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PROGRAMME



Team Building in a Seasonal Workforce

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Dustin Rothstein

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1 Executive Summary

“The stubborn fact is that all great human achievement is the result of team efforts...The degree to which this fact is overlooked is alarming and is a consequence of the individualistic bias of our culture”

(Curphy, Nilsen, & Hogan, 2019)

Seasonal horticulture work requires a group of individuals from diverse cultures, work experiences, and employment motivations to form a team in a short period of time. Often in the span of a few days, these workers are recruited, divided into teams, trained, and put to work. Their success in quickly forming a high performing team is directly linked to the success of the harvest season.

There is no shortage of research on how to build a high performing team, but seasonal horticulture work presents a few unique challenges that makes it difficult to blindly apply these methods:

- 1) Time Constraints – The entire season lasts only a few months
- 2) New Employees – Most seasonal workers are new to the company and to the industry
- 3) Demographics – Seasonal horticulture workers come from incredibly diverse backgrounds

This report aims to provide recommendations on how leadership and team building models can best be adapted to suit these unique challenges.

To achieve this, a deep understanding of the demographics and cultural norms of New Zealand’s seasonal horticulture workforce was a primary research focus. This cultural understanding was then overlaid with current best practice team building, leadership, and engagement models.

Recommendations

- 1) **Understand Your Seasonal Workforce** - The first step to building a high performing team from a collection of seasonal workers needs to be understanding who those workers are. Any process for building a high performing team with members of various cultures should acknowledge and respect the cultural differences amongst the team.
- 2) **Tailor Your Leadership Approach** - Tailor your leadership style to the needs of your team. Communication is key. With a seasonal, culturally diverse work team, the leader needs to take this a step further, helping the individuals find common ground and bond as a team before they align to a common purpose. Facilitate effective communication within the team to build these personal bonds. Follow this up with clear, consistent communication to the team.
- 3) **Develop a Structured Team Building Plan** - Understand the *Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing-Adjourning* model of team development. A guide to applying this for seasonal work is found in the Appendix. This should be a starting point and adapted to the unique norms of your own work team.

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3 Introduction

New Zealand's horticulture sector is undergoing a period of significant growth, with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) projecting export revenue to increase by 24% over the next five years (MPI, 2022). Although the global outlook for the sector is promising, with an ever-increasing demand for healthy, sustainable food products, the sector is also facing significant challenges.

Seasonal labour is the driving force behind most primary industries, and the horticulture industry is no exception. New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated (NZKGI) estimates the kiwifruit industry alone requires 25,000 seasonal workers for the three-month harvest each year (NZKGI, 2022).

Filling these seasonal roles has challenged the industry for several years (Hutchinson, 2018) and this has only been exasperated by the ongoing effects of Covid, closed borders, and the historically low unemployment rate. In 2021, the KPMG Agri-Business Agenda cited labour availability as the #5 priority of industry leaders, from unranked in 2020 (Proudfoot & Keeys, 2021).

Additionally, MPI notes horticulture "growers and exporters continue to adjust their operations around the challenges presented by the seasonal labour supply shortages" (MPI, 2021). Although the industry is slowly automating some roles, the seasonal labour requirements will continue to grow with the increasing fruit volumes for the foreseeable future.

The sector's primary focus has been on growing the overall horticulture workforce, with industry body Horticulture New Zealand (HortNZ) developing an industry job board for seasonal workers and supporting a career progression network for fulltime employees. In addition, there has been a major focus on defining the best way to recruit, train, and engage these seasonal workers (Go Horticulture, 2021) (Pangborn, 2016).

These are the critical first steps in the process, but the work does not stop once you recruit and train your staff. The next challenge that has often been overlooked in the horticulture industry is how to take this group of seasonal employees and mould them into a high performing team in as short of period as possible.

The current labour challenges are not just a numbers game – a smaller pool of employees working in a high performing team will achieve better results than a larger pool of employees working in a dysfunctional team. The sector's ability to capitalize on the current growth opportunities is wholly dependent on its ability to recruit new employees into the sector and then build them into high performing teams each season.

This report will focus on the most effective way to apply best practice leadership and team building methods in order to develop an engaged, high performing Line Management team in the kiwifruit post-harvest industry. Although the kiwifruit packhouse is the focus of this paper, many industries within the primary sector share the same labour and seasonality challenges and thus, could apply these same learnings.



4 Research Objective and Questions

4.1 Overall Aim

This report aims to provide recommendations on how leadership and team building models can best be adopted to the unique challenges of the seasonal horticulture industry.

4.2 Research Questions

1. What are the cultural characteristics and motivations of the horticulture sector's seasonal workforce?
2. What role does leadership play in building a high performing team of seasonal employees?
3. What are the key steps needed to build a high performing team from seasonal workers of diverse cultures?

4.3 Project Scope

The focus of this paper is on the process of forming a high performing team from a group of individual seasonal workers. The kiwifruit packhouse is the focus of this paper, as there is significant survey data available on their seasonal workforce.

Although recruitment is an important aspect of team building, ensuring you have the right people for the role falls out of scope for this paper. Effective training is also critical to the success of a team. Some of the team building methods suggested in this paper should be included in the preseason training process, although specific recommendations on the most effective way to train seasonal employees also falls out of scope for this paper.

4.4 Limitations and Challenges

As the seasonal data will show, the demographics of the kiwifruit workforce has changed significantly over the past three years. Although borders are open again, it is impossible to know what the seasonal workforce demographics will be in the coming years. This volatility makes it difficult to use demographic data from previous seasons to predict future trends.

The industry is working to automate where possible, this is a slow process and there will always be a need for some level of seasonal labour. As the industry automates, it could be argued there will be an even greater need for a smaller number of workers functioning together as a high performing team.

5 Methodology

This report identifies the unique characteristics of New Zealand’s seasonal horticulture workforce and suggests how current team building and leadership best practices can be adapted and applied to the industry.

To achieve this objective, two lines of research were pursued:

- 1) Understanding the unique motivations, demographics, cultural backgrounds, work experience, and expectations of this seasonal workforce.
- 2) Identifying common themes in the team building and leadership literature that can be applied to the unique challenges of the horticulture industry.



Figure 1: Research Project Methodology

5.1 Seasonal Workforce Cultural Norms and Motivations

A deep understanding of New Zealand’s seasonal horticulture workforce is a pillar of this report and one of the primary research focuses. NZKGI completes an annual survey of the seasonal kiwifruit workforce (NZKGI, 2022). Three years of these survey results were analyzed to understand seasonal worker demographics, cultural backgrounds, work experience, motivations, and job expectations. This was supplemented with internal demographic data and engagement survey data from EastPack’s seasonal workforce.

The kiwifruit industry often relies on foreigners to make up a large portion of their seasonal workforce, from Recognized Seasonal Workers (RSE’s) from the Pacific Islands, to working holiday visa (WHV) holders largely from Europe and South America. Research was completed to understand the cultural differences between these very diverse groups of individuals. This deep understanding of horticulture’s seasonal workforce was used to identify the unique motivations, expectations, and cultural norms each employee brings to the group.

5.2 Best Practice Leadership and Team Building

Psychological Researcher Bruce Tuckman first proposed his definitive model of team development, *Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing*, in the 1960's (Tuckman, 1965). Research into the various applications of his simple, yet powerful model forms the second pillar of this report.

A literature review was completed to identify best practice team building methods, with various team building strategies compared and aligned with Tuckman's *Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing* model. The themes of each model were viewed through the lens of seasonal horticulture work, identifying if they were practical for the industry and if they addressed the unique challenges of a seasonal packhouse environment.

