blind spots, assumptions and over confidence that hinder the performance of individuals and the team.

⁹ The Power of Self Awareness – how to build effective teams Gustavo Razzetti



“Your own self-realization is the greatest service you can render the world” – Ramana Maharshi

Many will have completed some form of self-awareness assessments. In those experiences we learn something new about ourselves and those around us, giving better understanding of empathy and ourselves for other members. Teams with high self-awareness make better decisions, interact with each other and manage tension more effectively¹⁰.

Time and experience shared together builds this knowledge however it is clear in all the case studies and my experience that conscious effort towards building knowledge and understanding of each other, can help to improve team's effectiveness.

There are multiple methods for the discovery and nurturing of self-awareness. This starts with a real focus on being present, open and honest reflection and feedback for continuous improvement, through to profiling and personalities tests. I aim to focus you on the importance and impacts gained from these efforts and leave you to discover which works best for you own teams. Noting it is ongoing journey and never a static assessment. It is about equipping teams with the tools, skills and time to continue to practice and learn.

Case Study - Super Rugby Franchise – The Crusaders

New Zealand professional rugby team based in Christchurch who have won 10 titles in the 24-year history of super rugby, including three titles in a row on two occasions. The team is renowned for its culture, ability to promote players to the All Blacks and obvious success record. The number of players and coaches who have continued to have a large impact with other teams and countries is also significant illustrating the foundations laid by an impressive organization.

Spending time with the Crusaders players and management in Christchurch on returning to New Zealand I was able to draw many parallels to farm teams. They have clear goals and a vision, use a collaborate processes to engage all members, are big on reflection and feedback, and leadership is about coaching people to solve their own challenges.

Awareness - I was surprised to discover the emphasis they place on understanding each players personalities and learning style, or preferred communication methods and the effort coaches make to ensure they vary the delivery method including aurally, visually and kinesthetically each time knowing different people will pick up and take in the message in slightly different ways. Time devoted to these soft skills was subtle but significant and revisited often. It is so ingrained in their culture people could be heard referring to each other as red, blue or purple dots based on the team understanding of their differing learning styles.

¹⁰ The Power of Self Awareness – how to build effective teams Gustavo Razzetti



In my own experience a facilitated session with our own team, as part of my own journey using the Tetra map profiling tool, created knowledge and growth as members could recognize in themselves how they were more likely to act under pressure, what their strengths and weaknesses might be and how they communicated and related to other members of our team. Realization that each person is a mix of all but have greater tendencies in some areas-built awareness and in the process is building foundations for improving our inter-relationships.

How might you build self-awareness in your team?

4.1.2 Clear Goal, Clear Roles and Clarity of Expectations

Having a clear and worthy goal is the foundation for all team activity and commitment to that goal drives performance. Individual's having clear understanding of their roles and expectations, and ultimately the consequences of their performance, can further enhance their engagement and the team success. Building on the awareness of other members, clear roles and expectations for the team allow people to contribute to what they are good at again driving motivation.

We need more than the typical job description detailing tasks and responsibilities we would usually have on farm. I take those as core to the position people are hired for. It is also about more than the implied responsibilities because of status or hierarchy.

Each team needs access to several differing team behaviours to ensure they are high performing. Like the awareness of personality types, awareness of the team roles that members may fill is important to ensure all are engaged and elements of the team functioning well. We have all been in situations where there are too many bosses or experts and not enough players to get the work done. teams that lack attention to detail, ability to accurately monitor output, fail on completion as too many member get lost in creation of new ideas.

Belbin team roles are one example and for this purpose help me to explain the variations in roles that I have come across. These are illustrated in figure 2. Again, it is the awareness of those team roles and how members fill them to ensure good balance in effective teams that is the important distinction.










When team members strengths, talents and interests are identified and encouraged within a team motivation and engagement increases. This is often a big shift and scary stuff as people are enabled to engage in things outside the core roles defined by their job descriptions. I heard stories of leaders who were real specialists in an area, recognising strength from their members in the chairperson/coordinating role and delegating those parts to ensure the team function was more effective rather than their ego hold those traditional leadership roles.



