Happy and Healthy at Work

Building a Successful Recognised Seasonal Employer Team

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Executive Summary

Labour and its shortage remain a critical issue that needs addressing, with the growth of horticulture predicted, coupled with on-orchard automation looking closer to 2030. With low unemployment in New Zealand, engaging the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workforce is vital to remaining successful as an industry.

The purpose of this report is to understand and provide recommendations for the key attributes of a successful team within the seasonal RSE workforce, focusing on the kiwifruit industry. The methodology includes a literature review on the characteristics of a seasonal workforce and breaking down what a successful team looks like, followed by semi-structured interviews with ten orchard owners and pastoral care managers to gain insights from their experience with RSE teams. Themes were generated through thematic analysis to provide conclusions and recommendations.

Key findings

A family culture with a village mentality is key to the success of an RSE team and results in a team that is both happy and healthy at work. Team building and a homely living environment add to this. RSE employees' purpose of making money to send home to their families, needs to be kept front of mind.

The RSE team needs to be well-formed with the right mix of skills, experience, and personalities with a clear and well-understood leadership structure. The team leader must be trusted and respected, creating productivity and success. Peer mentoring also adds to team success with team members supporting and encouraging one another.

The mindset of continuous improvement is essential to the success of the RSE team. Highly engaged RSE employees need development opportunities beyond their day-to-day tasks. The relationship is symbiotic, with New Zealand employers needing to be willing to learn more about the values and culture of the Pacific Islands. All parties working together need to have a strong cultural understanding of similarities and differences, which improves team performance. Planning for continuity and succession is vital.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to orchardists looking to build a successful RSE team:

- Develop a family culture, cultivating the village mentality. This is developed through having an inclusive living environment and creating a home away from home by their New Zealand employers.
- Ensure all permanent employees have a good understanding of the similarities and differences of the Pacific Islander culture. This can be developed through developing a cultural training programme for all permanent staff.
- Ensure RSE employees understand their purpose and motivation for being in New Zealand which is sending money home to their families. Checking in on this regularly to keep them reminded of their purpose is important to retain engagement.
- Put in place an RSE team leader that is trusted and well-respected.
- Create a culture of empowerment amongst the team to allow peer mentoring across team members.
- Put in place regular team-building activities and be in regular communication with the RSE team.
- The New Zealand employer needs to have a mindset of continuity and succession. The key to this is building a strong referral system.

- Ensure RSE employees have access to development opportunities. The main provider of this is Vakameasina.
- Be open to learning about the values and culture of the Pacific Islands.

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Horticultural exports for New Zealand (NZ) are at an all-time high; in 2021 they were a record $6.68 billion and are expected to increase to $7.3b by June 2023 (Aitken & Warrington, 2021). The largest contributor to horticulture exports is the kiwifruit industry, making up $2.7 billion in exports in 2021 (Aitken & Warrington, 2021). Future growth of kiwifruit is strong with its exporter, Zespri, predicting an increase in the supply of class 1 fruit from 176 million trays in 2020/21 to 238 million trays in 2026/27 (Zespri Group Limited, 2022).

The 2022/23 season has faced high fruit losses, estimated to be around $400-500m due to fruit quality issues with the review still undergoing (Uys, 2022). Labour supply issues are one of the probable causes of these losses and the impact on future growth is unknown at this stage (Uys, 2022). The growth goals of horticulture will be challenged by the labour and quality issues currently being faced by the industry.

With this aspired increase in supply comes an increased demand for industry-supporting functions. The main pain point at present is the shortage of labour at both the orchard and packhouse levels. With the lofty growth goals of the kiwifruit industry, demand for labour is predicted to increase, requiring 1000 additional employees a year (Cameron, 2021).

Automation and robotics on orchards are progressing through development however commercial use of robotics on orchards looks to be closer to 2030 (Proudfoot, Love, & Watene, 2022). Research from Horticulture NZ shows that while automation will take some of the pressure of labour demands, it will not impact the total workforce size. Instead, there will be a change in skill needs and there will still be an on-orchard demand for labour. This research indicates that some of the seasonal roles may not be automated by 2031 or 2041 making the seasonal workforce demand still prevalent (Horticulture NZ, 2021).

Vital to the success of the horticultural industry is a productive and engaged workforce, with the right amount of people and skills. This report is focused on the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workforce, investigating what makes a successful RSE team, with a focus on the kiwifruit industry. Findings from this report will allow orchardists, particularly those with an RSE workforce, to have a better understanding of what it takes to build an engaged seasonal team.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this report is to understand the attributes of a successful team within the seasonal RSE workforce, focusing on the kiwifruit industry.

The objectives are:

- To understand the characteristics of a seasonal workforce
- To understand the drivers of a successful team
- To provide recommendations for the key factors that result in a successful RSE team

The lens of this report is from the perspective of the orchardist.

Methodology

A literature review was undertaken to understand the characteristics of a seasonal workforce, to define a successful team, how to build a successful team as well as research the importance of leadership and culture on team success.