As team building is highly dependent on leadership and engagement, a review of the team building impacts of leadership, communication, and engagement was also completed. The key points from this literature review were also viewed through a seasonal horticulture lens, identifying common theses that could be applied to a diverse group of individuals new to the organization.



6 Industry and Literature Review

6.1 Seasonal Workforce Demographics

When walking through a kiwifruit packhouse, it becomes obvious that seasonal horticulture work attracts a wide range of workers. NZKGI’s annual survey of the kiwifruit industry’s seasonal workforce provides valuable insights into understanding the demographics of these workers (NZKGI, 2022).

Although there are interesting trends in the data, the main takeaway is that seasonal horticulture work attracts an incredibly diverse group of individuals:

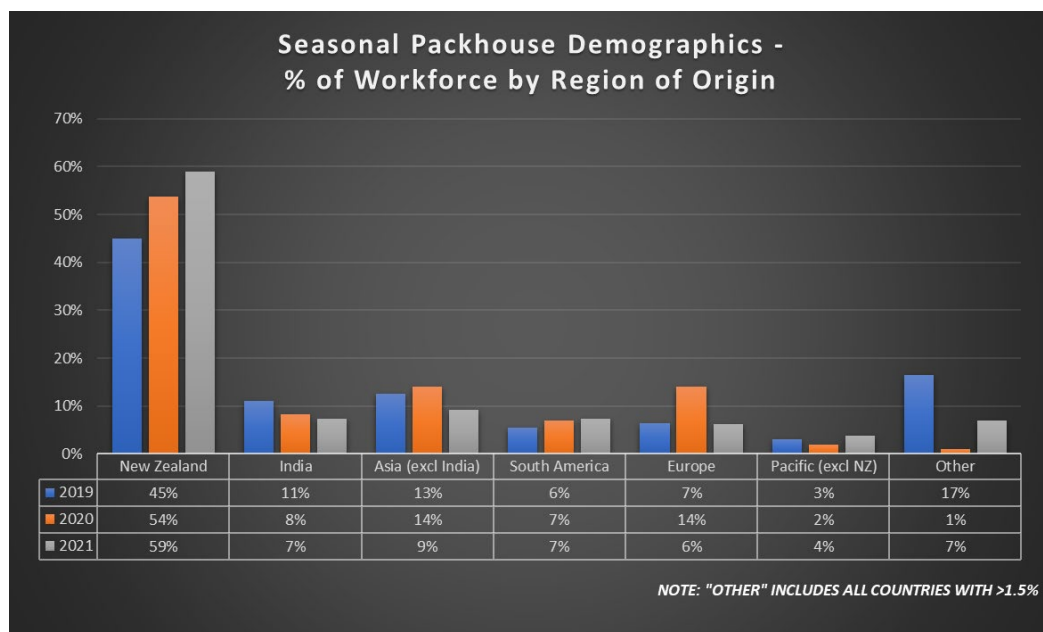


Figure 2: Seasonal Packhouse Demographics (NZKGI, 2022)

Demographics

- In 2021, 41% of seasonal workers were from outside of New Zealand – This was 55% pre-Covid and looks likely to return to this level as borders re-open.
- Due to Covid, the ethnic makeup of these seasonal workers has changed dramatically over the past three years. A slow return to the demographics of 2019 is expected.
- After New Zealanders, the main nationalities are Indian, Malaysian, Chilean, and Argentinian
- This industry data aligns well with internal EastPack data which shows similar trends

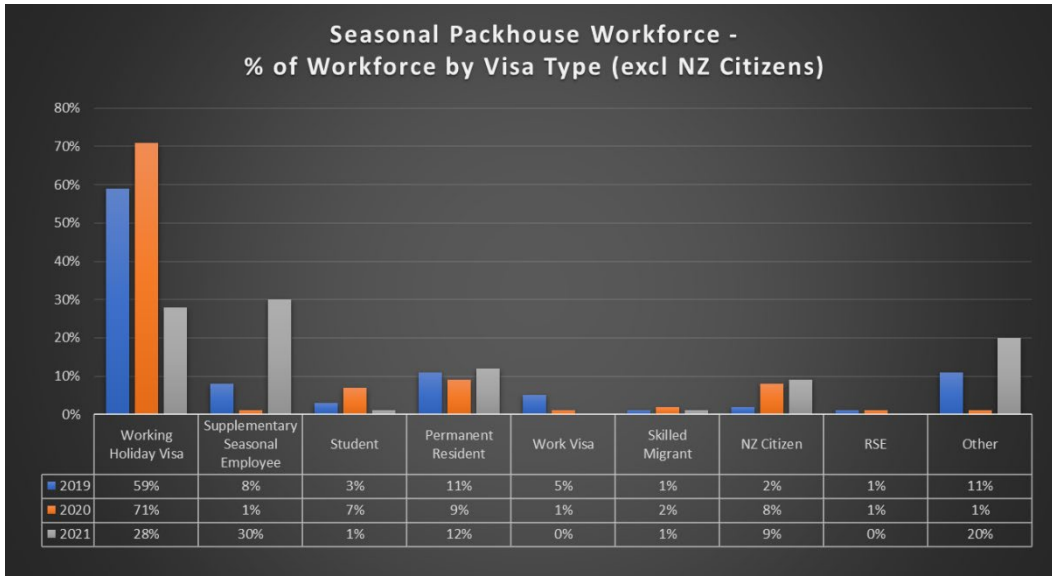


Figure 3: Seasonal Packhouse Workforce by Visa Type (NZKGI, 2022)

Visa Type (excluding NZ citizens)

- The majority of seasonal workers are foreigners on working holiday visas (WHV's) or Recognized Seasonal Employees (RSE's) from the Pacific Islands.
- RSE numbers are skewed in this data due to their low participation rate in the NZKGI survey.
- According to industry data, RSE's made up 33% of the seasonal workforce pre-Covid. (NZKGI, 2020). These RSE numbers will only grow in 2023 with the government increasing the RSE allowance by 3,000 workers, up to 19,000 total.

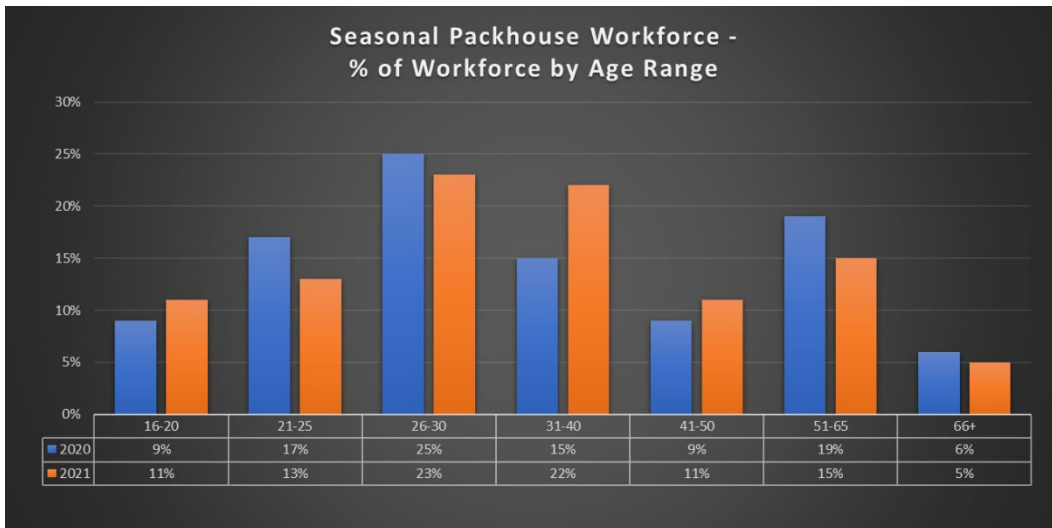


Figure 4: Seasonal Packhouse Workforce by Age (NZKGI, 2022)

Age

- In general, the workers are young – with almost 50% under the age of 30
- But almost a third (31%) are over the age of 40
- The flexible nature of the work also attracts those near retirement, with 20% of the seasonal workforce over the age of 50
- Internal EastPack team leader data shows a similar trend in experience levels, with 32% new to the industry and 20% having at least five years' experience

6.2 Cultural Dimensions

As the data shows, the packhouse is an incredibly diverse place – within EastPack’s seasonal workforce, 36 different nationalities are represented. Understanding the unique cultural difference of these workers is critical to successful team formation.