The correct balance of teams based on behavioural contributions rather than job titles, allows self-aware teams to adapt their behaviours according to situation and business needs¹¹.

What are the strengths and talents that make up your team? where are their gaps? How might you best fill those?

Figure 2. Example of Belbin Roles

	Team role	Strengths	Allowable weaknesses
Action oriented roles	 Shaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure The drive and courage to overcome obstacles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prone to provocation Offends people's feelings
	 Implementer (company worker)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient Turns ideas into practical actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Somewhat inflexible Slow to respond to new possibilities
	 Completer finisher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Painstaking, conscientious, anxious Searches out errors and omissions Delivers on time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclined to worry unduly Reluctant to delegate
People oriented roles	 Co-ordinator (Chairman)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mature, confident, a good chairperson Clarifies goals, promotes decision-making, delegates well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can often be seen as manipulative Off loads personal work
	 Teamworker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic Listens, builds, averts friction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indecisive in crunch situations
	 Resource investigator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative Explores opportunities Develops contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over-optimistic Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed
Cerebral roles	 Plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative, imaginative, unorthodox Solves difficult problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignores incidentals Too pre-occupied to communicate effectively
	 Monitor evaluator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sober, strategic and discerning Sees all options Judges accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lacks drive and ability to inspire others
	 Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single-minded, selfstarting, dedicated Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributes only on a narrow front Dwells on technicalities

Case Study: Dutch Health Care Provider – Buurtzorg

Buurtzorg is a company that has attracted attention, establishing a different model for the delivery of low-cost care through independent nurse teams. Established in 2006 by Jos de Blok and a small group of health care professionals who were dissatisfied by the traditional care model where bureaucracy and red tape limited work and took away from the best interest of employee and patient. They have grown a company of approximately 14000 care workers in over 1000 self-governing teams supported by a regional coach and a head office of only 50.

In Utrecht, Netherlands, in September I met with one of these teams and they described their work and care of patients. I witnessed a system that is delivering all the care a patient needs at a saving to the Dutch health system of approximately 40% and their company has been voted best employer 4 of the last 5 years.

¹¹ Why use Belbin Team Roles? - Belbin



Clear Roles and Expectations - Small self-managing nurse led teams of 10-12, each with a client list of 50-60 patients in a neighborhood have a clear goal of keeping patients in their homes for as long is possible. These teams are a great example operating autonomously with support from coaches or HQ. They are responsible for their own performance. Within these teams the Nurses decide what needs to be done, and by whom which includes anything beyond their core nursing roles. Over and above their professional roles hired for, team members fill one of six other roles to coordinate and benefit their teams. These range from

- *Housekeeper - organises facilities and regularly updates team on expenses and budgets*
- *Informer - monitors team productivity, work covered and finances*
- *Developer - cares for collaboration within and between teams, distributes knowledge across entire team*
- *Planner - take care of time commitments, ensures alignment with patients and advise of any upcoming plans and changes*
- *Team Player - Cares for team dynamics, encourage relationships with focus on goals of the team and organisation*
- *Mentor – Responsible for new members, their introduction, on boarding and coaching*

My experience completing these types of assessment has shown me that I have a strong tendency towards teamwork. I help groups to bond together and fit anywhere to complete work required on behalf of the team. I am cooperative, perceptive but can be indecisive in crunch situations. I am most like the team player in the Buurtzorg case study and must work harder at the housekeeping and informer role. Being aware of other roles and who in our team has natural tendencies to fill those allows us to shuffle responsibility and empower members to do more of the things they like doing.



Figure 3. Bluff Station Team Doing Team Roles and Awareness Session



4.1.3 Wholeness and Safety

If the teams are the heart of a successful business, then I have discovered that wholeness and psychological safety of its members is the health of the heart.

Organization behavioral scientist Amy Edmondson first termed psychological safety as the shared belief held by all members of a team that the environment is safe for personal risk. It is the sense that the group will not embarrass, reject or punish them for speaking up. It requires trust, mutual respect and allows members to be comfortable being themselves.

Researchers at Google studying the effectiveness of teams across their multiple business units found it as the single greatest determining factor for effectiveness in how people worked together¹².