Following this, qualitative semi-structured interviews were undertaken with ten orchardists and pastoral care managers who are all involved in the employment of RSE staff. Nine of these interviews were with people involved in the kiwifruit industry and one involved in the stone fruit industry. Five of the interviewees were orchard owners heavily involved with their RSE workforce, with two also carrying the role of pastoral care manager and the remaining five interviewees were pastoral care managers. The variety of interviewees across different orchard operations resulted in a broader snapshot of the processes and trends emerging from different operations. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of what building a successful RSE team looks like in reality.

Thematic analysis was used to derive key themes from the qualitative research undertaken. I used the thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). They defined thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within data and outlined a six-step process to ensure the findings are more accurate (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes were extracted and analysed to draw conclusions and recommendations.

Limitations

The following limitations of this project and therefore the opportunities for future research have been identified:

- Research has been focused on from the orchard perspective and the perspective of the packhouse was outside the scope of this report.
- Recruitment in the Pacific Islands came up in the interviews and is briefly mentioned, however, due to the time frame was unable to delve deeper. This is a future research opportunity.
- The difference in culture between the different islands (e.g., Samoa and Vanuatu) was touched on in interviews, however again was outside the scope.

Literature review

Characteristics of seasonal workforce

Part of determining the attributes of a successful team was developing an understanding of the unique attributes of the seasonal workforce.

Seasonal nature

The kiwifruit industry has a high seasonal component due to the nature of the plant production cycle. This flows onto a seasonality within the labour requirements, with differing demands throughout the year, as demonstrated by figure 1 below. This seasonal demand needs to be managed and planned accordingly to achieve desired production levels.
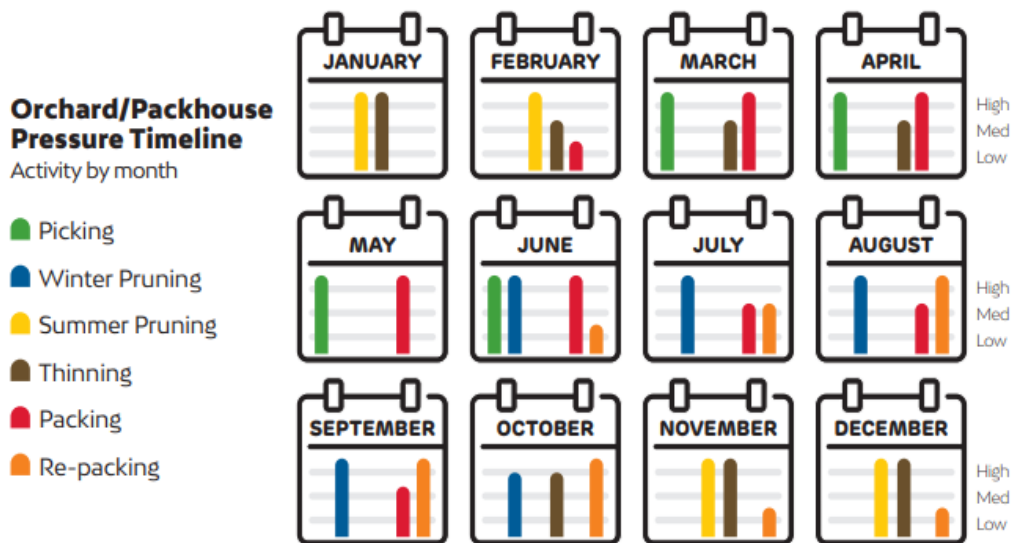
Figure 1: Orchard/Packhouse Pressure Timeline (NZKGI, 2020)

Seasonal work in the kiwifruit industry is highly influenced by weather and production demands. Due to the perishable nature of kiwifruit, there is a small window once the fruit is mature before it needs to be off the vines. During these small window periods, long hours are often required of those working within the industry.

Skills required

The common perception of seasonal work is that it is uncomplicated and repetitive by nature, however, it is demanding physically. Conversely, literature from the kiwifruit industry demonstrates there is a variety of complexity in some tasks required of seasonal workers, where experience and skill are essential (Beentjes & Reid, 2006). An example of this is pruning kiwifruit vines. The vine must be cut back to the right point, as over-pruning can have a detrimental impact on the future yield of the crop.

Good foundation skills are crucial for productivity and success. Foundation skills can be defined as literacy, language, and numeracy skills (Beentjes & Reid, 2006). Employees rely on these skills to perform most elements of their roles. When an employee is low in foundation skills, then productivity levels suffer (Beentjes & Reid, 2006). Employees within this workforce have differing motivational levels. This can make it difficult to train employees and promote productivity. As the workforce has grown, there is now a higher need for communication and teamwork.

The seasonal workforce is extremely diverse with a variety of different demographics as demonstrated by figure 2 below. The main group employed within the seasonal workforce is New Zealanders. A limitation of this data is it was collected in 2020, which was amid the pandemic when New Zealand had its borders closed to overseas visitors. Historically, without travel restrictions, employees from overseas make up a higher proportion.