Dutch management researcher Geert Hofstede originally created his cultural dimensions theory to explain these cultural differences in the 1980’s (Hofstede, Culture’s Consequences, 1984). His theory is based on worldwide surveys of employee’s values in the workplace.

This framework scores cultures on six different dimensions, with each dimension addressing a common cultural trait relevant to business settings. The six dimensions are described in the following table, along with the traits seen at the high and low ends of the spectrum for each of these dimensions.

Each of these dimensions can help a leader understand the different motivations and expectations employees have in a work environment. By understanding where each of your team members fall on this spectrum, the leader can tailor their leadership and team building strategy to address the specific needs of the individuals on their team.

Low	Dimension	High
This group feels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be equal distribution of power • Decisions should be made with input and consultation 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Power Distance</u></p> Deals with how much individuals expect and accept a hierarchy and top-down structure.	This group feels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone on the team has their place • The leader makes decisions and team members do as told
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These cultures place a greater importance on the goals and well-being of the team • There is a strong emphasis on relationships and loyalty 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Individualism</u></p> Individualism addresses how individualistic or collective a society is.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These cultures’ focus is on individual needs with less loyalty to the group • The focus is on achievement and individual rights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation, caring for others and quality of life is important 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Masculinity</u></p> This dimension addresses whether a society places more importance on wanting to be the best (Masculine) or liking what you do (Feminine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition, achievement, success, courage, and strength are emphasized
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People feel comfortable in unstructured situations or dynamic environments • More tolerant of change 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Uncertainty Avoidance</u></p> This dimension addresses a cultures tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a low tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty • Individuals expect strict rules and are not tolerant of change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the near term • Short-term gratification 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Long Term Orientation</u></p> This dimension addresses which cultures encourage the delaying of gratification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the future • Persistence and perseverance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suppress the need for gratification 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Indulgence</u></p> This dimension addresses the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free gratification • Celebration

Figure 5: Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

6.3 Kiwifruit Post Harvest Team Structure and Season

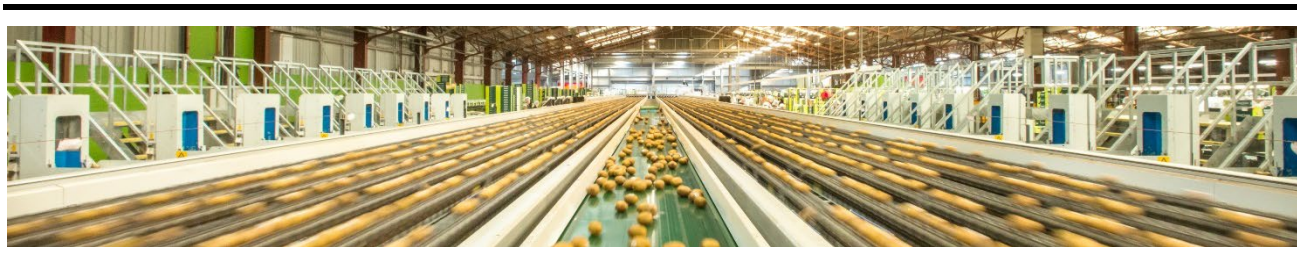
Team Structure

Kiwifruit packing lines vary in size and complexity, but each line will generally have 80-150 seasonal employees working per shift. This paper focuses on the Line Management team responsible for the day-to-day operation of these kiwifruit packing lines.

This Line Management team generally consists of 2-3 Line Supervisors and 8-10 Team Leaders. The Line Supervisors are full-time employees and are responsible for the operation of the entire packing line, while the Team Leader positions are seasonal. Each Team Leader oversees a specific department on the packing line with 5-40 seasonal workers on their team. These Team Leaders are often new to the kiwifruit industry and are generally the highest level of seasonal worker employed in the post-harvest sector.



Figure 6: Kiwifruit Packhouse Line Management Structure



Season Structure

The main kiwifruit packing season covers three months, from mid-March to mid-June, and generally flows in three phases:

- 3) Typically, the first third of the season is spent training while workers get a feel for the job and expectations. They slowly figure out their place in the team and generally achieve below target results.
- 4) The middle of the season sees some teams start to perform and hit production targets, while others are still stuck figuring out how to work as a team.

- 5) By the last third of the season, most teams are performing at an acceptable level, with a small minority excelling, and a few still not performing as a team and getting poor results.

These stages are visualised in the following graph:

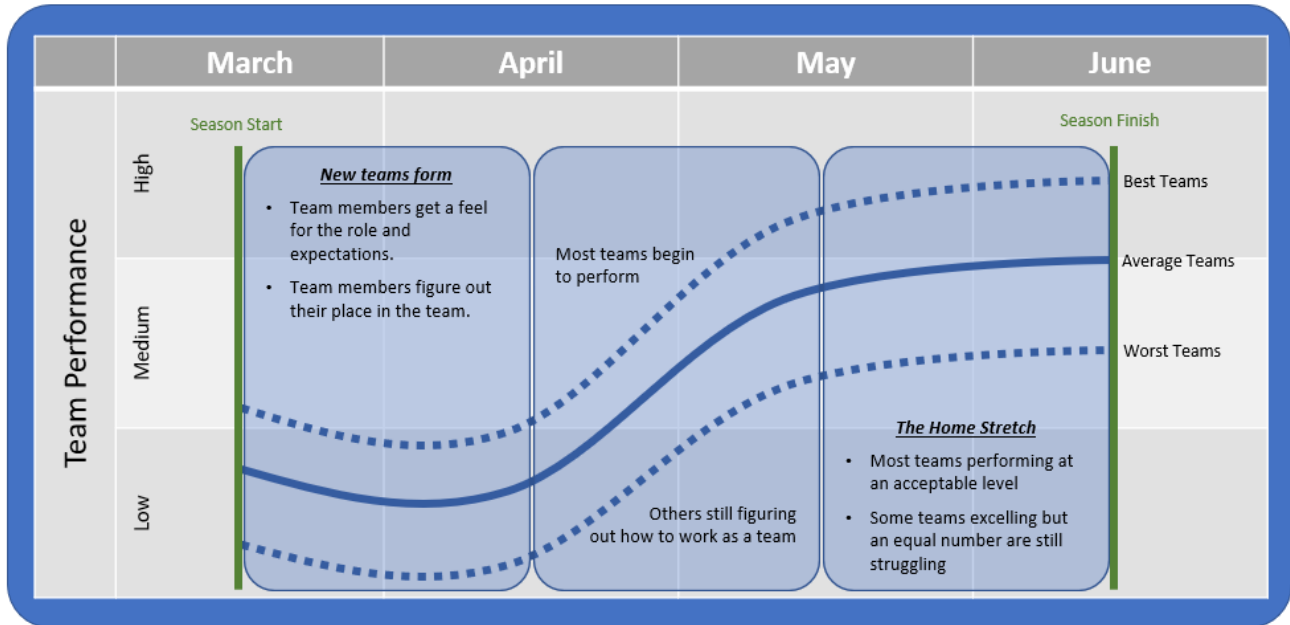


Figure 7: Line Management Team Performance Through a Typical Season

Case Study: The US Army

Through 10 weeks of basic training, roughly the same length of time as the kiwifruit harvest, the US Army takes a diverse group of individuals and turns them into a high performing team.

