



FINAL REPORT 2014

Choose an item.

Part 1 - Summary Details

Please use your TAB key to complete Parts 1 & 2.

CRDC Project Number: CRDC1328

Project Title: Building capacity of cotton farm employees:
employer driven staff development.

Project Commencement Date: 1/7/2013 **Project Completion Date:** 31/12/2014

CRDC Research Program: 4 People

Part 2 – Contact Details

Administrator: Warwick Waters, Director

Organisation: Waters Consulting

Postal Address: 80 Lawrence Rd, Highfields, QLD 4352

Ph: 0437937074 **Fax:** **E-mail:** watersw@internode.on.net

Principal Researcher: As Above

Organisation:

Postal Address:

Ph: **Fax:** **E-mail:**

Supervisor: As Above

Organisation:

Postal Address:

Ph: **Fax:** **E-mail:**

Signature of Research Provider Representative: _____

Date Submitted: _____

Background

1. Outline the background to the project.

In an increasingly competitive labour market, the ability to retain and develop existing employees is an ongoing challenge for the Cotton Industry. With approximately 4000 employees on cotton farms, even a small shift in labour productivity and retention will have significant benefits to the industry.

A previous CRDC project (Understanding the value added by vocational training in the Cotton Industry) identified the significant role of employers in the process of developing employee skills, particularly in the identification of training needs, and the application and re-enforcing learning post-training. While training resources have been developed by the industry and the VET sector, there has been limited uptake by employers of staff management training or by existing employees on cotton farms of formal farm production training. This project seeks to understand the motivations and barriers to developing staff management skills and capacity building of employees.

Objectives

2. List the project objectives and the extent to which these have been achieved.

This project had three key aims:

- 1) To test the metrics identified in the Value of Training project in a practical context and identify opportunities for application. This included considering the impact of individual farm capital investment in machinery and use of contractors on labour metrics as well as exploring the options for linking levels of competency of specific areas of practice (planting for example) to farm productivity. This relationship between skill level and productivity has formed the basis of measuring return on investment in training in other agricultural industries.

Based on the Boyce & Co CCA report, the key metrics explored were hectares of cotton per labour unit, tractor horsepower per 500ha, contracting cost per hectare and bales of cotton per labour unit. These metrics were collected from a range of farms involved in the training workshops and their value was discussed.

While there was interest in the metrics, it became obvious that the variability between seasons had a much greater impact than the variability between the farming systems represented. This was a useful exercise as Boyce only report averages, so it was interesting to see the ranges, such as a highly skilled operator managing 450 hectares largely by himself where as other farms were below 180 hectares per labour unit.

The 2014 Boyce data is quoting average labour costs of \$462/ha, which seems on the high side when hectares per labour unit are approaching 200. This would indicate average wages above \$90,000, which was not the case for the

farm workers involved in the training workshops. It is also interesting that the NSW Department of Trade and Investment cotton gross margins identify labour inputs of less than two hours per hectare of machinery operation for a whole season, indicating that the vast majority of a cotton employee's time is spend doing things other than driving tractors and other equipment.

The role of labour metrics will be discussed more under the results section.

- 2) To explore the strengths and limitations of the employers role in identifying skills gaps and training needs and driving the delivery of training by; harnessing the resources available on farm, through industry development programs and through the vocational training system. This will involve a process to reflect on current practice, plan improvements and practically test those changes to the current system. This aim will explore the need and options for delivery of staff management training for employers to develop the skills to improve employee skills and retain current employees.
- 3) To engage with industry extension and the VET sector to adapt existing training resources and delivery options to meet the identified needs of the case study reference groups. This included consideration of the practical delivery of training for employees.

The involvement of Rebecca Fing in the development of the HR Training Workshops provided a very practical case study of adapting existing training resources to meet the needs of the industry. Feedback from the focus groups identified the preferred timing, location and process of training delivery. It was observed that a key to the success of this program was the single point of contact through Rebecca for each of the trainee's and her ability to understand and work around the seasonal demands of the farm. This included options like rapidly pulling groups together during rainy weather. It also includes a focus on the skill needs of the farm, not the units of competency required for the qualification. This has not diminished the value of the qualification, but enhanced the value to growers and the industry by taking a bit more time to cover what was identified by the employers.

