

How do you help your team members to care about their work?

■ By Nicole McDonald

AT A GLANCE...

- People can have different levels of external or internal factors motivating them to work.
- Relying only on external factors like pay or financial incentives, and punishments or negative consequences won't get workers to step up to the next level.
- Cotton growers can move people along the motivation continuum by setting up ways for their team to experience relatedness, competence, autonomy, and meaningfulness in their jobs.
- We give an example from cotton grower Andrew Watson that demonstrates how growers can design work activities to give their team experiences of relatedness, competence, autonomy, and meaningfulness.

IN the CRDC-funded SHIFT Project¹ our team has been using a co-design process to hone in on workforce topics that are an issue for cotton growers and to find solutions that are evidence-based and practical. When we initially put a call out back in November 2022 for cotton growers and farm managers to tell us their workforce challenge, one wrote back with "Having the staff step up to next level, not just be workers." So, for this article, I thought we'd look at how you can help a team member take something that is important to you, (doing a good job on farm), and find it personally important to them. Otherwise known as "How do you help someone to care about their work?"

There are many different ways people can be motivated to work, and broadly these run on a continuum from not

being motivated at all, through to being motivated by different kinds of external factors (extrinsic motivation) to being completely motivated by internal factors (intrinsic motivation).

The 5 levels of motivation

Below we've adapted Self-Determination Theory's Taxonomy of Motivation for the cotton farm context. Reflect on your team or colleagues and see if you recognise any of these kinds of motivational states in their behaviour at work.

- 1. Amotivation:** Your team member feels like they can't do their job at all, they don't see value for their effort and they feel personally irrelevant to your business.

What we've heard from growers:

I've seen amotivation play out in stories of "siphon pullers" who come unprepared for the physicality of the job, they feel incompetent and that the effort to do this job is not worth it. Before growers even get the chance to have an impact on their motivation, this person is done.

- 2. Extrinsic Motivation Level 1 (completely external):**

Your team member is only motivated to do their work by external rewards, (the money, completing 88 days for visa requirements), or punishments (if I don't do this and lost my job, I lose the accommodation I need).

What we've heard from growers:

I've seen this play out in stories of backpackers who stick out a job that they ordinarily would not do, people who are only at their current workplace for the money and workers wearing PPE only because otherwise they will receive a warning or be fired from a job they need.

- 3. Extrinsic Motivation Level 2 (mostly external, slightly internal motivation):** Your team member is motivated to do their work to satisfy their own ego. They need this job to feel that they are worth something to other people and themselves.

What we've heard from growers:

In my experience, this is a common level of motivation for many people. Your workers may not love their jobs a lot of the time, but they will show up and work because they need to satisfy their sense of pride and to gain the approval of others. An area I've seen this sometimes play out is when younger growers have reflected on their motivation for their job, asking themselves "Am I doing this because it's expected of me and I don't want to let my family down (Extrinsic Motivation Level 2), or am I doing this because it's what I want to do and I have goals I want to achieve related to the farm (Extrinsic Motivation Level 3)?"

- 4. Extrinsic Motivation Level 3 (slightly external, mostly internal):** Your workers find value in their day-to-day work activities, and they have personally important



Team meeting: Fostering a sense of relatedness and meaningfulness is important for motivation. (PHOTO: Renee Anderson)



Supporting peoples' skill development, ensuring they have a sense of competence and can reflect on their achievements is important for motivation.

(PHOTO: Chantal Corish)

goals, and their job gives them the opportunity to work towards these.

What we've heard from growers:

You see this in the people who are wanting to develop and grow in their roles on farm. They may not love everything about their job, but for them, the effort to do these less enjoyable tasks is worth it as they work towards achieving their personal best and work goals. The people who have this kind of motivation are often tapped to become farm managers. Although I'd caution you to keep an eye out for their motivation to manage people if you are considering developing someone who is technically good at crop production into a team leader.

5. Intrinsic Motivation (completely internal): Your workers don't care about the money, they don't need approval or positive reinforcement from others, they just live to farm.

What we've heard from growers:

In my experience, people on cotton farms can tap into intrinsic motivation for aspects of their job, experiencing interest, enjoyment and being inherently satisfied by particular tasks, but I'm sceptical that anyone is always and only intrinsically motivated at work.

Nudging people towards internal motivation

While it's highly unlikely we'll be solely and completely intrinsically motivated at work all the time – doing it purely because we enjoy and are interested by it, leaders can nudge people further along this continuum towards greater levels of internal motivation. You can do this by ensuring that you are not relying solely on contingent incentives to motivate your team's effort (e.g. financial rewards for meeting KPI's). Instead, you can help people show up to work willing to step up to that next level and be keen to get the job done by employing strategies for them to experience satisfaction in four key areas. People care about work when they feel a sense of relatedness, competence, autonomy, and meaningfulness in their jobs.

- When people have a sense of relatedness you essentially get them to the point where they say: "I care about my work because I care about you/you care about me and when we're in this together my sense of belonging is satisfied."
- When people have a sense of competence you essentially

get them to the point where they say: "I care about my work because I am good at it and when I can effectively do things my sense of achievement is satisfied."

- When people have a sense of autonomy you essentially get them to the point where they say: "I care about my work because I don't feel coerced or controlled and when I can choose my actions my sense of freedom is satisfied."
- When people have a sense of meaningfulness you essentially get them to the point where they say: "I care about my work because it feels meaningful to do it, and this means my sense of purpose is satisfied."

A strategy to motivate the team to care: The Annual Yield Competition at Kilmarnock

One example² we've come across in the research of an activity that increased team members motivation by giving them autonomy, competence, relatedness and meaningfulness is the Annual Yield Competition that cotton grower Andrew Watson runs with his team on Kilmarnock farm. Each team member, Andrew included, are given their own area of the crop to manage and irrigate through the season, with the highest yield securing that person the nominal prize of a carton of their preferred beverage. It's a fun experience, and with their employer participating alongside them, team members develop their knowledge of the impacts that decisions could have on the crop and expand their decision-making skills.

As Andrew explains: "There's a fair bit of humour involved in that. But it does get them thinking about their patch. You know, one of them will come to me and say, well, there's a few weeds in here – is that going to impact on the yield? And I say, yep, what are we going to do? (Or they ask) well, if I start irrigating on Sunday, that's probably better than if I start Monday morning?"

The motivating factor isn't the prize. The motivating factor is the satisfaction of getting to be the one making the decision for the crop (autonomy), some good-natured ribbing and competition with your work colleagues (relatedness), getting better in your skillset (competence) and seeing the results of your work (meaningfulness).

In talking more with one of Andrew's team members about what was important to them to get their job done well, they spoke about their internal motivators, their interest and enjoyment and noted that all important 'need for relatedness' – being satisfied at work.

"Probably trying to get it done to the best of your ability is about 50 per cent of it, and then I like having a bit of fun at work. I don't come to work, do my job and go home. You know, I come and have a bit of a joke with the boys. Make the day interesting. Have a chat. That's the way I like to do my job and I do it as best I can."

And having a team member dedicating effort to doing their job the best that they can, is how they take themselves to the next level, and not just be workers.

1. www.shiftproject.com.au
2. **Understanding and planning for the future cotton workforce (insidecotton.com)**

Nicole is a Senior Research Officer in CQUniversity's Agricultural Education and Extension Cluster and leads the SHIFT team that consists of Chantal Corish, Amy Cosby, and Jo Eady.