Source of Workers 2020
(combined orchard and packhouse)

- New Zealanders
- RSE
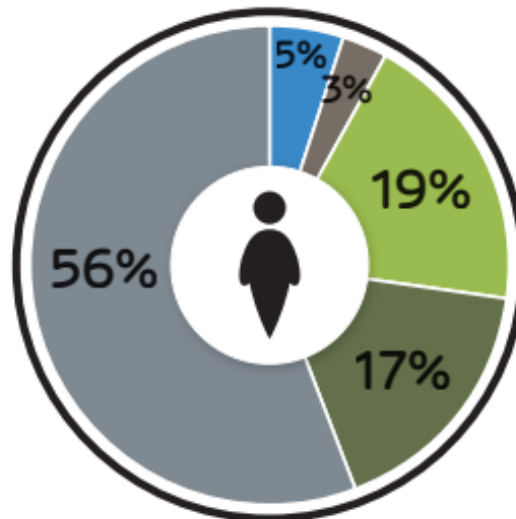- International Working Holiday
- International Students
- Work Visa

Figure 2: Source of workers 2020 (NZKGI, 2020)

Industry working condition improvements

With a low unemployment rate, currently sitting at 3.3% (Stats NZ, 2022), and increasing competition from other industries also needing more staff, the industry has made improvements to its working conditions. The main improvements are:

- Increased pay rates
- Development of more accommodation and transport options
- Improved flexibility of hours
- More reliability of hours
- Extended seasonal work contracts
- Increase in training and future pathways
  (NZKGI, 2020)

RSE Workforce

This report focuses particularly on the Recognised Seasonal Employer employees. The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Scheme began in 2005 with 5,000 places and has grown to 19,000 places for the 2022/23 season (Immigration New Zealand, 2022). The scheme aims to provide a more stable seasonal workforce for horticulture and viticulture as well as provide economic assistance to Pacific Island Nations (Lewis, 2017). Visa holders can stay up to seven months over an 11-month period (except for Tuvalu and Kiribati, who can stay for nine months). RSE employees are vital to the industry, are known to be efficient and reliable, and are relied upon for shift work along with winter pruning (NZKGI, 2020). The RSE employees' focus and reason for being in NZ are to provide financial support for their families back home (Bedford, Bedford, & Nunns, 2020).

For an employer to gain RSE status certain criteria must be met:

1. The business must be in a sound financial position
2. Strong human resource practices need to be in place – this involves a good human resources policy and pastoral care arrangements
3. Be committed to training and employing New Zealanders
4. Have good workplace practices

(Immigration New Zealand, 2022)

Ahead of each season, employers also need to apply for an agreement to recruit which has further criteria.

One of the requirements for employers to gain RSE status is to provide pastoral care arrangements for the RSE employees. Pastoral care is a model which provides emotional and spiritual support to people (University of Canberra, 2012). Pastoral care is a crucial component of the RSE scheme providing support and fulfilling needs outside of work hours. Pastoral care managers are employed to take care of their RSE teams' needs outside of work, ranging from checking in on their mental health to taking them to the doctor when required. This role works alongside the rest of the team to ensure the RSE employees are well cared for.

Accommodation is either provided or arranged by the RSE employer for the RSE employees. There is a variety of options available for RSE employees. There is a high variation in accommodation from older buildings with limited amenities to purpose-built accommodation (Bedford, Bedford, & Nunns, 2020). The newer purpose-built accommodation has a focus on recreating a village environment, often providing facilities such as sports fields, volleyball courts, and recreation rooms. The figure below shows the planned increase in accommodation per number of beds, with the main portion coming from purpose-built. The significant investments being made here reflect the benefit RSE employees provide to orchardists.

	Purpose Built	Converted	Other	Total
2021	1906	330	135	2371
2022	1960	329	15	2304
2023	1180	88	45	1313
2024	848	77	55	980
2025	835	76	75	986

* number of beds

Figure 3: Planned new accommodation* (NZKGI, 2020)

Successful team

This section of the literature review investigates what makes a successful team.

A team is defined as a group of people who work together to achieve a common goal (Juneja, 2015). Biech (2007) defines a team as "a group of people who are mutually dependent on one another to achieve a common goal". Katzenbach and Smith (1993) researched and identified five characteristics that define what a team is:

1. Teams are small in number, between two to 25, the majority less than 10.
2. Team members have complementary skills – each member has a defined and different role.
3. A common purpose and performance goals are shared.
4. Team members form a common approach.

5. There is mutual accountability between team members.

J. Richard Hackman, over his 40 years of research, discovered the success of teamwork is having the right 'enabling conditions" in place is more important to success than the personalities and behaviours of team members (Haas & Mortensen, 2016). Hackman (2002) defines five conditions, identified, and explained below, which improve team performance.

1. Real team – does the team have clear boundaries and interdependence among the team?
2. Compelling direction – does the team have a clear purpose with a strong understanding of what needs to be achieved?
3. Enabling structure – does the team have a good mix of the required skills and attributes?
4. Supportive context – does the team structure provide resources and support for the work to be done?
5. Competent coaching – is there coaching available to help members and provide development opportunities?

Dawson (2005) keeps it simple by defining the three key components of a successful team a clear purpose, the right competencies and skills, and direct support from leadership. He also discusses the importance of regularly checking in on team performance and team maintenance activities to create a team that trusts one another.