Methods

3. Detail the methodology and justify the methodology used. Include any discoveries in methods that may benefit other related research.

This project used focus groups to identify skills needs, semi structured interviews to understand grower capacity building challenges and issues during the delivery of the Human Resources Training Workshops. These are all standard social research methodologies and do not add benefit to other research projects.

It is apparent, however, that cotton growers are very time poor and the opportunity to engage with growers is limited. Discussion with consultants revealed a change in on farm culture since the drought years. Previously, owner/managers were more inclined to have significant office time dedicated to more strategic activity such as planning, marketing and business management. With the added financial pressure of the drought years, owner/managers had by necessity taken on more practical tasks on farm. With the improving seasons, they had continued to perform these roles. One of the growers interviewed agreed with this assessment and had made the conscious decision to be able to spend a day a month off his farm contributing to industry activities (Cotton Australia panel member etc). He believes growers are taking a business risk by being overly committed to their own farm.

It is also apparent that the CottonInfo Regional Development Officers (RDO's) are growing in their roles within each region. With time, they will develop relationships with growers that will allow them to more confidently give direction to researchers about the motivation for involvement in projects and to better identify growers who would be interested in participating.

Results

4. Detail and discuss the results for each objective.

The original strategy of the project was to meet with three grower reference groups to discuss employee capacity building and their role in that process. CRDC had expressed an interest in understanding if cotton businesses with higher returns manage staff any differently. This strategy was reliant on an existing motivation of growers to explore ways to develop their staff and the ability to be able to identify businesses that were performing above industry average.

In mid 2013, the Cotton Industry Skills project began, aimed at providing training delivery for existing cotton farm workers. This project also needed to identify the training needs of employees. It was decided that where possible the projects would collaborate to maximize efficiency. This freed up time to be able to explore additional data sources to understand the role of employers in developing staff capacity and the value of that capacity. As a result, data collection for Milestone Two consisted of:

- Three regional grower focus groups to identify priorities for staff training, previous experience and preferences around delivery (similar to the planned reference groups). These were conducted in Narrabri, Goondiwindi and the Riverina regions.
- Semi- structured interviews with growers on the Downs, Goondiwindi and Boggabri.
- Analysis of industry business data sets including Boyce & Co, NSW Department of Primary Industries crop gross margins and the Agripath benchmarking program.

The following discussion details the main findings of the focus groups and interviews, and the application to the training workshops developed.

The key skills for managers identified by the focus groups were:

- Communication
- Empathy with staff
- Effective team worker
- Awareness of mental health factors
- Understanding budgets

These issues provided a solid core for the development of staff management training for this group.

Motivation and Barriers to HR Training Delivery

The motivation and barriers to employee capacity building were discussed in the focus groups. The motivations for improving staff management capacity included:

- Enabling timeliness of operations through effective staff management. As the ability to monitor and manage inputs to the cotton production system improve, the timeliness of managing inputs rather than varying the inputs themselves is becoming more important to farm productivity and profitability.
- Removing stress and pressure from the farm through having competent employees who can identify and solve small problems before they become big problems. The industries willingness to invest in round module pickers is an example of the motivation to remove the stress of inexperienced staff from the production system.
- Retention of staff through growing them with the business.
- It saves time, not having to fix problems caused by unskilled workers.

“You have to be very precise with the little things to make a dollar” Narrabri focus group.

It is an interesting development in cotton that the technological capacity of farm machinery is increasing, which in some ways is reducing the skill required by the operator to operate it effectively. It could be argued that there is a significant opportunity to realise the value of precision agriculture technology by up-skilling the people using it, but the reality at this stage is that precision agricultural technology needs to be utilised and incorporated at an owner and manager level into the farming system first. It was a common observation from machinery resellers that 80% of the technology capacity on modern tractors and pickers is not being utilised at this stage. Change needs to occur at a systems level before capacity building of employees is required.

