— BRIDGE THE GAP

# Strategic Upskilling of Your Team





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# Bridge the Gap

We only have finite amounts of time, energy and financial resources that we can apply to our business. So how can we optimise these resources to get the best possible return?

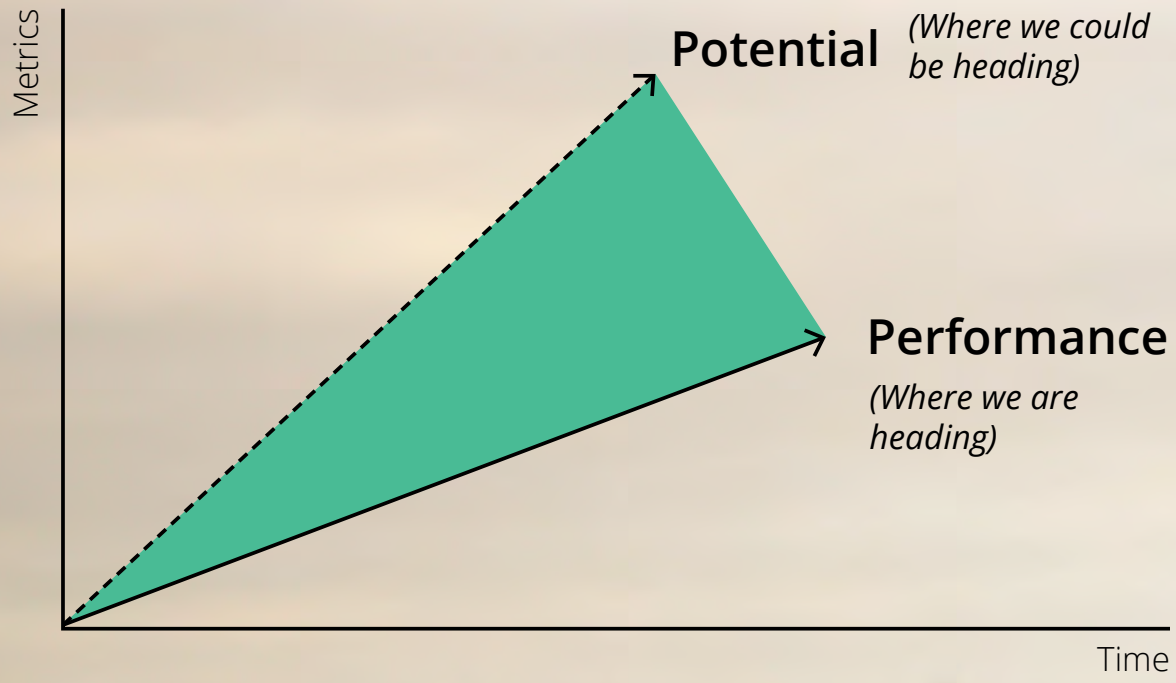
This age-old question has long been difficult to solve.

The answer lies in careful analysis and a committed action plan.

***Let's explain...***

# The Gap

As the diagram depicts, the gap exists between where we are and where we think we should be. When we consider our team at scale, this distance correlates with the unrealised earning potential of the business - so it's worth the time, energy and effort to try and close this gap as much as possible.



# How do we close the gap?

**Let’s start by asking ourselves - “where do my gaps actually exist”?**

You can find this out by:

**1**

Identifying the core functions that create optimal business/ farm performance

**2**

Determine the level of expertise each person has in each of those functions

**3**

Establish the amount of overlap that is required for safe and efficient task completion

**4**

Uncover the duplication (or lack thereof) that exists across the business

Feel free to write down your ideas:

# Where should you start?

This begins with a spreadsheet, and while that may be a daunting prospect, it means this will be a 'live document' that we can review and revise as people join or leave, as training is offered and completed, and as processes are added or altered. Unfortunately a static document just won't cut it, if we're truly committed to closing the gap and keeping it that way.