Feelings of safety are different for individual members but the ability for a person to bring their whole self to contribute to the team's goals without fear, means they are willing to ask questions, share their ideas and voice concerns if something isn't right.

We have all been in situations where early in team meetings, conscious of our status as an outsider, we have kept quiet about an idea, only to later regret not mentioning it.

Wholeness refers to bringing the complete or whole self to the role as opposed to traditional workplaces that encouraged people to show up as their professional self only bringing the parts fit for work. Organizations feared that if people were to bring all their moods, quirks and weekend clothes, things would dissolve in a mess. Employees feared exposing themselves to criticism or ridicule and believed it was much better to be safe behind a professional mask¹³.

Why is it important?

Subtle and might seem like an exaggeration, but when we experience stress or conflict at work it triggers our fight/defend or flee/avoid responses. Our ability to think strategically disappears and shifts our behavior from reasonable and rational to primal and reactive.

For leaders it is particularly important to be aware of triggers like unrealistic deadlines or unfair expectations, lack of respect, not being heard, and being unappreciated. It is the response to these sorts of things that determine how safe other members of the team feel. It needs to be consistent and unanimous for true effectiveness.

Example: Consider the culture of a farm team where an older established member who is a charismatic person with plenty of experience is chipping away at younger members as they work. To

¹² Rework – Google study of Teams Effectiveness

¹³ Reinventing Organizations - F Laloux



most it seems like good light-hearted fun as everyone needs to be able to laugh at themselves however this behaviour reduces their contribution and motivation. Consider the effect when trying to create an enjoyable and engaging environment and get the best contribution from all.

Team Leaders need to take responsibility for explaining, encouraging and demonstrating the behaviours they expect, but it is not their responsibility alone. It is equally important for every member of the team to be aware, be curious, ask for feedback and be open to mistakes when they happen.

Words are noise, group performance depends on behaviour that communicate one powerful overarching idea: We are safe and connected – Daniel Coyle, in the Culture Code

I believe that psychological safety is the most important aspect in team effectiveness and that it is so difficult to describe or put value on is because when someone fails to speak up it is invisible. This makes it incredibly difficult to provide real time course correction.

Psychological safety is often confused with trust. The distinction is that trust is the belief one person has about another, whereas safety focuses on how group members think they are viewed by others in the group.

Benefits for Team

The benefits for teams who can foster an environment where the group held belief is that it is safe to speak up, include are greater employee engagement, mental health and reduced¹⁴. Further benefits are illustrated in the table below.

Table 2. Five Benefits of Psychological Safety (adapted from Halo Psychology)

1. Better levels of communication, sharing of knowledge and level of engagement
2. More openness to learning, including learning from mistakes
3. Greater performance with more creativity and innovation
4. Positive attitudes including commitment to team
5. Increase levels of initiative, such as identifying ways to work around limiting factors

¹⁴ The importance of Psychological Safety – A Edmondson



Psychological Safety vs Accountability

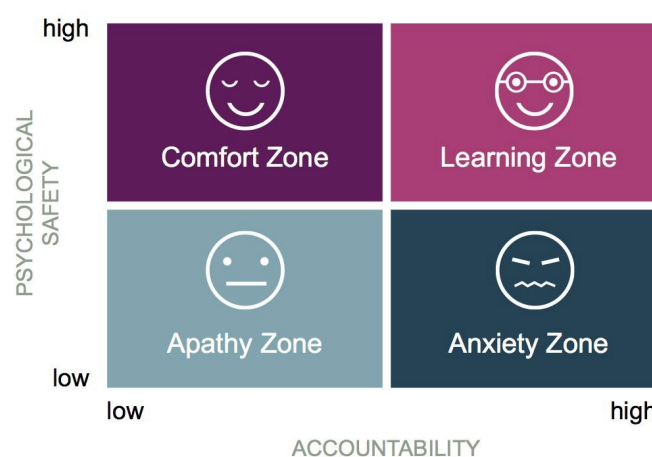
Holding people accountable is essential for getting the best from people but without psychological safety it can create an environment that is stressful and causes anxiety. On the positive side, safe environments make it easier for concerns to be raised and question the status quo, but without accountability it can result in people feeling too comfortable, which can lead to poor performance and lack of motivation.