Barriers to employee capacity building included:

- Challenges managing the timing of training. It is recognised that the most value from training will be realised if it is delivered close to the time that the skill will be applied. While some of this training can be reliably planned in advance, in some cases a flexible approach that allows for the impact on weather on availability and timing is required.
- Ability to measure the value of training. As discussed in the review of industry data sets, there are challenges in measuring the impact of increased employee capacity. Even tracking employee productivity over time on the one farm is challenging due to variability in the amount of crop planted each

year. As a result, a grower has to weigh up the obvious immediate cost of time and dollars spent on training against a much less definable future return.

- Difference in perception of task challenge. The theory of Flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) identifies the differences in mental state of inexperienced and experienced people performing the same task. As the level of task challenge increases, an experienced person will move from boredom to arousal and control, where the inexperienced person will move from apathy to worry and anxiety. If this is recognised, it provides a strong motivation to increasing employee skill and experience. If it is not recognised, it can lead to incorrect assumptions by experienced managers about how their staff are responding to challenging situations.
- The “starting product” is different these days, with younger people more demanding and having a different concept of hard work. Managers feel less inclined to invest in developing people with this attitude.

Another barrier is highlighted in the work of Mulder *et al* (2007) on identifying and developing competencies for transforming farms into learning communities. They found that while farmers demonstrated competencies, they did not relate to the generic definitions of those competencies from the management literature. The competencies included in their study were: learning orientation, self-management, planning, market orientation, result orientation, networking, leadership, problem analysis, conceptual thinking, negotiation, persuasiveness, vision, general awareness, management control, value clarification, judgement, team work, strategic orientation, human resource management and international orientation. This list provides a good reference to compare the competencies identified in the needs analysis and included in the workshops.

Mulder *et al* (2007) found that farmers did not think in these discrete competency categories and only attributed meaning to them when they were embedded in the farming context. The point here is that promotion of the value of HR training may have limited impact while generic management terms are being used, but over time a more effective context embedded language will emerge that is more meaningful to growers and their employees.

The final stage of data collection will occur during the delivery of two HR Training two day workshops with growers in the Narrabri, Moree and Goondiwindi districts. These workshops are an implementation of the suggested outcomes of this project.

The key components of this workshop informed by this project include:

Communication

Improving communication between the work team was the highest priority raised by the needs analysis. The workshop took a very practical approach of identifying the main communications activities on farm and then considered some theory on listening, the role of body language, words and tone in communication, prevention of conflict through developing trust relationships and understanding the impact of personality on communication. The workshop process included a case study farm to use as examples if participants wanted to raise hypothetical situations. In practice this was hardly required and participants were comfortable talking about their own situations.

The main opportunities to improve communications identified by the participants involved avoiding miscommunication across multiple levels of the organisation. Examples included information flow from consultants to owner to operations manager, where the operations manager gets frustrated by the consultant not being aware of the implication of their advice at an operations level. Another example was owners giving instructions directly to operators contrary to what an operations manager had organised. In each case, we talked through the reasons for communication failure and identify options for practically addressing that failure on farm.

Understanding Personality Difference

Using the DISC (driver, influencer, slower paced and compliance orientation) profiling, individuals completed a self assessment and then participate in a few exercises to explore the implications of their personal preferences. It was very interesting to see the relationship between personal preferences and the roles they currently had on farm. The majority of people found themselves in roles that suited their personality preferences. Some newer employees were currently performing roles that they saw as necessary to transition to roles they would prefer. The issue was raised that some employees are going to grow out of positions relatively quickly, which creates risk for the employer (as they may move on to a better position elsewhere). Some employers were willing to take this risk while others aimed to avoid it by employing potentially less capable but more stable staff.

Working in Teams

This process emphasised the relationship between organisational culture and values and the practical operation of the people who make up the working team. It demonstrated the relationship between seemingly unimportant tasks such as regularly reviewing performance and asking for feedback from staff and the bigger issues of maintaining organisational culture.

As a practical example of work culture, each farm was asked to consider their position on swearing on farm. The aim of the exercise was not to come up with an ideal policy on swearing in the work place, but to consider the processes currently in place that determined what was appropriate, how standards were maintained and how employee opinions were considered. In most cases, there was no formal mechanism for articulating work culture, or defining "this is how we work around here".