How do they lead recruits representing a range of ethnicities, countries, and religions to develop common ground, discover shared interests, and work together as a team?

1. Promote cohesion by defining core values: respect, integrity, selfless service, and a sense of duty
2. Spend time defining, discussing, and reinforcing the bonds built through these core values
3. Focus on the unique strengths each individual brings to the team
4. Lean on these core values, and the unique strengths of each individual, to build a culture of support and teamwork

Adapted from *How U.S. Army Basic Training Turns Diverse Groups into Teams* (Farnell, 2016)

6.4 Leadership and Communication

The literature is clear on the relationship between leadership, communication, and team building - strong leadership, with clear communication, is the foundation of building a high performing team. (Wiseman, 2017) (Pentland, 2012) (Richards, Carter, & Feenstra, 2012)

Former Navy captain David Marquet's leadership model provides a compelling argument on the importance of clarity of message and purpose (Marquet, 2013). His story of keeping his team informed of its goals, and then giving them control to make decisions, led to a culture where everyone took responsibility for his or her actions, team members become leaders and a happier, high performing team delivered better results.

More specific to the horticulture sector, Pangborn also examined the role of leadership when he researched what it takes to be a great employer in the post-harvest kiwifruit industry:

“When managing multicultural teams, it becomes even more important that the team has a clear and compelling direction, its members have access to the information and resources they need to successfully carry out the work, stakeholders in different geographies and functions are on board with the team's agenda, and the team is staffed wisely, ideally with people who have the requisite technical skills as well as cultural intelligence and global dexterity.” (Pangborn, 2016)

In addition to top-down communication, fostering communication *between* team members is also a critical task of the leader. Alex “Sandy” Pentland of MIT's Human Dynamics Laboratory has done considerable research into the group dynamics that characterize high performing teams (Pentland, 2012).

In one of his studies, team engagement and team energy improved simply through increasing the amount of informal communication between team members by instituting a common coffee break. This drove an 8% increase in efficiency amongst the call center team in the study.

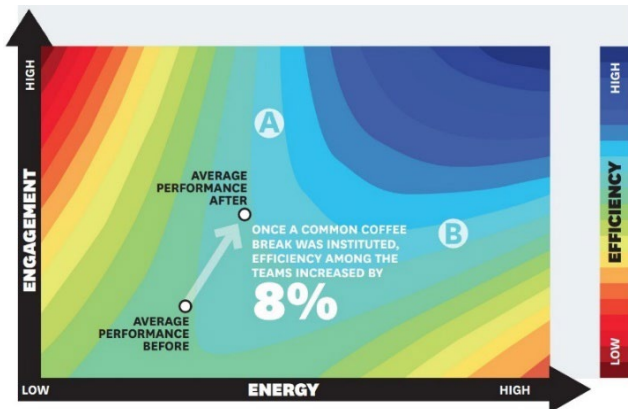


Figure 8: Benefits of Improved Communication (Pentland, 2012)

“With remarkable consistency, the data confirmed that communication indeed plays a critical role in building a successful team”

(Pentland, 2012)

6.5 Team Building

All teams go through stages of development. Although there are numerous models defining these stages, the most common is Tuckman's *Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing* model (Tuckman, 1965).

During each stage of development, team members display unique feelings and behaviours. The leader needs to understand the needs of the team during each of these stages and provide the leadership, coaching, and framework to move to the next stage. These stages are described in detail in the following table.

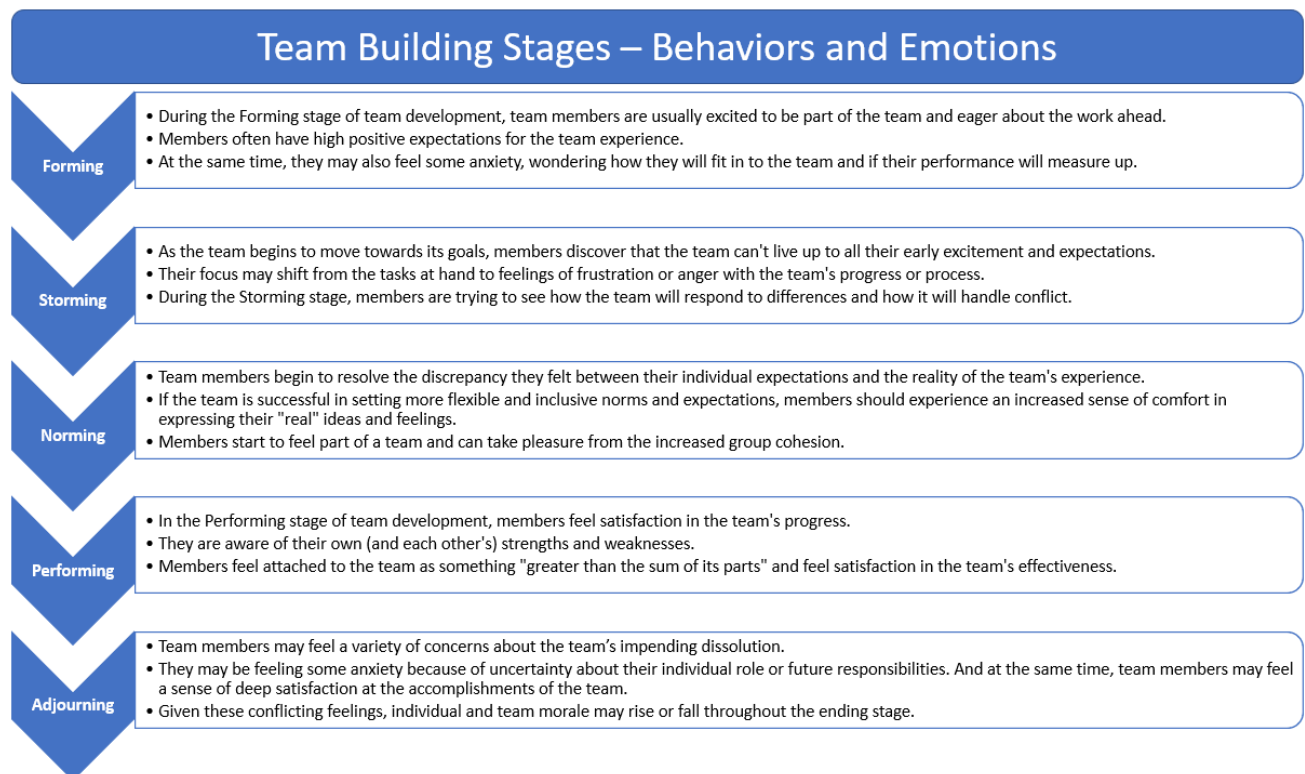


Figure 9: Behaviours and Emotions During the Stages of Team Building
Adapted from *Using the Stages of Team Development* (Stein, 2018)

Tuckman's model aligns well with the factors Katzenbach and Smith define as necessary for high performing teams (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Achieving these factors requires addressing each stage of Tuckman's model.