Biech (2007) in the book "The Pfeiffer Book of Successful Team-Building Tools" outlines a model for the 10 characteristics that have been found within successful teams as shown below. She points out that the structure of the model is crucial. The bottom four blocks act as the foundation of a successful team and need to be part of the early team foundation. The second row is not as critical but still vital and needed early in team formation also. The third-row characteristics make working in a team more satisfying and rewarding (Biech, 2007). The top block is not on top as the most important but instead there as it tends to emerge later in team development.

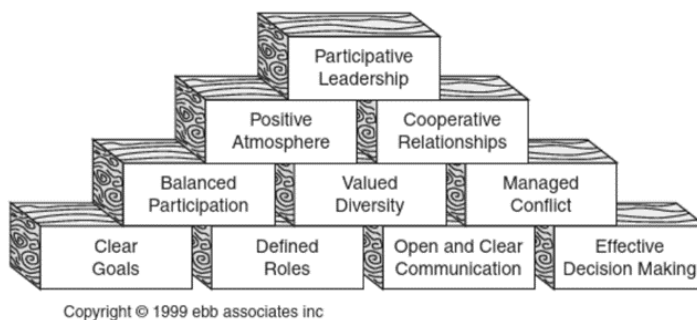Copyright © 1999 ebb associates inc

Figure 4: Ten characteristics of a high-performance team (Biech, 2007)

The ten characteristics are outlined briefly below:

1. Clear goals - members understand the purpose and vision of the team.
2. Defined roles – members understand their job and why they are on the team.

3. Open and clear communication – the team can effectively listen and respond to each other.
4. Effective decision-making – solutions need to be reached to move the team forwards.
5. Balanced participation – everyone needs to contribute evenly.
6. Valued diversity- unique contributions are acknowledged and celebrated.
7. Managed conflict – conflict needs to be addressed and resolved.
8. Positive atmosphere – an environment of trust and openness needs to be built.
9. Cooperative relationships – the value of each team member needs to be understood.
10. Participative leadership - leadership is shared and the environment is trusting and collaborative.

In summary, the literature reviewed agreed on the core components of a successful team. All articles discussed the vitalness of having a clear purpose and ensuring all team members understood this purpose. Secondly, team members need to understand what their roles are in the team as well as the role of other members. The final core component was the support and accountability required from team members and leadership.

Building a successful team

One of the most commonly referred to and used models of team forming is called Tuckman's model, demonstrated in figure 5 below. It was developed by Bruce W. Tuckman published first in 1965, with a fifth stage added in 1977.
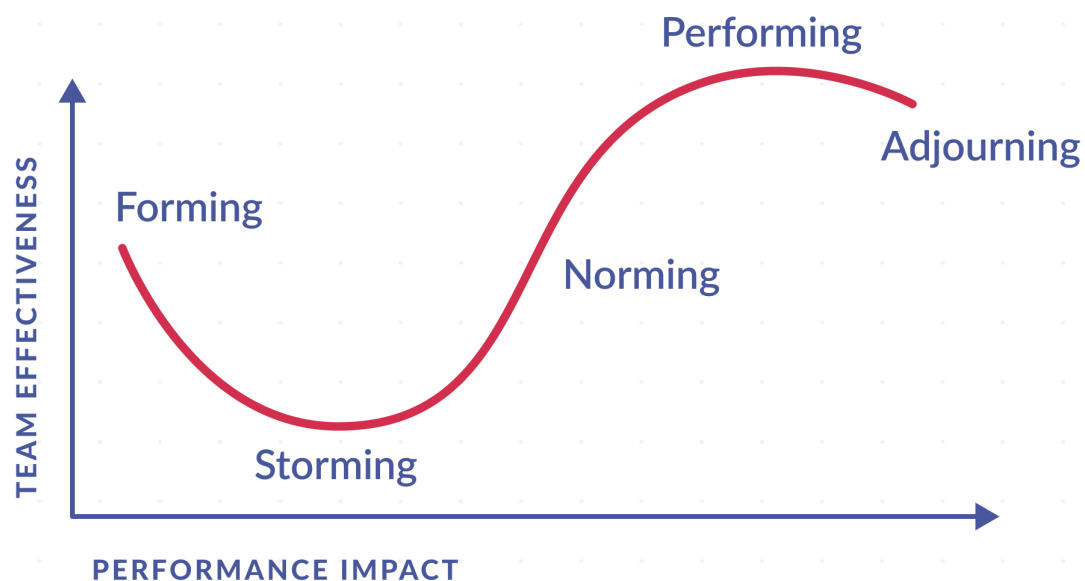
Figure 5: Tuckman's model of group development (Dhillon & Donnie, 2019)

In the forming stage, team members are becoming orientated to each other and the task ahead of them. Storming is when intergroup conflict starts to emerge, with clashes emerging with differing opinions and working styles; lack of unity is the key feature of this phase. When in norming, group cohesion is developed, with group-generated norms formed and there is an openness in the group. Performing is when the group is at its peak performance, conflicts are

resolved, group energy is channelled toward the task and solutions begin to emerge. The final stage is called adjourning when the group completes its goals, and it is time to disband. (Tuckman, 2001)

The key to team success is to move successfully to performing. Feedback on the model has been that it can be unclear when a group moves into the next stage and that the process is more cyclical and less linear than suggested (van Geffen, 2020). Teams can move back and forwards between this model is what newer studies show. This model is well-regarded which is seen due to the fact it is still referenced and used more than 50 years post its development.