After the swearing exercise, participants were encouraged to identify aspects of work culture that they thought were important to address on their farms, and issues of keeping to time (particularly at shift changes), honestly (particularly when mistakes had been made) and willingness to listen to everyone's ideas were identified.

Industrial Relations

Although the people and productivity aspects of staff management were priorities, the participants appreciated being able to work through relevant industrial relations issues. This included running through a risk profile of the laws they were required

to comply with. Of these, the federal employment laws and tax law were identified as the highest risk.

Topics covered included the National Employment Standards, the Pastoral Award 2010, individual flexibility agreements and the BOOT test (better off over all test). These discussions raised specific questions that the presenters were either able to address on the spot or seek clarification on between meetings. This session also included working through the HR & WHS Module of myBMP.

Employers Role and Staff Management Training

The majority of participants at the HR Training workshops were operations managers, who reported to owners or farm managers. Staff management issues were very relevant to this level of the organisation, but they were not always empowered to influence processes and culture within the organisation. If farm owners or managers are not able to participate in the workshops, it is important that they are briefed on the workshop content and encouraged to discuss the application of that content to their business.

Training Segments

The previous “Cotton industry value of training” report identified the importance of understanding skills acquisition segments when designing and delivering training. In this project this issue was an important consideration for both the design of the training workshop and also as a component of the workshop to help managers understand the implications for developing their own staff.

It is important to realise that the segments relate to skills, not individuals. We all possess a mix of novice to expert skills. As an individual develops a skill, the way the skill develops changes. This has implications for the way training is provided to different skill levels that should be taken into account when training programs are developed. Table 1 provides a summary of these segments.

Table 1. A summary of the stages of skills acquisition as identified by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986).

Stage	Characteristics	Recognition of relevance	How context is assessed	Decision making
Novice	Sticks to taught rules or plans. No discretionary judgment. Little perception of the situation. Knowledge is explicit, or can be verbalized.	None	Analytical	Rational
Advanced Beginner	Begins to recognize patterns in the situation Instruction now assumes some understanding of the context			
Competent	The number of features in the situation that are now recognized becomes overwhelming, so goals and plans become important to			

	simplify and focus performance. Mental models are well developed to start ignoring the normal and identify the exception.	Present		
Proficient	After multiple experiences of the consequences of actions and plans in a context, there is less conscious deliberation about actions and plans. Knowledge is more tacit.			Holistic
Expert	Decision making is reduced to "knowing" by feel and familiarity. Complex situations are intuitively managed, without the need for formal plans or goals.			Intuitive

This project focused on three common segments and addressed the factors involved in developing these segments. These were:

1. Novice and new beginners. Based on the businesses represented in the workshops, 30% of employees had less than two years experience on that farm. There is also a casual labour pool, such as backpackers, who come in for short periods during busy times of the season. This segment will require clear rules and guidelines and should not be expected to be recognising unusual situations or be very good at problem solving when things go wrong. They should have ready access to a supervisor to ask questions. If given a list of tasks to perform, they should not be expected to prioritise well. Managers should also realise that during this phase, workers are having to consciously think about what they are doing, which uses more energy than sub-conscious thinking. As a result, people will get tired quicker than expected.
2. There is a segment of employees that are characterized by about four or five years experience, having an interest in continuing in the cotton industry and seen as worth investing in by their employer. This segment is looking for a combination of recognition of the skills they have developed as well as training that challenges them to step up to the next level in skills. This could include the development of an area of specialization, such as irrigation management, machinery maintenance or crop nutrition. The growers recognize that good employees may outgrow the positions available on their farm and move on.
3. A third segment are employees who have significant experience on farm and find themselves "promoted" to tasks and responsibilities they have not sort or particularly want to do, such as manage staff. While they are proficient at most of the tasks of cotton production, they may be novices and early beginners at aspects of staff management. They require a blend of clear guidelines along with case studies or problem solving activities that allow them to work through issues that they have observed but may not know how to manage. Engagement with this segment emphasised the need for including managers or owners in the training and development process, where

discussions about motivation, autonomy and career development are as important as the providing a process to gain skills.