- All teams need a sense of purpose and a clear cut mission.
- All teams need the mission to be broken down into meaningful performance goals for each team member to pursue.
- All teams need to develop certain work approaches, procedures and processes to ensure that they accomplish a task efficiently and effectively.
- All teams have to support the common mission and take their individual responsibility seriously to do their part in accomplishing a task.
- All teams need a mix of skills, experience and expertise, in order to meet the challenges of the team task.

A critical team trait identified by Molinsky and Gundling is trust. They suggest building trust on your cross-cultural team through setting a clear and compelling direction, ensuring the team has access to the information it needs, and then building personal bonds on your team (Molinsky & Gundling, 2016).

Goldsmith and Morgan lay out a 13-step process to building a high-performing team based on individual feedback (Goldsmith & Morgan, 2012). Although potentially useful for an internal team made up of skilled workers, it becomes harder to replicate for a seasonal work team. However, their recommendations can be simplified as building communication networks *within* the team, which is critically important in a seasonal work team made up of diverse individuals. This aligns with the improvement in efficiency Pentland saw when communication *within* the team was improved.

Case Study: The New Zealand All Blacks

The All Blacks are one of the most successful sporting organizations in modern history, with a 77% winning percentage over 612 tests. They have been the subject of numerous books, articles, and case studies on successful leadership and team building.

A few of their insights into building a high performing team are highlighted in James Kerr's "Legacy: What the All Blacks Can Teach Us About the Business of Life". (Kerr, 2013)

Teamwork:

- 1. Give your team purpose – Align towards a common goal. Communicate what success looks like.*
- 2. Never stray from your core values - Foster a culture of openness, respect, and accountability.*
- 3. Rituals reinforce the organizational culture – Give team members an identity they can take pride in.*

Leadership:

- 1. Create your own team mantra - Create a mantra the group buys into, embodies the culture you want to build, and inspires the team.*
- 2. Share your knowledge – Encourage team members to learn from each other and share their unique skills and strengths.*

The kiwifruit packhouse is an incredibly diverse place, with teams often made up of workers from multiple different nationalities. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions can help the leader understand the unique characteristics each of these nationalities brings to her team.

The benefits of utilising best practice team building models, specifically Tuckman's *Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing*, as well as a focus on leadership and communication, are clear. But, to get the best results, these models need to be adapted to the unique challenges of seasonal horticulture work.

7 Findings and Discussion

While it is clear the industry is focused on addressing the labour challenges it faces through attracting more workers to the sector, there is little discussion on how to build high performing teams within the existing workforce. The labour challenge is not strictly a numbers game – a small, well-functioning team will consistently outperform a large, dysfunctional team. (ThinkWise, 2022)

Nor should “well-functioning team” be mistaken for a harder working team. A well-functioning team works together efficiently, communicates, is forward focused, and addresses potential issues before they become major problems, leading to improved efficiency and better results.

7.1 Culture and Motivations of Seasonal Workers

The first step to building a high performing team from a collection of seasonal workers requires understanding the experience, age, and cultural demographics of those workers. Pre-Covid, seasonal employee data from the kiwifruit industry shows the main nationalities found in a packhouse are New Zealander (45%), Indian (11%), Malaysian (6%), Argentinian (4%), and Chilean (3%). These workers are generally new to the industry and tend towards a younger demographic (under-30), although a significant portion of the workforce is made up of those over 50 years of age.

Any process for building a high performing team with members of various cultures should acknowledge and respect the cultural differences amongst the team. Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions provides a tool for understanding these cultural differences (Hofstede, Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, 2010).

These dimensions help provide insight into the cultural differences of the typical nationalities found in seasonal horticulture work:

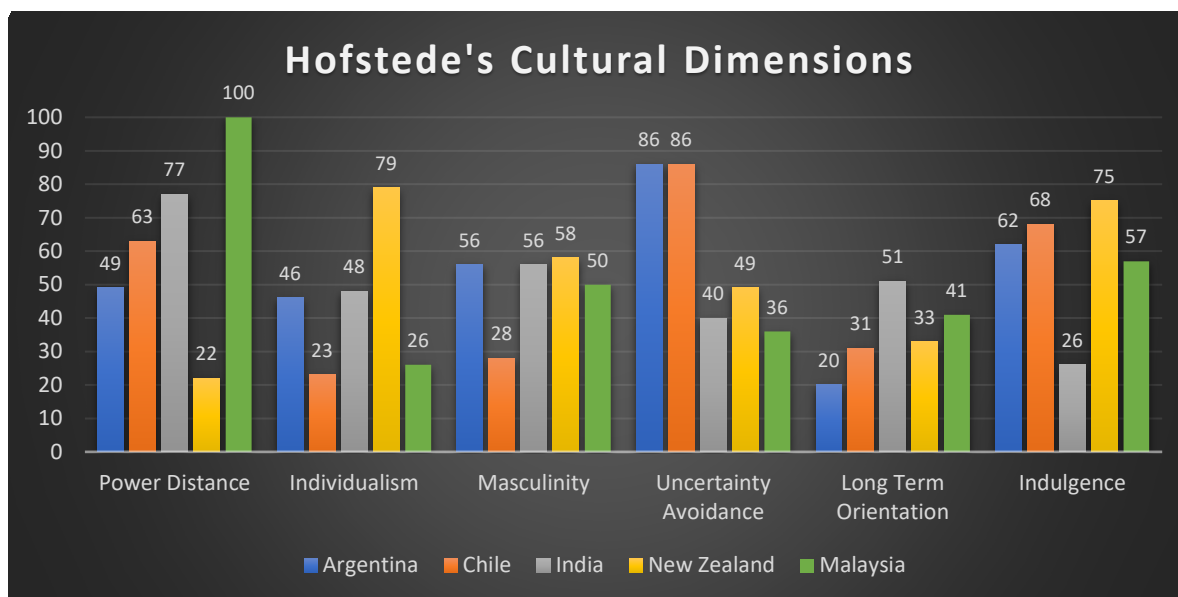


Figure 10: Cultural Dimension Comparison
Data Sourced from Hofstede Insights (Hofstede Insights, 2022)

Looking at these cultural dimensions yields some unique insights, highlighting a few major differences in the norms of the various groups. These differences should inform how the leader leads and engages her team. With

both extremes of each dimension represented on a single team, as is often the case in a packhouse, the leader needs a strategy to appeal to workers on both ends of the spectrum.

Power Distance:

Malaysia scores the highest possible on this metric (100 out of 100), meaning they accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place, and which needs no further justification. The South American and Indian cultures are also more accepting of a hierarchical order, whereas Kiwis expect a more equal distribution of power.

Countries with a high power distance are less likely to question authority, and less likely to provide input/feedback to their leaders. The implication is that leaders of teams with these high power distance cultures need to work harder to draw feedback from their team

Leaders of teams with a low power distance must go to extra lengths to explain the purpose and direction of a team. Low power distance individuals won't immediately buy into the "why" we are doing things – and "because the leader said so" often won't be good enough.

Individualism:

Malaysian and Chilean cultures are much more collective and expect their group to look out for them. These collective cultures put more emphasis on relationships and the goals/well-being of the group. Leaders can build team cohesion in these seasonal teams by focusing on the camaraderie and shared values of the team. These cultures will more easily work as a team and help other members of the team.

Individual cultures, including New Zealanders, put more emphasis on the "I". Leaders of teams with these cultures need to emphasize the benefit that individuals will get from being part of the team. This could include the team building and leadership skills associated with their role that are transferable to a wide variety of industries the employee may be interested in for the future. These individualism cultures also take more work to buy into a team dynamic. The leader needs build trust within the team and have a strategy to foster team connections.