William Dyer in his book "Team Building" outlines a simple four-step structure for team development called the Four Cs of Team Development as shown in the diagram below.
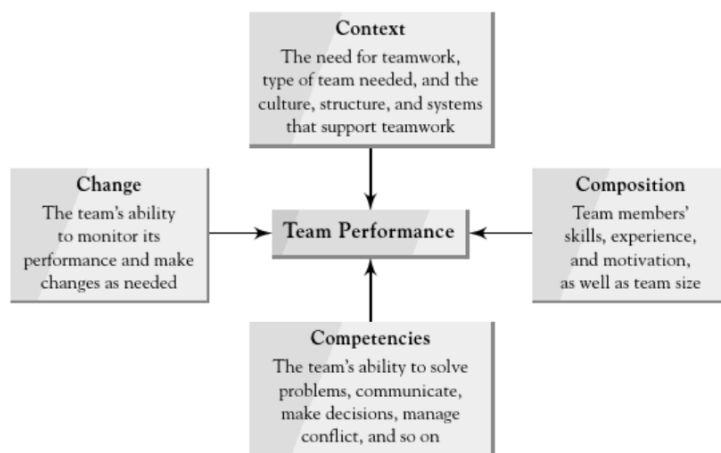

Figure 6: The four Cs of team development (Dyer Jr, Dyer, & Dyer, 2013)

The first factor is context, the key here is to build the right foundation. The main element of this factor is effective teamwork is vital to success and the organisation has a supportive framework and culture for a team to operate within. Composition is ensuring that the team has the right combination of skills and attitudes to be an effective time. The leader needs to understand each team member's technical and interpersonal skills to get the required tasks completed. Competencies are what move the team to high performance. Competencies are the processes in place and abilities of the team to problem solve, resolve conflicts, and make effective decisions. The final factor is change which is the ability of the team to devise more effective ways of working together as the first three factors change over time.

This section highlights that team development is a process and both models show that the right processes need to be developed within the team to move to high performance.

Leadership

This section will briefly explore the importance of leadership in a high-performance team and outline shared leadership.

The literature that was reviewed agreed that good leadership is vital to the success of a high-performing team (Indeed Editorial Team, 2020) (Kasowski, 2020). It is the function that helps to direct the team towards improved efficiencies and team goals. Leadership is the driver of the vehicle moving the team forwards. An effective leader gives clarity of purpose as well as

guiding and motivating the team members (Indeed Editorial Team, 2020). Leadership has begun to move away from directing and dictating to team members what they need to do. Instead, the key to successful leadership is the ability to motivate teams toward a common goal. Jackson (2013) takes this thought further discussing true buy-in to the organisation comes from an inspired team. Jackson (2013) outlines that inspiration is built by giving the team a cause they are devoted to.

Kasowski (2020) discusses the importance of leaders getting to know the members of their team, building team members' capabilities, and providing regular and actionable feedback. Through these actions, team members feel valued and appreciated. Cilliers (2019) takes this one step further discussing the importance of vulnerability from leaders and how it is now an asset.

> *"Vulnerable leaders inspire, are more authentic, and build bonds that lead to increased performance."* (Cilliers, 2019)

Shared leadership was a theme that emerged from my review of the literature. Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone (2007) define shared leadership as a team attribute that is appearing from leadership influence becoming distributed across several team members. Emerging from the literature I reviewed is the theory that leadership is wider than the top-down process between the leader and the team and that within a group, multiple leaders can be present (Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006). Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone (2007) undertook a study using a sample of 59 consulting teams and found that the level of shared leadership within a team is positively correlated to team performance. Another study suggested that shared leadership does need to be coordinated and have an element of structure to it to improve performance (Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006).

Culture

Culture is defined as the attitudes, behaviour, and opinions of a particular group of people within society (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). In a workplace context, culture is the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that people in a work environment share (Indeed Editorial Team, 2020). Societal culture is built at an individual level whereas workplace culture is influenced heavily by the leadership and strategic direction of the organisation. A positive culture in the workplace has been shown to improve teamwork and morale, increase productivity and improve retention of the workforce (Agarwal, 2018).

In a team environment, working cross-culturally, cultural differences need to be understood and managed accordingly. Time needs to be spent in team formation stages with team members building an understanding of each other's culture, particularly focusing on understanding different communication styles and ways of working. An advantage of cross-cultural teams is that the different sets of opinions and values can be helpful to team performance (Dyer Jr, Dyer, & Dyer, 2013). Working out these differences can build a unique culture to fit the mix of people in the team. What is key to the success of a cross-cultural team is regular check-ins on performance and understanding of tasks to ensure the ask is clear. Conflict within a cross-cultural team tends to stem from a lack of cultural understanding among the aggrieved individuals (Dyer Jr, Dyer, & Dyer, 2013).