These skills acquisition segments also provide insight into who is best placed to deliver training. As a person moves into the proficient and expert levels, their ability to explicitly express the way they do things decreases as they operate more at an intuitive level. The theory suggests that a person who has recently been through the learning process themselves is best placed to teach. This can seem counter intuitive. When delivering the staff management workshop, we have encouraged participants to learn from each other and share their experiences as well as bring in guest speakers to share their experiences in an interactive forum session.

Recommendation 1: *When the cotton industry offers or supports training in the area of staff management, and effort is made it include senior management in the process. At a minimum, this should include making managers aware of the training process and the importance of senior management and business culture on the implementation of staff management.*

Review of Industry Data Sets

The Boyce ACCA has identified that the hectares per labour unit have increase significantly since 2006. The reported figure of labour units per hectare cotton planted is consistent, but difficult to accurately define given the majority of farms grow other crops and run livestock. One of the challenges for the cotton industry is to get a better handle on employee work tasks given that the time for the paddock (mainly tractor driving) component of growing a cotton crop accounts for about 10 – 15% of the time an employee is paid for (NSW DPI gross margin templates for cotton production). Data from the John Deere Greenstar precision farming system could quickly verify this figure. If it is accurate, there could be significant labour efficiencies to be gained by examining how the farming system are using off tractor labour time. There was an example at the HR Training workshops of a cotton system producing 450 ha per labour unit, well over twice the industry average.

There is very limited dialogue in industry literature about the quantitative aspects of labour in the cotton production system. An example is the WaterPac publication that mentions labour 38 times in a 145 page document with only one vague mention of the implication on operator skill on irrigation efficiency and no mention of labour metric targets, differences between irrigation systems or specific skills required by operators. The report quotes survey results that identify “reducing the need for labour” as the second most important driver for changing irrigation systems and significant research into the benefits of bankless and overhead irrigation systems, but provides no indication of a benchmark for labour time or cost per ML of irrigation. Evaluating the implications of poor and good labour skills on the management of irrigation would allow a value to be attributed to training to change those skills. The same evaluation of labour skill impact on planting, fertiliser management, weed management, repairs and maintenance and harvesting would provide a rich picture of the influence of skill on the cotton production system.

Outcomes

5. Describe how the project's outputs will contribute to the planned outcomes identified in the project application. Describe the planned outcomes achieved to date.

Delivery of Workshops

This project was intended to be an exploration of the issues around developing the capacity of employees on cotton farms and the specific role that managers had in that process. Through the partnering with the Cotton Industry Skills project, we were able to incorporate the findings of the grower feedback into the development and delivery of workshops for growers and managers to start the capacity building process. These workshops involved 20 individuals from 16 farm businesses.

The workshops have included a review process with participants. Improvements that will occur in later versions of the workshop include:

- The collection of case studies of practical responses to industrial relations questions. Part of the workshop process includes time for participants to ask specific industrial relations questions. Some of these questions had to be taken on notice to be followed up. These questions and their answers have added to the set of examples covered in the workshops.
- Linkage to myBMP could be improved. The workshop already has a session on the check list items and resources in the Human Resources and WHS module, but there is the opportunity to further integrate the module into the workshop delivery.
- Timing of sessions will improve over time as practical experience in their delivery increases
- The content will continue to be reviewed based on current issues and participant feedback. Alignment to the Managing Staff unit of competency will continue to be a consideration, but not the key driver of content.

Informing Stakeholders

This project is also unusual in that the project manager has since been employed by the industry in the key position that this project would seek to engage with and influence. In the role of CottonInfo manager, I have the opportunity to build employee capacity development into industry programs, partner closely with Cotton Australia in their training and education activities and participate in the reference groups of ongoing workforce planning projects funded by CRDC.

***Recommendation 2:** The cotton industry sponsor the training of five key personnel in human resource management. This could include representatives from Cotton Australia, the CottonInfo team and the larger agricultural consulting companies.*

The HR Training workshops identified the importance of the weekly shed meetings for labour productivity. Although they were not mentioned specifically in the needs analysis, group discussion revealed the importance of these meeting for ensuring timeliness of operation, identifying where specific skills or knowledge gaps existed

and for addressing problems that were impacting on productivity. Running an effective weekly meeting can be challenging, with issues raised of:

- Growers allocating the responsibility of assigning weekly duties to a farm manager, but then coming in later and reallocating tasks
- Having good systems in place for when plans changed
- Managing communication from consultants

A key finding from the pilot HR training days was the opportunity for an independent person to facilitate improvements in the HR processes within farm businesses. This was highlighted by opportunities for improvement that staff identified that they did not feel confident suggesting to management without the support of a third party. This has been a significant value of the dairy HR consultants, and indications are there is a need in the cotton industry as well.