**An example of this may well look something like the following:**

| Function | Manager | Herd Manager | Farm Assistant #1 | Farm Assistant #2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Animals: Mating | | | | |
| Minor cow condition score | | | | |
| Detect & record cows on heat | | | | |
| Manage dry stock (i.e. Bulls) | | | | |
| Manage non cycling cows | | | | |
| Coordinate insemination | | | | |

| Key: | Able to supervise others | No supervisation required | Limited supervisation required | Full supervisation required |
|---|---|---|---|---|






**The main subcategories we suggest coverage in are:**

Milking - Animals - Environment - Feed - Plant & Machinery - Technology - HSW - Strategy

Your current job descriptions will likely provide a useful starting point for relevant functions.

Other industry publications can also provide guidance and inspiration as and when required, as will speaking to your team around what could/should be covered. Engaging in this conversation gives initial visibility to what will become an often referenced management tool. By involving your people early in the journey, scepticism and resistance are minimised, and your people are now "primed" for the deeper analysis that is to come.

By colour coding the skill level designations for each individual you gain an 'at a glance' understanding of individual and collective capability.

The terms you use for each level can be customised to your requirements or preferred terms but for general suitability those referenced in the key above should prove a good starting point.



# How does this influence our decision making?

Using the earlier example (on page 6) as a reference, the following aspects can be effectively managed.

## ROSTERING

It becomes clear who can be assigned together for specific tasks at specific points in time

## ESSENTIAL PEOPLE

Retention strategies can be devised/deployed for key people

## COVERAGE/ SCALABILITY

Capability bottlenecks become apparent and can be addressed into long-term planning

## RECRUITMENT

Where problematic skill gaps continue to exist/ persist - specialised help can be sourced

## PROGRESSION OPPORTUNITIES

As capability and confidence improves enhanced responsibilities can be signposted

## LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Special emphasis can be placed on targeted skill acquisition training (ideally prior to peak periods where skill-dependant capacity is most under strain)

# Key actions moving forward

The important thing to remember is this much more “continuous improvement” than “fix and forget”. With that ethos front of mind, consider these as you go...

### Determine your learning and development priorities

This process will likely identify gaps in the early stages, few of which can be filled quickly or easily. As a result you will need to top-grade your options and sequentially work through them.

**To aide the prioritisation process consider these questions:**

- What is the biggest positive impact I can make on farm production?
- What will most likely limit employee burnout or churn?
- What ensures animal health/welfare is maintained or enhanced?
- How can I best mitigate known health and safety risks?
- What enhances the quality of our outputs?
- What benefits the most stakeholders simultaneously?

### Refer to opportunities for improvement in your performance conversations:

Use your 1:1’s as an opportunity to create conceptual buy in and commitment from your team members on improving in these important areas.