The main finding here is the importance of finding harmony between the workplace culture and the culture of the individual.

Analysis

Through conducting a thematic analysis of the literature and interviews undertaken, five themes emerged when placed against the main question of what the attributes of a successful RSE seasonal team in the kiwifruit industry are, as demonstrated by figure 7.
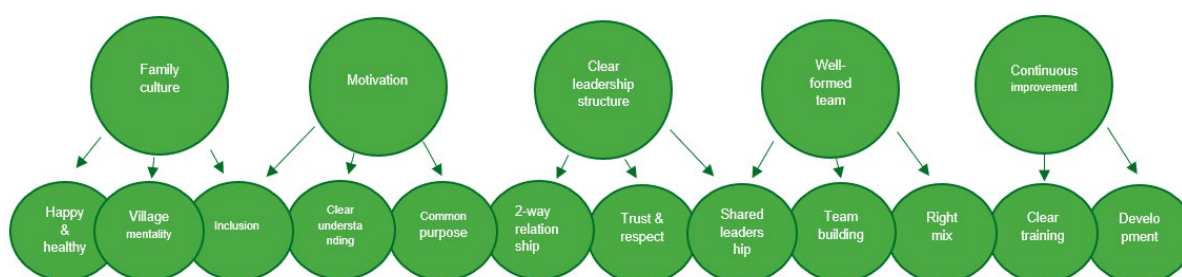

Figure 7: Analysis of themes from literature review and semi-structured interviews

The first theme was building a family culture. The key to building a family culture was ensuring that RSE employees are happy and healthy, building a village mentality, and inclusion of their culture.

The second theme was understanding motivation. It was emphasised in both literature and the interviews that employees need to have a clear purpose to provide direction and motivation in their day-to-day tasks. Having clarity and understanding of the why promotes increased engagement and productivity.

A clear leadership structure was a key observation from all organisations interviewed and backed up by literature. The leader must be trusted and respected and serves as the middleman between the orchardist/supervisor and the RSE team. It is a 2-way relationship. Also, the concept of shared leadership coined in literature was apparent from all interviews.

The fourth theme that emerged was building a well-formed team. The right mix of skills, experience, and personalities was discussed in most interviews and was signalled through literature. Through living together and team-building activities run by the employer, the team-forming model is accelerated.

The final theme is continuous improvement. Literature expressed the need to evaluate performance and pivot the direction if required (Dyer Jr, Dyer, & Dyer, 2013). Interviews showed the desire of the employers to continue to strive to do better for their employees, their organisation, and the industry.

Discussion and findings

Literature defined a team as a group of people working together to achieve a common goal (Juneja, 2015). In the case of the RSE workforce, they come together to provide a vital labour source for the orchards, with their goal being to make money to send home to their families. The below subsections discuss the main findings from the literature and the interviews undertaken to determine what makes a successful RSE team.

Family culture

The main finding from Agarwal (2018) was that a positive culture improves teamwork and morale. This finding was echoed by all interviewees. Every interviewee mentioned that they want their RSE employees to be happy at work, with three adding healthy also, as their first and foremost priority. Five interviewees went further linking the happiness of their employees to how they measure the success of their teams.

"Happy, doing well, earning good money, feel respected as people first and know that you care" – Pastoral care manager

All interviewees discussed how their main aim is to build a family culture. The RSE employees all live together communally, and a village mentality is cultivated. Village mentality is the concept of everyone living together, as well as helping and supporting one another. Interviewees also discussed how this village culture was apparent when working in the orchard, with RSE employees all helping one another to get tasks complete. When new members join the team, the experienced RSE workers connect with the new members and collaboratively they help with training and bringing the new members up to speed quickly.

"Family culture with boundaries" – Pastoral care manager

"Treat them like our family, build a family culture" – Orchard owner

"Inclusion is critical, make them feel included" – Orchard owner

"Family business, all about cultivating our people" – Orchard owner

Dyer Jr, Dyer, and Dyer (2013) concluded that understanding cultural differences within a team are critical to team performance. Most of the interviewees had a focus on gaining an understanding of the RSE employees' culture through training and the process of recruitment. It is a mutual relationship, where all parties have something to learn from one another regarding culture. Before Covid, three of the interviewees regularly went over to the island nations to visit the villages their RSE employees were from and do plan to return shortly when possible. Both literature and the interviewees discussed that conflict with RSE employees often stems from a lack of cultural understanding between all parties. Two of the interviewees had employees from several cultures working in the orchards and they noted conflict arose predominantly from cultural miscommunications.

"Important to understand the differences and similarities, similarities are emphasised to build bond and differences are viewed as something admirable" – Pastoral care manager

"Delicate balance between respecting and understanding Pacific nation culture and blending it with NZ's culture" – Pastoral care manager

"Deal with conflict immediately" – Orchard owner

Motivation

Literature on successful teams agreed that a successful team needs a clear and common purpose (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993) (Dawson, 2005). The lens of this thought was from the organisation's perspective. However, my finding from the interviewees contrasted this slightly. All interviewees also highlighted the need for the RSE employees to have an awareness of their purpose for being here. The need was not organisationally linked, instead, it was about what the RSE workforce is here for. The main purpose for all RSE employees is to make money to send home to their families and communities, as discussed earlier.