The people aspects of the cotton farming systems can be thought of in three overlapping domains of process, productivity and people. These are interrelated, and I would suggest the more they overlap the better.

Process: This covers the administrative and legal requirements of employment. This domain is the most readily defined, although it can be complex and changes can make it challenging to keep on top of. Information on the process domain is covered well by myBMP.

Productivity: there are quite limited measures of the impact on labour on the cotton production system. The Boyce report identifies the cost of labour on a per hectare, per bale and total basis as well as the hectares produced per labour unit.

There is a significant challenge in the cotton production systems to establish benchmarks for labour productivity due to the variable use of contractors and the different capital infrastructure (tractor size, irrigation types etc). This area covers issues of staff skills development and their fit with the business objectives.

Recommendation 3: *The CottonInfo team establish industry agreed parameters for measuring labour productivity on cotton farms. This should build on the analysis of the Boyce & Co report.*

Key Message: The accepted industry information on business metrics does not provide a consistent or useable story on the costs and role of labour in the business performance of cotton production. Moreover, the technical information sources (WaterPak for example) contain very limited quantitative information on the impact of labour or skills on cotton production.

Recommendation 4: *That the CottonInfo Program facilitate an industry process to identify the potential use and need of key business and labour metrics, and how they can be measured.*

People:

This covers areas such as communication, motivation, management, culture and teamwork. The HR skills analysis identified these issues as the highest priority for the diploma level trainees and the HR training program was designed to emphasise these accordingly.

References

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: the psychology of optimum experience*. New York: Harper and Row.

Dreyfus, H.L and Dreyfus, S.E. (1986). *Mind over machine: The power of human intuition and expertise in the era of the computer*. New York. Free Press.

Mulder, M., Lans, T., Verstegen, J., Biemans, H. and Meijer, Y. (2007). Competence development of entrepreneurs in innovative horticulture. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 19, 1.

6. Please describe any:-

- a) **technical advances achieved (eg commercially significant developments, patents applied for or granted licenses, etc.);**
- b) **other information developed from research (eg discoveries in methodology, equipment design, etc.); and**
- c) **required changes to the Intellectual Property register.**

This project has contributed to the development of training material to support delivery of the Unit of Competency AHCBUS501A Manage Staff that is directly relevant to the cotton industry. This material has been reviewed by a working group of cotton growers, industry and VET sector providers, and piloted in two locations with 16 participants.

Conclusion

7. Provide an assessment of the likely impact of the results and conclusions of the research project for the cotton industry. What are the take home messages?

Improving the management and development of staff on Australian cotton farms provides a significant opportunity for increasing productivity through:

- Improving the timeliness and skill of production operations
- Reducing the turnover of staff and maintaining cotton growing skills within the industry
- Attracting new employees through maintaining a reputation for being a progressive, profitable agricultural industry

As a result of this project, the first HR Training workshops have been developed and piloted. The response from participants has been very positive, and more workshops are planned to be delivered in the future. This training has identified a skills shortage in the cotton industry of people with Human Resource qualifications who are able to deliver accredited training and provide ongoing HR support to individual businesses.

While industry data sets do provide insights into labour productivity metrics, the optimum will vary from business to business based on infrastructure, the broader farming systems and the seasonal planting potential. The best guide for growers is to record labour productivity over time to assess how productivity is trending in that particular business.

Extension Opportunities

- 8. Detail a plan for the activities or other steps that may be taken:**
- (a) to further develop or to exploit the project technology.**
 - (b) for the future presentation and dissemination of the project outcomes.**
 - (c) for future research.**

Capacity building in the area of HR is relatively new in the cotton industry. Fortunately, the industry has been able to draw on the experience of the dairy industries People in Dairy program that has many years of delivering both advisor and farmer HR training. Based on that experience, we advocate that a core group of five advisors/trainers be encouraged to complete a Diploma of HR or similar to provide a basis of service support for the cotton industry. This recommendation has been re-enforced by feedback from the pilot workshop participants who identified the need for independent advisors to help work through staff management issues with managers and employees.