The balance between safety and accountability I believe is key to engaging and motivated environments and is illustrated in figure 3. When both psychological safety and accountability are low, people show up to work but their minds are elsewhere. These people chose self-preservation over any hard work. In a safe place without accountability people are too comfortable with-out being challenged, leading to little innovation or growth, nor engagement.

The situation common in many farm workplaces is where high standards are expected but safety low. Here both work quality and employees suffer from the invisible silence. I believe too often good management is confused with setting high standards resulting in anxiety.

If farm businesses get it right and the situation where both standards and psychological safety are high, a learning zone prevails where people can speak up, raise concerns, report mistakes and suggest ideas and in the process collaborate and learn from each other.

Figure 3. Importance of Psychological Safety – A Edmondson



The optimal zone is the learning one. How often in our farm teams do we fall into any of the other three?



4.1.4 Trust and Dependability

Building trust and meaningful relationships are the result of a combination of the previous steps and ultimately lead onto dependability and mutual accountability in teams. When members are reliable in doing what they say they will do and keep themselves and others accountable, great results and reward occur, and satisfaction from achieving the desired goal is the highest priority. This is often seen when members go the extra mile for others to make every body's lives easier. The result of mutual accountability from the team rather than accountability between individuals.

The Crusaders choose from the same talent pool as the four other super rugby franchises, however not all the success comes from choosing the best players. The environment and culture created by the Crusaders fosters and develops players and coaches and is significant in their success. Ultimately that trust and dependability manifest itself in belief and going above and beyond for each other in those crucial moments, which that mean winning games and their impressive record.

Self-managing teams such as those illustrated in the Buurtzorg example are the result of absolute trust and accountability and even more remarkable in the health industry where hierarchy and control are so prevalent. Team members display incredible accountability to each other and patients on the back of member awareness, clear goals and expectations, psychological safety and are the reason they have been voted best Dutch employer four times.

4.2 Culture, Values and Purpose

Culture is the term used to describe the behavior and norms found in a team or society, acting as a guideline for the expectations of a group. Simply put, being the way things are done around here¹⁵! It is incredibly difficult to describe by those who have it, and equally hard to define by those who are searching for it! In teams it is often enabled by a common set of symbols or words that are values used to generate behavior.

Purpose, being the intention and commitment to action can act in the same way. Consumers are proven to pay extra for product and services from companies that are committed to positive social and environmental impact¹⁶, and people look to work for organizations they can relate to and can positively influence the things they support.

Culture, values and purpose are significant in shaping the success of teams as when aligned, act to reinforce expectations and the way of interacting, brings people to a common place and provides a sense of direction. Positive and engaging workplaces act in a self-fulfilling way to attract

¹⁵ "That the way we do things around here" – and Overview of Organizational Culture

¹⁶ Neilson report



likeminded people who believe in the same things, however, are equally destructive when negative behavior can exist.

Looking at successful teams and businesses visited who had a strong culture, lived and embedded their values in their actions and the employees felt they were contributing to something that had real purpose and could identify with. They provided very strong guidelines and expectations for members and reinforced those team roles.

Case Study: American Outdoor Retailer – Patagonia

Patagonia is an American clothing company who market and sell active wear and outdoor equipment. Founded by iconic adventurer Yvon Chouinard in 1973 who wrote the book “let my people go surfing”. The company is well known for their stance on many environmental issues and their innovative approaches to family and maternity leave.

I met with their staff in Ventura, California in October of last year and it was obvious all were outdoor fanatics from mountain climbers to snowboarders. I saw and heard two powerful examples that helped me understand why employees truly live the culture and essence of what it means to work with Patagonia.

Purpose, Culture and Values -The ability of a Patagonia to walk their talk regarding their purpose and values for a number of years has really embedded the sense of unity and belonging evident when visiting and I got a sense from all those I spoke to of their passion and belief behind what the company has and is achieving. Seeing parents meet their children for morning tea at the purpose-built childcare facility begun 33 years ago out of necessity to support families has resulted in almost 100% of mothers returning to work for the company. Dumping their most profitable product line in the switch from conventional to organic cotton in 1994 and most recently a story told by staff of the Black Friday sales, where on the suggestion of a team member, they donated their entire sales to grass roots not for profit organizations fighting to protect the environment.