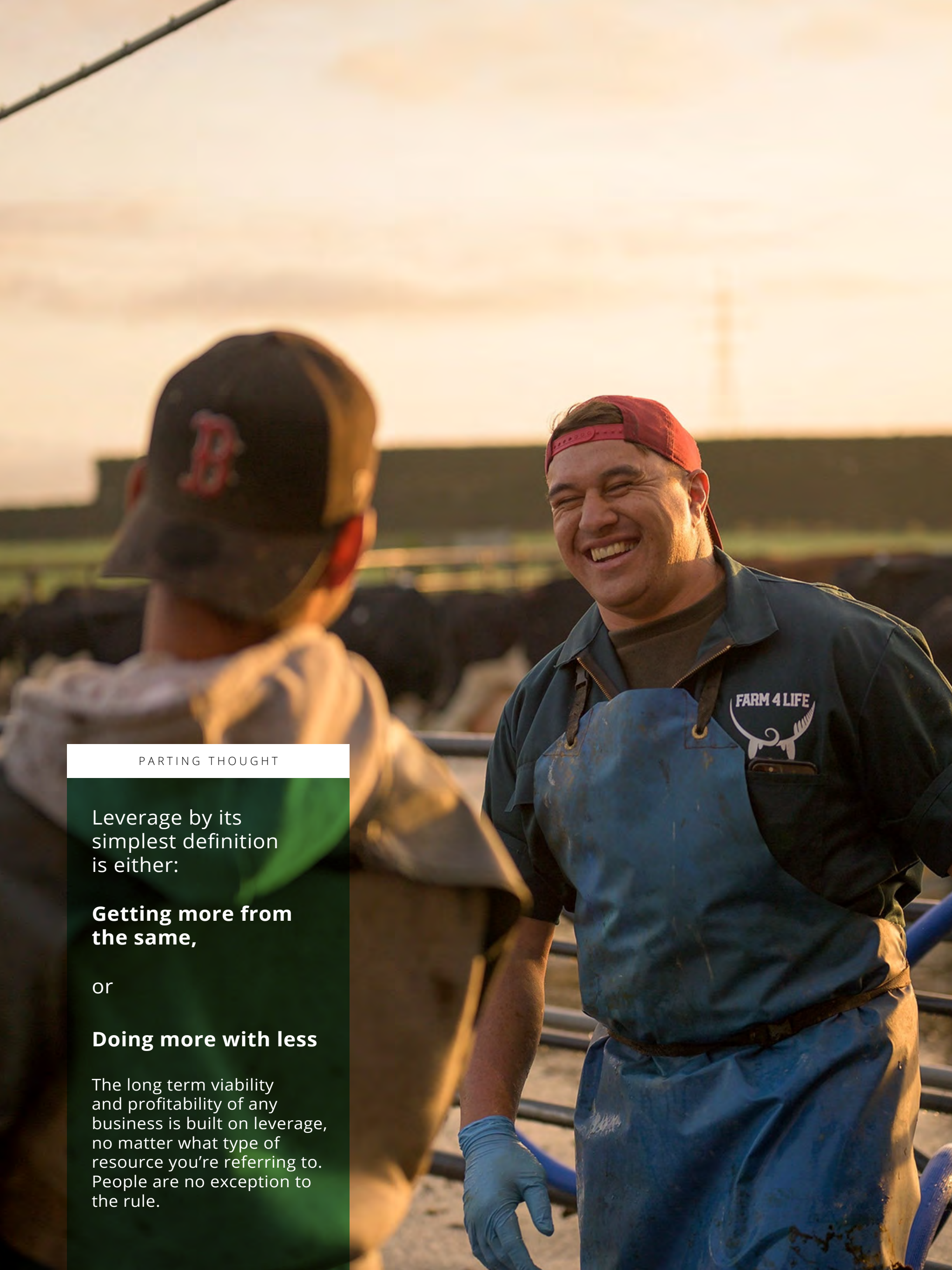
Top tip: Keep this to one or two things at a time. Ideally these should be prompted by them rather than you (through enquiry-based questioning). Check out our Positive Performance Conversations eBook for more on this.

### Ensure your job descriptions reference what’s important:

It’s important that expectations are clear and not assumed. This starts with the roles and responsibilities conveyed in these core documents. Coverage should be given to the full breadth of tasks that a capable person at that level should realistically be able to perform. Make reference to the level of involvement that would fairly be expect to provide: e.g. provide support with... / lead the completion of... / coordinate and coach others to...

### Hire for fit AND for skill

Be selective and deliberate in recruiting people that can deliver on expectation. While potential, enthusiasm and likeability are important attributes to consider, temper this with the knowledge of any key skill deficits. The last thing you want to do is put additional pressure on your existing staff, which in certain circumstances can exacerbate your recruitment and retention issues by leading others to leave for less challenging work conditions.




PARTING THOUGHT

Leverage by its simplest definition is either:

**Getting more from the same,**

or

**Doing more with less**

The long term viability and profitability of any business is built on leverage, no matter what type of resource you're referring to. People are no exception to the rule.