Uncertainty Avoidance

South American cultures are less comfortable with uncertainty and want firmer direction. The biggest impact in a packhouse setting means they need more clarity of upcoming work schedules and priorities. This clarity is often difficult in the middle of a fast paced, highly variable harvest that is at the mercy of Mother Nature. Leaders need to account for this in their cascading communication plans. Even if clarity cannot be given, frequent communication is key to keeping these workers engaged.

New Zealanders and the Asian cultures are more accepting of uncertainty. With these teams, the leader can get away with more ambiguity of upcoming schedules and work plans. The team will be more resilient to sudden work schedule and priority changes.

Masculinity

There is little variability between the cultures on this dimension, with only Chileans an outlier. Cultures with low masculinity scores tend to value quality of life, not standing out, and belonging;

while those on the other end of the spectrum place more emphasis on achievement, competition, and winning.

This dimension helps leaders understand the individual motivations of their team members. Those who value achievement and winning will benefit from setting goals, being challenged to achieve those goals, and regularly reviewing progress/targets. Those who value quality of life and belonging will be more motivated by the team aspect of the job and a prioritization on the relationships built with their team members.

Long-Term Orientation

This dimension addresses how societies balance the maintaining of, and respect for, tradition while still acknowledging and planning for the future. Cultures with low long-term orientation prefer to maintain time-honored traditions and are skeptical of change. Those with high scores are more pragmatic, focusing their energy on the present and future - they're also more likely to accept change.

The key aspect of this dimension relevant to team building is in understanding how your team will deal with change. Do they expect things to always be done a certain way or are they open to changing priorities and schedules? Most cultures found in a packhouse tend towards the low end of the spectrum, meaning extra effort, especially a focus on communication, will be required of the leader when the team is faced with change and uncertainty.

Indulgence

This dimension defines the extent to which people try to control their impulses and desires. Those cultures on the low end of this spectrum are considered to show restraint and have a tendency towards cynicism and pessimism.

Teams with members from cultures on the high end of this spectrum will want to regularly celebrate their successes. The team will be more optimistic but also short term focused.

Most cultures in the packhouse are at the higher end of this spectrum and will benefit from regular celebrations through the season as key milestones are achieved. The leader will also need to work hard to keep the team focused on the big picture and long-term objectives.



7.2 Challenges of Leading Seasonal Work Teams

“If you’ve hired a diverse team, you have a variety of strengths at your disposal. But if you don’t help people integrate effectively through common values, those strengths may not be used to their full potential — and your team probably won’t be more than the sum of its very different members.”

(Farnell, 2016)

A major challenge for seasonal industries is in the integration of individuals who are new to the organization and often not invested in the long-term success of the organization. By knowing your workforce, and their cultural norms and motivations, the leader can deliver a clear, engaging message that defines common values and instills a sense of direction and purpose.

Even if the worker isn’t engaged in the long-term success of the business, the leader can still appeal to their individual motivation – whether that’s gaining valuable experience being part of a diverse team, having fun in a fast-paced environment, or even working long hours for a few months to bank a solid pay packet.

Ideally, once a team is engaged and aligned to their team’s purpose, the leader can divest more control to the team. However, another challenge with a seasonal work team formed from individuals new to the organization is in their general lack of technical understanding.

Marquet discovered divesting control only works with a competent workforce that understands the organization’s purpose. As he divested control, he had to build technical competence within his team and reinforce organizational clarity (Marquet, 2013).

Due to the limited time to build technical competence, seasonal industries often do not have the luxury of divesting control to their work teams. Thus, a practical approach becomes providing day-to-day instruction to their team while constantly working to maintain engagement. Leaders of seasonal work teams need to be prepared to make decisions for the team while ensuring members still feel part of the team.

7.3 Communication

Communication is the key ingredient to addressing these alignment and engagement challenges listed above. There are two forms of communication the leader needs to account for:

Provide Communication to the Team

Even in skilled work teams formed from inside the organization, the leader needs to communicate a clear purpose and direction. With a seasonal, culturally diverse work team, the leader needs to take this a step further, helping the individuals find common ground and bond as a team before they align to a common purpose. “Inclusion is one thing, and integration is something else entirely. I’ve found that people with disparate life experiences often require help from their leaders to see and develop common ground.” (Farnell, 2016)

Communication from the organization’s leaders to the workers starts with the induction and training process. The purpose of the team, and what success looks like for the team and for the organization, should be clearly communicated.

Once the team is formed, there needs to be a regular cascading communication process in place for the organization to keep the team engaged, communicate upcoming schedules and expectations, and inform how the team is tracking towards its goals.

Foster Communication within the Team

The second form of communication that needs to be addressed is communication within the team. Alex Pentland’s research on high performing teams highlighted the importance of communication between team members:

“In data collected by wearable electronic sensors that capture people’s tone of voice and body language, we can see the highly consistent patterns of communication that are associated with productive teams, regardless of what kind of work they do. The data do not take into account the substance of communication, only the patterns, but they show that those patterns are what matter most—more than skill, intelligence, and all other factors that go into building a team combined” (Pentland, 2012)

In the packhouse, there are a few ways leadership can facilitate effective communication within their teams:

1. Shared breaks and events – These facilitate communication between team members outside of the packhouse floor.
2. Movement of staff – By moving staff within the work area and/or between teams, the leader fosters communication between different individuals that wouldn’t normally happen.
3. Regular meetings – Although seasonal employees are often not included in regular meetings, this is a mistake. Not only do meetings provide information, they can foster communication between team members.

7.4 Team Building

The step-by-step process laid out in the highly regarded team building guide, *Ignition: A Guide to Building High-Performing Teams* (Curphy, Nilsen, & Hogan, 2019), suggests it takes about three months to build a high performing team. Additionally, this timeline assumes the team is formed from individuals already within the business. With the kiwifruit packing season lasting only three months, post-harvest operators cannot afford to wait 2-3 months before their teams are performing at an acceptable level.

Current team performance seen during the kiwifruit packing season aligns well with the 2-3 months *Ignition* suggests is required to get teams to the Performing stage. This is visualised in the following graph, with the season and team performance overlaid with the five stages of team development. Note that for only 1/3 of the season are most teams in the medium-high to high performance range.

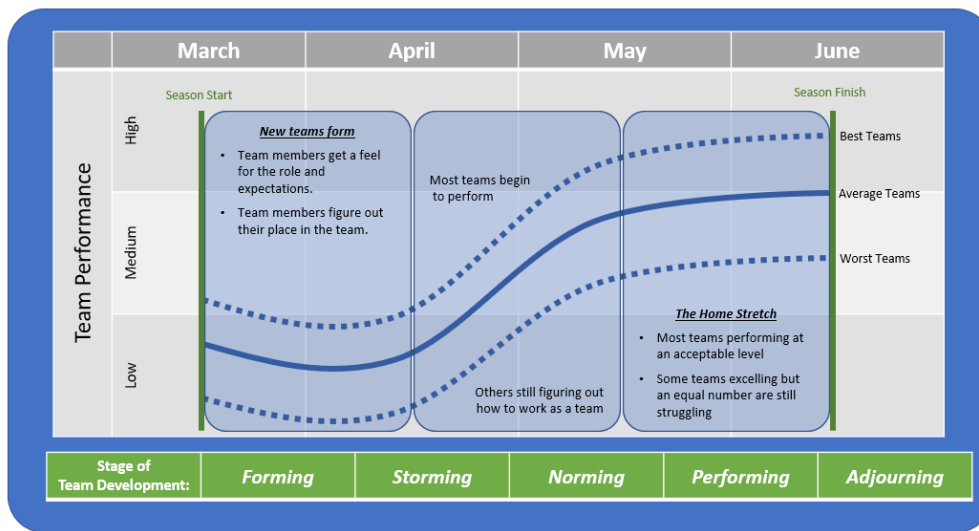


Figure 11: Typical Packhouse Team Performance

The goal of any seasonal organisation should be to get their teams to the performing stage as quickly as possible. By taking a deliberate, structured team building approach, tailored to the unique cultural characteristics of your team, it is possible to significantly reduce this 2-3 month timeframe. The visualisation below shows the ideal state, with team building sessions starting well before the season commences. If this lofty goal can be achieved, most teams will spend 3/4 of the season in the medium-high to high performance range.