Leadership – The story behind the Black Friday suggestion was made by an employee as an idea and was forwarded on to the CEO who made the decision and actioned the call within 24 hours. It is the kind legendary stuff that employees will talk about for years to come and illustrates both leadership modeling the way and psychological safety to suggest such ideas.

Purpose and values are real buzzwords in the corporate world, and many spend time creating fancy mission statements and values to develop a high-performance culture. However, they seem to miss the point by not walking the talk. The subtle difference between organizations doing seemingly the same thing and getting different results is the time taken to get alignment on what those agreed things look, sound and feel like.



As farmers we have an incredible drive, passion and purpose for what we do, but find that difficult to explain. The work ethic has been unrivaled, and values shared in most rural communities the best of what humanity has to offer. However, as our workforce changes and becomes more diverse we need to stop assuming those values are shared by those around us. It is important to take time to share our values and purpose “our why” with those around us. To extract further value, we must take the further step of describing what it is, this is important to turn those values into behavior. This is getting descriptive on what they look, sound and feel like to achieve real alignment. Repeating that process often enough as new members join is a further step and the key to embedding a strong culture. Making hiring decisions, rewarding staff employees for displaying those values and making them part of everyday decisions further reinforces the culture and values.

What do your values look, sound and feel like as actions? What are they for your team?

4.3 Collaboration and Continuous Improvement Processes

A process is a set of repeated or periodic activities that relate to produce a result. They are the patterns and methods for creating action and are usually designed for efficiency. Thinking about the processes we use on farm to plan; organize and manage complicated farm businesses I reflect that the knowledge is often held centrally, and a directive style of assigning tasks prevails. Very understandable as the knowledge has been hard earned by farmers who have accumulated considerable experience over time but in a world where people are taught to solve their own problems and information is freely available the traditional approach does little to engage and promote employees.

Workplaces visited had taken an intentional approach to using process in a way to encourage collaboration and continuous improvement, allowing greater autonomy and ownership for the results. The clear focus of these processes was around understanding the problem at hand with a real focus of input from all to ensure the right question was being solved in the first place. It was followed with a rapid cycle of experiment, gather relevant information and feedback and improve before repeating again. Members all understood their roles and they were often facilitated by members that understood their role in coaching to coordinate the output.

Case Study: Silicon Valley Startups, Tech Companies and Game Developers – Lyft, Square, IDEO, Granular, Google

Lyft- 2nd largest ridesharing company after Uber based in San Francisco

Square – Tech startup company offering mobile payment and financial services, developing software and devices for small businesses. Now employing 3000 employees and valued at over 6 b

IDEO – International design and consulting firm using design thinking approach to create product, environments and experiences.



Granular – agricultural software development company. Providing software to help farmers track their inventory, costs, inputs to help maximize productivity and return. Founded in 2009 and half share purchased by Monsanto in 2014. (Large scale American version of farm IQ)
Google -American multinational technology company specializing in internet related services and product and home of the most visited website in the world google.com.

Spending time with design firms, tech companies and startups while in the USA I was made aware of several processes and tools used to tackle the complex and difficult problems faced within their businesses. I gained insight into three different processes for development and the culture that goes with innovation in these businesses.

- *Design thinking - the framework for how to explore and solve problems.*
- *Lean - a process for testing beliefs and learning the way to better outcomes*
- *Agile a philosophy for how to adapt to changing systems with software.*

All start with understanding the need and reframing to put humans at the center, then use the power of the group to collaborate and solve for solutions. Important in all processes was the uncertainty. With no known answers the methods involved short work cycle, smaller bites and rapid experimenting striving for continuous improvement. Always balancing the healthy constraint between being perfect and making progress. The faster feedback can rerouted back into the process, then faster changes and moves made to improve the result.

