

Are you driving the task, or is the task driving you?

Task management as a non-technical skill in farming

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NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS IN AGRICULTURE

What is TASK MANAGEMENT?¹

Task management has been consistently identified as an important non-technical skill across multiple areas (healthcare, offshore drilling, farming). Task management is usually described as the skills required to manage resource, plan ahead, schedule work and ensuring standards are met. This can encompass the four following main elements:



Planning: Prepare for tasks in advance, including contingency plans for if/when problems arise.



Prioritising: Identification of the tasks that are most important, or time critical. Focus on those tasks first and avoid becoming distracted by other, less vital, tasks.



Maintaining standards: Awareness of legal and regulatory requirements for each task. Ensure that all tasks adhere to those guidelines, and ensure a good standard of work.



Stress and fatigue management: Acknowledgement of risks associated with stress and fatigue. Organisation of tasks to avoid heavy workload, excessively long hours and undue stress.

Examples of good and poor Task Management^{1,2}

Good management	Poor management
Discusses plan of action with other team members and makes sure everyone knows where he / she will be and what he / she plans to do.	Works alone without telling other people where he / she is or what he / she will be doing.
Ensures that all the required equipment is prepped, safe and ready for the task.	Looks for equipment at the last minute and so may not be able to check it over before the task begins.
Allows enough time to complete the task, without feeling the need to rush.	Doesn't consider length of time needed for task, and as a consequence often has to rush.
Recognises symptoms of stress and fatigue and will take a break, or change work routine, to relieve those symptoms.	Does not recognise symptoms of stress or fatigue. As a consequence often works while tired or stressed, or both.



Four steps to better Task Management



1

Plan ahead

Thinking about a task in advance will help you identify the possible risks that need to be managed.

2

Take your time

Rushing a job is likely to lead to an increased risk of error or accident.

3

Share your plan

Tell other people what you plan to do and when, if nothing else this will at least let them avoid disturbing you, or prompt them to check on you if you don't return at the expected time.

4

Check your equipment

Make sure your equipment is up to spec and well maintained so you know you can rely on it.

Why is **TASK MANAGEMENT** important in farming?³

Task Management has been identified as a critical skill by farmers, both when working alone and when working as part of a team. They reported that the purchase and maintenance of equipment was important to enable them to complete tasks, they also reported that new equipment often improved safety.

Preparing for a task was reported to include planning for potential problems, such as ensuring cattle handlers had an easy, and identified, way

out when managing livestock in a shed. Prioritisation included an element of risk identification, with some farmers reporting that they would quickly respond to anything that represented a risk to safety.

Lapses in task management were linked to taking shortcuts (such as jumping in and out of a tractor while the engine is still running) and an increased risk of error.

Task Management is important to enhance safety and reduce risk on the farm.



References

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