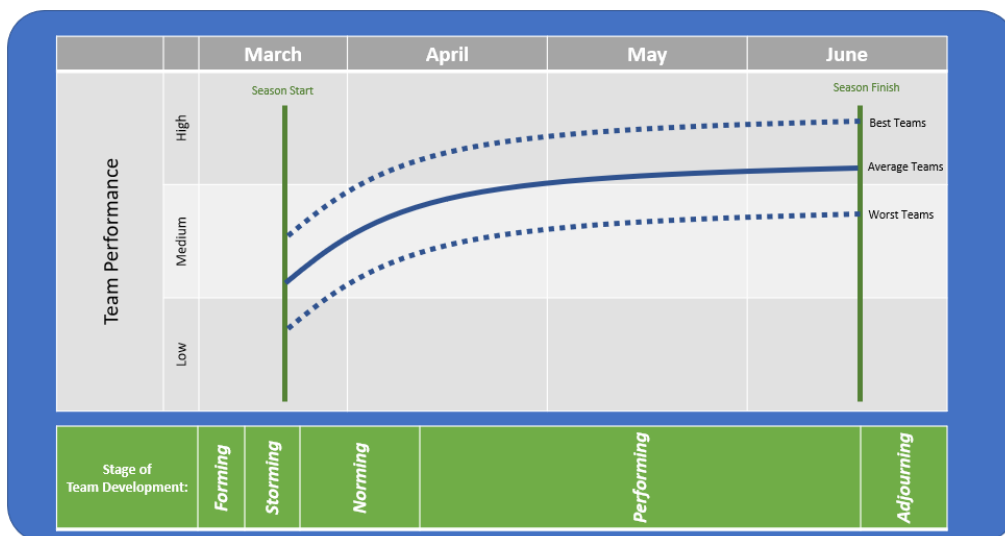


Figure 12: Ideal Packhouse Team Performance

Pre-Team Building

Before the team comes together, some preparation from the leader is required to increase the likelihood of the successful formation of a high performing team. Know the various cultures on your team and understand their differences. Will the leader need to put extra effort into getting buy-in on why the team exists? Or will more effort be required to extract input and feedback from the team? How much effort does the leader need to put into clarifying each step of the process? How will the team react to the uncertain schedules and expectations along the way?

LEADER ACTIONS:

- Know the cultural makeup of your team
- Understand the differences in cultural dimension scores amongst the team
- Tailor your leadership approach to addressing these cultural differences
- Tailor your team building strategy to account for these cultural differences

Forming

When a new team is first formed, individuals are unsure of the team's purpose, their role in helping the team achieve its purpose, how they fit within the team, and how they'll interact with one another. The team members often feel excitement and enthusiasm mixed with anxiety and uncertainty.

Team members will look to the team leader for direction. By providing this direction the team leader can harness the excitement and enthusiasm of the team while addressing the anxiety and uncertainty. Promote cohesion amongst the team by defining the core values all employees can get behind, regardless of their culture or motivations - respect, honesty, and integrity.

While most seasonal horticulture jobs require little experience, employees want to feel valued and understand the value they bring to an organization. Instead of making them feel replaceable, leaders should reinforce the value they bring to an organization throughout the induction and training processes.

Realistically, a WHV holder on a seasonal contract who only intends to stay in the area for 3-4 months will not be as invested in the success of the business as a full-time employee. In this case, the leader should focus on the value the employee receives from the job. This could be related to the team building and leadership skills associated with their role that are transferable to a wide variety of industries the employee may be interested in for the future. Or many seasonal employees will simply be motivated by the camaraderie found in a fast-paced industry full of a diverse group of workers.

LEADER ACTIONS:

- Clearly introduce the company's vision and values
- Define what success looks like – What is the team's purpose and direction?
- Define the reason the team exists – What's the case for a team-based structure?
- Introduce team roles, structure, and expectations
- Give their position value
 - Reinforce the value the employee brings to the organization
 - Emphasis the benefits the employee will receive from the job

Storming

When individuals come together and become a team, conflict can occur as personal differences surface. This is where cultural differences can often begin to show, as cultural norms towards authority, conflict, and motivation are often quite different.

Left unchecked, personal agendas begin to show and members begin to push against established boundaries. This can lead to confrontations on the team, the challenging of authority, and even an us-vs-them mentality amongst the team.

The leader wants to help usher the team through this stage as quickly as possible. The challenge with seasonal businesses is that it is often difficult to even enter this stage until the season is underway. And often seasonal work teams never make it past this stage.

LEADER ACTIONS:

- Revisit and clarify the team's purpose and direction
- Clearly define team roles and responsibilities
- Engage the team in setting purpose and goals (after the company sets direction)

Norming

In this stage the team begins to form a cohesive unit. Members start cooperating, resolve their differences, and respect the authority of the leader. They're committed to the team's goals and cooperate towards achieving it.

Although difficult, getting to this stage within the first 1-2 weeks of the season is a worthy goal for any seasonal industry.

LEADER ACTIONS:

- Build connection by encouraging communication within the team
- Create a Team Charter
- Define working approaches and processes
- Highlight, and celebrate, the unique skills and experiences each member brings to the team
- Encourage constructive criticism

Performing

As the team is making progress towards a common goal, confidence grows both individually and with other members of the group. The team is working efficiently and achieving success on a regular basis.

By this stage, roles on the team may have become more fluid, with members taking on various roles and responsibilities as needed. The team members understand their differences and leverage this to improve the team's performance. (Stein, 2018)

Seasonal employees will know their role and place on the team well, are engaged and enjoying the camaraderie of their team, and may even be taking on more responsibility or helping in other areas as required.

As a leader of seasonal teams, this is a great time to identify and cultivate hidden talent. Although most seasonal employees move on at the end of the season, in a high-growth sector there is always

a need to build the permanent ranks. With proper coaching, training, and development the best of these seasonal employees, who are in the area long-term, can be converted to valuable full-time employees.

LEADER ACTIONS:

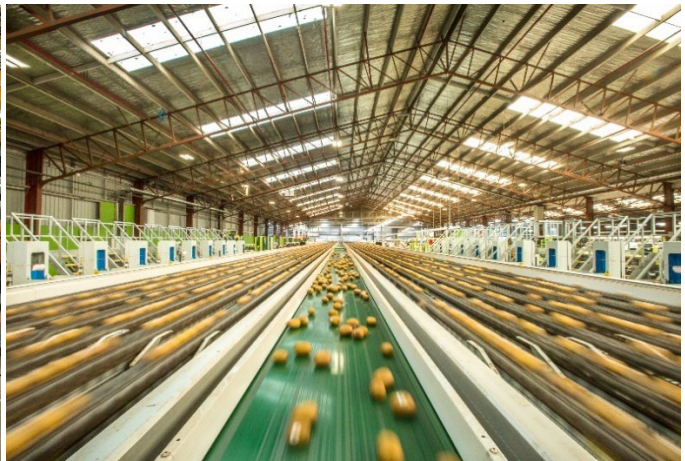
- Leverage successes to build team pride and loyalty
- Encourage teamwork and opportunities for individual growth
- Cross-train and upskill promising staff
- Look for opportunities to convert high-potential seasonal employees into full time employees

Adjourning

By this stage the team members acknowledge their work is coming to an end. Some may be anxious due to uncertainty of what's next or feel sadness about no longer being part of a team. At the same time, they may also feel a sense of satisfaction at their personal and team accomplishments through the season. Given these conflicting feelings, it is common for individual and team morale to rise and fall throughout the adjourning stage.