Our agricultural businesses are faced with uncertain and complicated physical, environmental, financial challenges that are constantly changing. We have clear outcomes and are generally sure on how to get their however when aiming to build organizations that are more engaged and effective it requires giving teams the tools and processes to be facilitated to work together. Being collaborative drives innovation and engagement and with the rapid experimentation mindset information can be fed back into the team to improve.

It is a common misconception that those processes designed for engagement, allowing the collection of a far greater diversity of ideas are also for designed for consensus therefore slow and cumbersome. I have discovered this is not the case. To be able to operate in such a way effectively and use such processes the team must be aware of themselves and others, understand their roles and have an understanding the team in safe for interpersonal risk. Reinforcing those points of discussion we have already covered.

What is your style? How could different processes encourage engagement with your team?



4.4 Feedback

Feedback is simply observations and suggestions we have on someone else's behavior or actions to guide or improve outcomes. Even mentioning this topic makes many feel uncomfortable as it invokes a negative response! It is difficult, as you can never control another person's reaction. Emotions are involved and emotion is hard!

Whether we choose to verbalize it or not feedback is happening constantly. A moment in time, a simple shrug of shoulders, eye contact, a smile. Or the other end of the scale a formal conversation in an annual performance review. Done well, feedback helps people to grow and stimulates performance. Inherently we all want to do better, be better and therefore feedback is crucial helping us to do that. Our brains are hardwired to seek feedback helping to see what the next step might be.

The importance of feedback was something ingrained in me from my time playing sport. However, I stumbled again on the concept when doing a coach approach course four years ago. It was a real lightbulb moment for me back then and so it was something I was naturally interested in. I thought that our ability to provide feedback and create an environment where people are open willing to receive and give feedback was important however the business I saw, and the conversation had on this topic allowed me to dive deeper.

Case Study: Video and Computer Game developers

Kongregate is an American video game publisher and web gaming portal. Their web portal features over 110,000 online games and 30+ mobile games available to the public, while also publishing games for PC and console.

Time spent with game developers and those working Tech companies in the USA highlighted the importance of designing the right environment to keep players engaged or even in some cases addicted. They sought to create an experience with a worthy challenge offering multiple levels to match players skills and ability. Through constant positive and negative feedback players have the opportunity to navigate their own paths. This is a multimillion-dollar industry with matching research and development in engaging players and as business owners we can adapt some of their ideas. The research that sits behind some of our most popular social media websites and the clever ways we are being hooked in, through constant notifications, constant feedback is fascinating.

Reflection during the down moments of my travels highlighted how instantaneous feedback in the world has become. We are wired to seek it and multimillion-dollar businesses have been built on this factor alone.



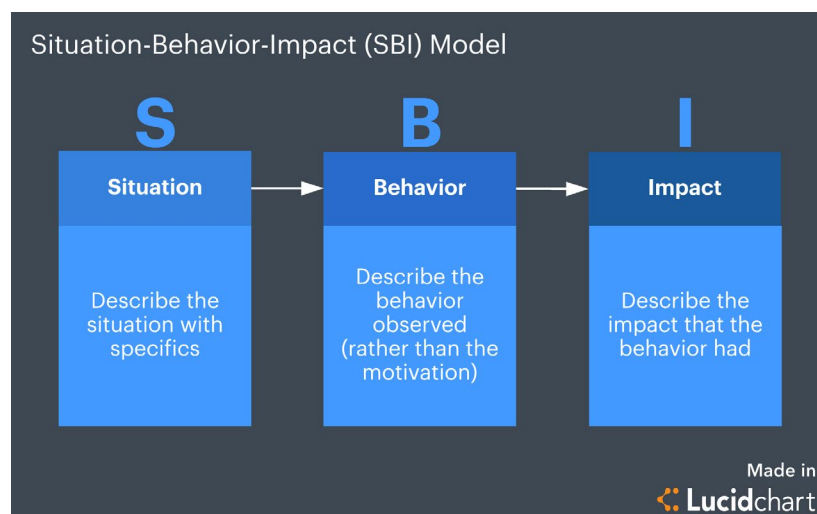
I believe that feedback is crucial for improving performance, but appropriate and constructive feedback is hard to give. We have all experienced examples when it was provided but it didn't land well doing more harm than good. The fight or flight emotions kick in and the learning opportunity is missed. The deemed risk of our well-intentioned feedback not being delivered or received well means we are often reluctant to give it at all. Sometimes we allow it to build to a point where emotion takes over. Leaving it till this state is a sure way to hijack the best intentions for what could be a learning opportunity.