"Motivated by getting money back to their family" – Orchard owner

"The guys are motivated to work; they want to work and are motivated to take home as much money as they can" – Orchard owner

"Happy in work, making money, offering opportunities" – Pastoral care manager

"Team of guys that want to be here, happy in their work, fulfilling their needs back home" – Orchard owner

Jackson (2013) discussed the importance of true buy-in coming from an inspired team. This was clear from the interviewees that their motivation to send more money home to their families enabled them to be happier and more productive. One interviewee discussed how checking in on their goals and purpose when they first arrive, then keeping them reminded of their purpose helps to retain high engagement and productivity.

"When they first come here, we ask them what, why, how; why are you here; what do you want to improve; how can we help you. We check in on this throughout their time with us and when they leave. This enables that when they go back home, they are happy as they did what they came here to do" – Pastoral care manager

Clear leadership structure

An observation from the interviews was that all teams had a very similar leadership structure. Each RSE team had a selected team leader (selected by the NZ employer in most cases) and then often a second-in-command. During the day they tended to have a supervisor, who was a permanent employee of the orchard, and then all interviewees had someone dedicated to pastoral care. This person was often referred to as "camp mum/dad". The hierarchal structure of having one leader is the common structure in the Pacific Islands (Bedford, Bedford, & Nunns, 2020). As a result, the RSE teams respond well to the team leader structure put in place on the orchards.

An effective leader is important to the success of any team. The literature concludes that a successful leader motivates and provides clarity to the team. Kasowski (2020) discussed the importance of the leader knowing and caring for all team members. This was echoed by the interviewees, with all interviewees discussing how vital a strong and effective team leader was to the success of the team. Two interviewees had team leaders that weren't effective as they

didn't have the respect and trust of the rest of the team, which resulted in engagement and productivity issues. Three interviewees discussed how the team leader emerges organically. Sometimes the team leader is pre-selected before coming over to New Zealand so this decision can be initially out of the orchardist's control. The main attributes interviewees said they looked for when choosing the team leader were their communication skills; the respect they have from their peers and who the team goes to when problems arise.

"Leader needs trust and respect within the team and amongst wider staff" – Orchard owner

"Respect the leader has is invaluable" – Orchard owner

"Team leader is the key communicator" – Orchard owner

The second theme was the importance of communication between the RSE team and the orchard owner or pastoral care manager. The RSE employees need to feel they can go to their pastoral care manager for any issues that crop up during their time here. A two-way relationship is vital for trust to be built and to create a safe atmosphere for all team members.

"They need to know who to go to if there are issues" – Orchard owner

From the review of literature, mentioned in this report, the theme of shared leadership emerged, with the concept introduced that leadership is not necessarily top-down and can be shared amongst several team members. This concept was prevalent across all interviewees through the mention of peer mentorship. The RSE workforce goes through training and induction measures, however, it is the experienced RSE employees that come alongside the new employees and help them learn and get their tasks done.

"Half to two-thirds already have experience and they all support each other to get the work done" – Orchard owner

"Mentor each other" – Pastoral care manager

"Experienced take the new guys under their wing" – Orchard owner

Well-formed team
Teams tended to range between 8-10 in number and were all able to fit into a van, providing ease of getting to and from orchards. The literature discusses how vital it is for a team to have the right mix of complementary skills and attributes. Interviewees agreed with this concept. It was apparent from the interviewees that the right fit of personalities was also quite vital to how well the team worked together. This contrasted with the literature, with Hackman's finding being that enabling conditions are more important than the personalities of team members (Haas & Mortensen, 2016).

"Team often built on chemistry, who works well together, who's new, who's more experienced, regularly evaluate if we have the balance right" – Pastoral care manager

The first year an orchard owner has RSE employees is the most important due to the training component and the need to move the team to productivity as efficiently as possible. Tuckman's model clearly outlines the different stages of team forming, with the key to building a successful team to move to performing as quickly and efficiently as possible. An observation that was made from the interviews was that there were very few issues with team forming and most teams quite quickly moved to performing. This is attributed to the following factors:

- The RSE team comes together the night before they fly to New Zealand
- They stay on this team for the duration of their time in New Zealand
- They all live together as a team
- Team building activities occur regularly

Team building emerged from all interviewees as an important part of employing RSE employees. All interviewees regularly brought their RSE employees together for a meal to build community. Team activity days were also common. Interviewees shared that they have taken their RSE team to the snow, as well as fishing for the day, with one discussing plans to take the team away for an experience weekend to show the team some of the tourist spots. One interviewee discussed how they have recently put in place vegetable gardens for their RSE employees to grow their own vegetables. This is a team bonding activity and teaches them more skills to take home. These activities help to build a strong well-bonded team.

Orchardists noted that after their second year of having RSE employees, they had high retention with most RSE employees returning. Most of the interviewees operate on a referral model to bring new team members over from the Islands with the team leader being the one selecting who would be the right fit. One interviewee discussed the importance of continuity and succession. The key to their success was to have a good mix of new and returning RSE employees. This interviewee doesn't bring in unreferred people but instead relies on their existing team to refer internally. High levels of trust are placed with the RSE team leader for this process.