The CottonInfo extension planning framework provides one mechanism for considering extension of a technology. The following table works through the framework for building employee capacity:

Focus Area	Developing cotton employee capacity through better staff management
myBMP Standards	Hr5 Human resources: Staff and business requirements are part of the staff management and development strategy Hr6 Human resources: Employers ensure consistency and fairness whenever managing performance Hr7 Human resources: Staff are offered development opportunities which can take many forms from formal training, to informal on the job training and mentoring
Problem and Opportunity	The average cotton farm has six employees that are critical to the business productivity. Operations and farm managers are often appointed based on their skills and experience in cotton production, and managing staff is something that “comes with the job”. This project has identified a training need in the area of staff management for senior farm managers.
Practice Gap	Anecdotal evidence suggests that up to 30% of the industry manage labour on a minimum cost basis, resulting in high staff turnover, limited staff development and ongoing performance issues. While the majority of the industry value their staff and have good intentions of retaining and developing them, there has been limited opportunity to develop staff management skills and knowledge.
Benefit of change	The development of both good staff managers on farm and the industry support service should result in higher labour productivity and reduced staff turnover.
Service scan	Up until recently, Cotton Australia have funded support for industrial relations through Rob Kellow. This service is now on a fee for service basis. The industry provides HR resources through myBMP. While these resources are useful for providing information and templates, they are not designed to increase

	skills. Results from the Crop Consultants Association surveys show that consultants rarely if ever provide HR advice as part of their services. There is also a HR champion on the CA board in Barb Grey, who has been a willing supporter of this process and could be utilised in the future for advocacy and promotion.
Target Audience	The main participants of the current workshops are employees in middle and senior management on farm seeking to attain a diploma of agriculture. They are being supported in this professional development by their employers and managers. While the delivery through formal qualifications should continue, the training should also be offered to owners and farm managers as a stand alone training activity.
Delivery Method	Currently delivery in this area is through myBMP and the HR Training workshop. The current plan is for these workshops to be promoted in each valley and delivered when a core of seven participants express interest. It would be hoped that at least three workshops per year were delivered. In addition, there is the opportunity for targeted fact sheets and case studies to be developed based on the experiences and feedback from the workshop participants. There is also the potential to work with the People in Agriculture web site to provide additional support material for the industry.

We should recognise that many cotton growers have professional experience outside of the industry that has included managing staff. Developing employee capacity should not just be a top down process and should

There is potential for more case studies in the cotton industry media on the application of good HR practice.

**9. A. List the publications arising from the research project and/or a publication plan.
(NB: Where possible, please provide a copy of any publication/s)**

No

B. Have you developed any online resources and what is the website address?

No

Part 4 – Final Report Executive Summary

Through its People Program, the CRDC had been supporting research aimed at developing a stable and skilled workforce. This project has looked specifically at the role of owners and managers in the development of the capacity of employees on farm.

The project focused on three key areas of human resource management: people, productivity and processes. A skills needs analysis of growers identified that it was the people management area that was the highest priority. As a result, a training program was developed (in conjunction with Rebecca Fing, Tocal College and the Cotton Industry Skills project), and piloted that priorities people management skills, while still including aspects of productivity (understanding the impact of employees on production) and process (the administrative and industrial relations aspects of managing people).

Barriers identified by the project to employee development that needed to be considered included:

- The timing of training, particularly to make sure it was delivered close to when skills and knowledge would be applied on farm
- Overcoming differences between generational attitudes to work and career progression. Managers have to manage the different attitudes of younger generations.
- The value of training is hard to quantify, and it will vary significantly between individuals and farms. Keeping records of labour metrics such as bales produced per labour unit, can provide insight into how a business is trending with labour productivity.

While the Managing People workshop was well received and should continue to provide value to the industry, there are also opportunities to promote better management through industry media, collaboration on the People in Agriculture web site and the addition of resources to the myBMP Human Resource module.