Traditionally farming businesses and their leaders are not good at feedback. Yet the trend of feedback and its importance was reinforced time and time again over my travels. I am convinced that feedback is critical for motivation and engagement. A real gap exists in our workplaces and teams and opportunity presents itself. Done well it can be the difference between the disengaged and engaged.

Does constructive regular feedback happen in your workplace? As a team member or team leader what feedback do you give or receive? How receptive are you to feedback - positive and negative?

I have seen the affect it has had in my own life, family and farming business by practicing the simple technique check, ask, share intention then provide specific observations and describe the impact. This is shown in a basic diagram in Figure 4. Feedback is one area that I believe everyone can make a subtle two-degree shift. It doesn't cost anything just simply involves stoping pausing and thinking about the feedback intention, seeking permission to give it, then delivering your message so it lands well.

Figure 4. Simple Feedback Model





4.5 Leadership

Leadership plays a critical role in all of the above topics and discussion. By Leadership I am talking about the skill and ability of an individual or organization to guide or influence others in achieving a common goal. It is a large, diverse and well-studied topic so rather than discuss leadership I will outline what I have seen in progressive and engaged teams.

A common trend of the successful and engaged workplaces I saw was the idea that everyone steps up and is responsible for leading the team and themselves. This style of supportive leadership enabled the members to coach each other and to solve their own problems. This intentional approach by the teams I observed allowed them to measure their own performance, handle conflict, give feedback and effectively distribute work. The result connected and positive teams.

Through further reading and reflection, I tried to narrow this leadership element as I believe it is important in creating farming teams and thriving workplaces of the future. Thinking about the historical command and control leadership styles from owners and managers I believe that farmers are leaders, leaders of their families, employees, communities however they do so with very little training and tools. Typically, our leadership style is directive, doing all the thinking before arriving to work in the morning or that meeting at the community centre. Instructions are passed down through a chain of command or hierarchy and people are expected to follow. Generally, the leadership has large amounts of experience, intuition and gets value from being the decision maker and that is formalized in management.

This leadership style has worked well in many situations and still absolutely has a place, but I think we are seeing a subtle shift in what people want from their leaders and are responding positively to a coaching style. I challenge us to think about tweaking this 'control and command' leadership style as I believe it often neglects the wisdom of the crowd and disengages those in lower positions.

The two-degree shift is moving from a command role to more often a coaching one. Putting our egos aside, refraining from solving everyone's problems and listening to the conversations around us. I believe that coaching in our workplaces and teams is one of the most under valued skills. When done well it has a significant effect on engaging employees and in the process creates less problems as we learn to solve our own problems.

The future lies in mastering coaching and for these coaching conversations to become part of our everyday lives, teams and workplaces. Imagine a place where it was normal for us to coach our teams and them to have enough skills and the tools to coach each other.



5. Conclusions

I began looking into how to create and develop the best environment on farm to attract, train and retain people that better drives engagement, satisfaction and accountability. In the process I have come across five key elements, teams, culture and values, processes, feedback and leadership and conclude that small and subtle shifts in what we do in each of these areas will combine to produce a better environment for those involved in our farm businesses.

Teams are the center of all our farm businesses, but what distinguishes those truly effective teams from working groups is the way that they work together. Teams that have high levels of self awareness and empathy, clear roles and expectations around what they bring to the team and a safe environment to truly express themselves are more effective and fulfilling. They have mutual accountability that sets them apart achieving great results and ultimately satisfying the needs of members.

Culture values and purpose are important however until alignment of what those mean with clear understanding of what they look sound and feel like distinguish those successful teams from others. When a positive culture is achieved it act as powerful way to reinforce behavior and expectations that attracts likeminded people.