"Continuity and succession are key" – Pastoral care manager

Continuous improvement

Taking a team from good to great is found in the mindset of continuous improvement. One of Hackman's (2002) keys to a successful team is to have coaching and development opportunities in place for the team. Due to the skills required for the tasks at hand of the RSE employees, the training process is relatively straightforward. Instead, all interviewees mentioned that they give their RSE employees the option to complete some life skills courses, through the Vakameasina programme. Vakameasina is a free education and development programme that has been developed especially for RSE employees (Fruition, 2022). Three of the interviewees run different courses from Vakameasina on-site at their accommodation

facilities. These courses allow the RSE employees to learn further life and business skills they can take back to their village when they return home. This is important to RSE teams as returning with further skills is another way of supporting their family when they return home, which links back to their motivation for why they are here.

The desire of all interviewees to continue to learn and do better for their RSE employees was apparent. The fourth factor of team development of change by Dyer Jr, Dyer, and Dyer (2013) backs this up with the ability of the team to work out more effective ways of doing things. All interviewees expressed the need to start working together better and to share their learnings as there is a shortage of information out there.

There is also a learning opportunity for employers to learn more about the Pacific Islands and what their values and culture bring to New Zealand. Three interviewees mentioned that it's a symbiotic relationship. Both parties have something to learn from each other and teach each other.

"We get to embrace their culture, teaching us the positive side of their values and culture" – Pastoral care manager

"It is a symbiotic relationship on a business, work and cultural level" – Orchard owner

"It's important that it's a two-way relationship, we want them to feel valued and come back" – Orchard owner

Conclusions

The purpose of this report was to understand the attributes of a successful team within the seasonal RSE workforce, focusing on the kiwifruit industry. With growth predicted in the horticulture industry, particularly the predicted 35% increase in production of kiwifruit export trays by 2026, coupled with on-orchard automation looking closer to 2030, labour remains a critical issue that needs addressing. With low unemployment in New Zealand, engaging the RSE workforce is vital to remaining successful as an industry. From my research in the above report, five themes emerged to be key to building a successful RSE team, summarised below.

Building a family culture is integral to an RSE successful team. Employers that build a family culture and cultivate the village mentality result in a team that is both happy and healthy at work. All parties working together need to have a strong cultural understanding of similarities and differences, which improves team performance.

RSE employees have a clear purpose of making money to send home to their families and communities. When this purpose is kept front of mind, they are happier and more productive.

The leadership structure must be clear and well-understood by all parties. An effective RSE team leader that has the respect and trust of the team needs to be put in place. This team leader also must be able to communicate clearly with the orchard manager, supervisors, and pastoral care manager. Peer mentorship also adds to team success, with team members supporting and encouraging one another.

The RSE team needs to be well-formed with the right mix of skills, experience, and personalities. RSE teams move well through Tuckman's stages due to the team coming together as they begin their RSE journey, living together, and the regularity of team-building activities. Having a continuity and succession focus is important for future team success as well as building a strong referral system.

The mindset of continuous improvement is essential to the success of the RSE team. Highly engaged RSE employees need development opportunities beyond their day-to-day tasks to further develop their skill sets, which is provided by Vakameasina. Also, the relationship is symbiotic, allowing NZ employers to learn more about the values and culture of the Pacific Islands.

Recommendations

From the findings and discussion presented, the following recommendations are made to orchardists looking to build a successful RSE team:

- Develop a family culture, cultivating the village mentality. This is developed through having an inclusive living environment and the creation of a home away from home by their NZ employers.
- Ensure all permanent employees have a good understanding of the similarities and differences of the Pacific Islander culture. This can be developed through developing a cultural training programme for all permanent staff.
- Ensure RSE employees understand their purpose and motivation for being in New Zealand which is sending money home to their families. Checking in on this regularly to keep them reminded of their purpose is important to retain engagement.
- Put in place an RSE team leader that is trusted and well-respected.
- Create a culture of empowerment amongst the team to allow peer mentoring across team members.
- Put in place regular team-building activities and be in regular communication with the RSE team.
- The NZ employer needs to have a mindset of continuity and succession. The key to this is building a strong referral system.
- Ensure RSE employees have access to development opportunities. The main provider of this is Vakameasina.
- Be open to learning about the values and culture of the Pacific Islands.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What is your role with RSE employees?

2. How many RSE employees do you employ?

3. How long have you been employing RSE employees?

4. Do your RSE employees live on-site or off-site?

   a. What systems are in place if onsite?

   b. What do you provide pastorally if off-site?

5. What is the structure of your team?

   a. What is the leadership structure?

6. How do you build a team?

   a. How do you build trust within a team?

   b. How do you build team culture?

7. How do you manage cultural differences within your teams?

   a. Do you have cross-cultural teams? If yes, how do you manage this?

   b. Do you have cross-cultural training in place? If yes, what does this look like?

8. What training do you have in place when they start?

   a. What is the purpose of the training?

9. What does a successful seasonal team look like to you?

10. How do you measure success within a team?