LEADER ACTIONS:

- Keep the team focused on the task at hand to maintain productivity to the end of the season
- Provide clarity on next steps –is any additional work available during the storage season or even next season
- Celebrate the contributions of the individuals and the accomplishments of the team



8 Conclusion

High performance teams have:

- *A deeper sense of purpose*
- *More ambitious performance goals compared to the average team*
- *A clear, collectively understood working approach*
- *A sense of mutual accountability*
- *Complementary skill sets and at times interchangeable skills*

(Katzenbach & Smith, 1993)

Although insightful, the characteristics of a high-performance team identified by Katzenbach and Smith (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993) sets an almost impossibly high bar for a seasonal work team.

Many organizations argue it is not practical to apply existing team building methodologies in a seasonal workforce. The time and resources often can't be justified, especially when considering up to half the team could leave before the season concludes. But more costly is to have no team building strategy.

By understanding your team and applying a structured process, the unique challenges of building a team within the seasonal horticulture workforce can be overcome.

9 Recommendations

The current seasonal labour challenges seen throughout the primary sector are not just a numbers game. Leaders can get more out of their workforce by focusing on building their seasonal workgroups into high-performing teams as quickly as possible.

Understanding the uniqueness of your seasonal workforce, strong leadership with clear communication, and applying a structured team building methodology is the key to helping your seasonal work team achieve the results you desire.

9.1 Understand Your Seasonal Workforce

- 1) Cultural Differences
 - a. Know the various cultures on your team and understand their differences
 - b. How much effort is required to get buy-in for the team's mission and purpose?
 - c. What is each team member's need for communication vs collaboration?
- 2) Motivation
 - a. Employees want to feel valued and understand the value they bring to an organization
 - b. Emphasize the value the employee receives from the job. In addition to their pay, they can work in a dynamic, fast paced industry full of diverse workers. They'll also likely get valuable experience in leading teams and managing change.

9.2 Tailor Your Leadership and Communication Style to Your Team

- 1) Leadership
 - a. Tailor your leadership, and communication, style to meet the needs of your team
- 2) Cascading Communication
 - a. Provide a clear, compelling sense of direction and purpose
 - b. Although seasonal horticulture work is weather dependent, with schedules constantly changing, regular communication of expected schedules is critical to maintain engagement
- 3) Communication Within the Team
 - a. With a seasonal, culturally diverse work team, the leader needs to help individuals find common ground and bond as a team before they align to a common purpose
 - b. Have a plan to facilitate effective communication within their teams

9.3 Develop a Structured Team Building Process Specific to the Needs of Your Team

- 1) Pre-Season Work
 - a. Spending a few days working through the Forming and Storming stages of team building prior to the season will help ensure the team is performing when the season starts
- 2) Structured Process
 - a. A detailed Team Building process, with specific leadership tasks adapted for seasonal horticulture work, can be found in the Appendix.

9.4 Next Steps

Although out of scope of this paper, the recruitment, induction, and training phases of bringing a seasonal employee into an organization play a pivotal role in the success of seasonal teams within the organization.

The team building recommendations outlined above should form part of the induction and training process for seasonal employees but do not eliminate the need for a strong onboarding process. Pangborn provides recommendations on induction and training that still ring true. (Pangborn, 2016)

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11 Appendix

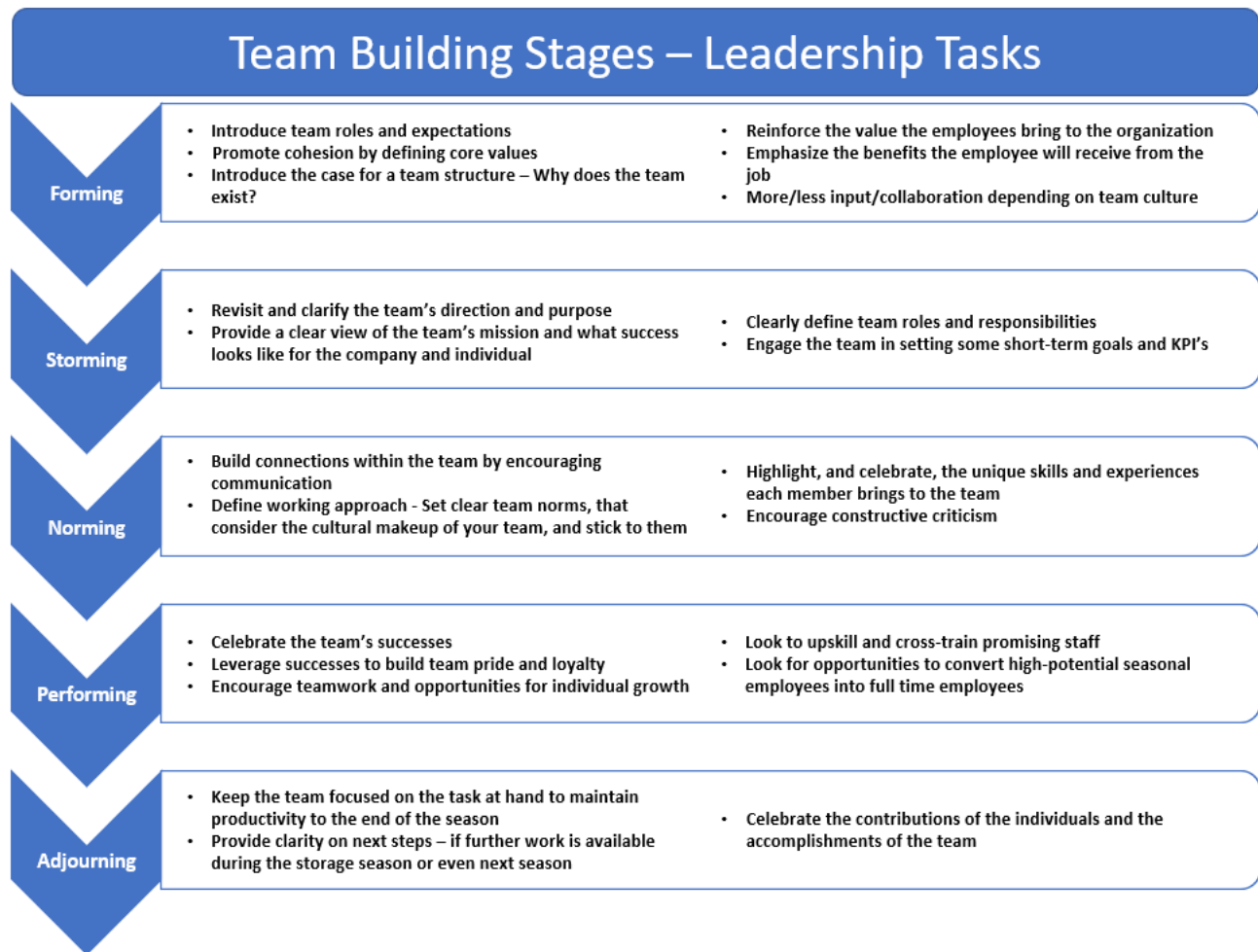


Figure 13: Team Building Leadership Tasks by Stage