Processes are the ways that teams are facilitated to work together. Examples in design, software development and lean manufacturing highlight that in constantly changing environments such as our farm businesses it is better to focus on those processes that allow us to adapt and continuously improve. Using the strengths and diversity of the team with a focus on short work cycles and progress does not mean that collaboration is about consensus but more of harvesting team members input to gain motivation and engagement.

Feedback for continuous improvement is as important in our farming businesses as it in in our own growth and that of our team members. I encourage and hope we can get as good at giving feedback as we can at measuring pasture growth rates or condition scores. That it becomes part of daily conversations and is viewed as an opportunity for learning and growth, and that people and their well being become the first agenda item for any catchups rather than the last.

Leadership we know is crucial in creating the best environments but the most subtle shift of our owners and business managers towards more of a coaching style will have the greatest impact. As employees are given the tool and encouragement to solve their own problems, they increase their motivation and engagement.



Recommendations – Call to action

As I reflect on my own journey and desire to learn about engaging and motivating workplaces. I have read and listened to all difference types of media, had fascinating conversations with people that have both inspired and overwhelmed me. To anchor me back to what is important and focus my thoughts I kept coming back to my intention. Too inspire, spark interest and encourage leaders and participant in teams to make subtle shift in the way they lead and contribute to their workplaces.

People are hard, we are emotionally driven but the rewards are great and fulfilling if teams of people work together effectively. It takes courage to try new things, courage to let go of our ego and lead differently and have courageous conversations. Ultimately each must discover what are the things that work for you as it is each to their own journey of discovery

With this is mind this call to action section is important as hopefully I have motivated you to take one step, change one thing, test, fail and try again! Below is a small number of links, by no means conclusive but ideas to get you started!

1. Try doing a coaching course – Taking a coaching approach to leadership has a longer a greater impact as it creates employee learning through creating awareness, responsibility and self-belief. Coaching has a real focus on questioning and discovery rather than telling. (I completed a course through Coach Approach some years ago and it has been the foundation for changing my thinking)
2. Building self-awareness amongst team members and awareness for the roles of team members – There are many ways and but these two provide an introduction
Introduction to TetraMap - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAXcQaGm3Wg>
Introduction to Belbin Team Roles - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMesDq_rNOw
3. Read about re:Work from Google – Practices, research and ideas from Google that help you put people first in our organisations, specifically the element of Team effectiveness
<https://rework.withgoogle.com/subjects/teams/>
4. Read this book “A More Beautiful Question” – The power of inquiry to spark breakthrough ideas. This is a book by Warren Berger who suggests our most underappreciated tool is our ability to question and that we as adult need to relearn the art!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dey1Rm5gUxw>
5. Watch this short clip “Turn this ship around” taken from a book by David Marquet who was a submarine Captain and is all about leadership. His thoughts are all about embedding greatness in the people and practices of a organisation and decoupling that from the personality of the leader. Here is a short video showing some of the main ideas.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqmdLcyES_Q



6. Watch this short animation by RSA about Daniel Pinks book “Drive” the surprising truth about what motivates us. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6XAPnuFjJc>
7. Follow The Corporate Rebels – Two guys from the Netherlands who are on a mission to make work more fun. They are visiting companies around the world doing things differently and provide many ideas and thoughts on significant trend in changing business. <https://corporate-rebels.com/>

Recommendations from an Industry Perspective

It starts with looking at ourselves and the environments we create

I believe that Agriculture as an industry and farmers as the owners and managers of our farming businesses need to do more to attract, train and retain people to address the perception and decline of available labour. People are always going to be essential in our business and therefore we must do more to consider the changes happening and focus on how we can create the most enjoyable and fulfilling workplaces. This starts with looking at ourselves and the environment we create.

Focus on the soft skills (awareness, team roles, questioning, psychological safety)

It is my recommendation that industry take the opportunity to focus framers and industry leaders on those soft skills through specific and focussed training. Everybody wants them but nobody spends time working on them and they are essential that in the current employment environment.

Extend this to farm teams

Personal development in these areas is often restricted to leadership, therefore programs that help and allow farm teams to learn together becoming self-aware, team aware and focusses them on how they can more effectively work together will have a significant impact for those businesses that choose to make it a priority.



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