



# AUTO INNOVATE

Rethinking Workforce Structure in the Australian Automotive Industry



*“The industry doesn’t have a Staffing Problem, it has a Job Design Problem”*



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## ***Smarter Job Design for Automotive Workshops***

If you run a workshop right now, you already know the problem.

- Good technicians are hard to find.
- Overtime is creeping up.
- Your best people are getting tired.

And every time someone leaves, replacing them is harder than ever.

Most of what we hear from industry and government is the same message:

“The solution is more technicians.”

“Bring in more skilled migrants.”

But many workshop owners know something else is going on.

**The real issue isn't always how many technicians you have.  
It's how their time is used during the day.**

That's where AutoInnovate comes in.

It's a practical workforce model designed to help workshops:

- get more out of the team they already have
- reduce fatigue and injury risk
- protect experienced technicians from burnout
- make the workshop easier to run long term
- 

All without lowering technical standards.

## Why This Model Exists

Cars are more complex.  
Compliance is tighter.  
Customers expect faster turnaround.

But in many workshops, the way work is organised hasn't changed.

A qualified technician is still expected to do everything:

- diagnostics
- 
- servicing and repairs
- moving vehicles
- chasing parts
- cleaning and organising
- explaining work to customers
- supervising apprentices
- 

That might have worked years ago but today it creates pressure.

Highly skilled technicians spend too much of their day doing work that doesn't actually require a qualified tradesperson.

When that happens:

Skilled labour gets wasted.

Your best techs spend less time on the work only they can do.

Fatigue increases.

Mistakes, injuries and burnout follow.

The industry's workforce problem isn't just about not having enough technicians. It's about how workshop work is designed.



## The Problem Being Solved

AutoInnovate focuses on three common problems many workshops are dealing with.

### 1. Skilled Technicians Doing the Wrong Work

Highly trained technicians often spend a lot of time on jobs that don't actually need a qualified tradesperson — things like moving vehicles, chasing parts, or general workshop tasks.

That means your most valuable skills aren't being used where they matter most.

### 2. Constant Interruptions

Technicians get pulled in different directions all day — questions, parts issues, vehicle movement, customer explanations.

The result is broken workflow, slower jobs and more rework.

### 3. Burnout and Physical Strain

When every task is bundled into one role, technicians carry the full physical and mental load of the workshop.

Over time this leads to fatigue, injuries and people leaving the trade.

In a tight labour market, inefficiency makes the workforce shortage even worse. The answer isn't lowering standards.

It's rethinking how work is structured inside the workshop.



## Task Structure in a Modern Automotive Workshop

Workshop work typically falls into three categories:

### High-Skill Technical Work

- Advanced diagnostics
- Electrical fault tracing
- Complex mechanical repair
- ADAS calibration
- Final compliance sign-off
- Technical customer explanation

*This is premium labour time. It should be protected.*

### Core Service Work

- Routine servicing
- Standard component replacement
- Brake and suspension work
- Scheduled maintenance
- Tyre and wheel procedures

*Structured and repeatable technical work.*

### Support & Operational Work

- Vehicle movement
- Bay preparation
- Tool staging
- Parts collection
- Cleaning and reset
- Documentation support
- Supervised preparation tasks

*Necessary — but not high-skill dependent.*

When these categories are intentionally separated, skilled technicians remain focused on revenue-generating activity.



## How It Looks in a Busy Garage

In a high-volume workshop operating under a traditional structure:

- Senior technicians are interrupted frequently.
- Vehicles are not staged consistently.
- Parts are chased mid-job.
- Supervision happens informally.
- Fatigue accumulates mid-week.

Under structured job design:

- Vehicles are prepared before diagnostics begin.
- Tools and parts are staged.
- Support roles manage movement and reset.
- Apprentices have defined exposure pathways.
- Sign-off authority is clear.
- Interruptions reduce.

The technical standard does not change.

The structure does.

The workshop becomes calmer, more predictable and more productive.



## **Supervision, Safety & Sustainability**

High-pressure automotive environments require clarity.

Structured supervision includes:

- Defined task boundaries.
- Documented competency progression.
- Clear escalation pathways.
- Demonstration over assumption.
- Predictable workflow routines.

This improves:

- Time-to-competency.
- Retention stability.
- Error reduction.
- Career longevity.

Smarter job design also enables:

- Graduated exposure to heavy tasks.
- Reduced repetitive strain.
- Better task rotation.

Injury prevention becomes a commercial strategy, not just a safety objective.

## **Economic Impact & Implementation**

Even modest structural reform delivers measurable outcomes:

- Increased billable technician hours.
- Reduced overtime.
- Lower injury frequency.
- Improved retention.
- Higher daily throughput.
- Greater margin stability.

If a senior technician regains five hours per week from non-technical tasks, that represents over 250 additional high-value hours annually.

Across multiple technicians, the financial impact compounds significantly.

Implementation does not require full-scale redesign overnight.

### **Begin with three questions:**

Where are high-skill technicians spending time below capability?

Where are workflow interruptions most visible?

Where is fatigue emerging?

## Identifying the “\$10 Tasks” in Your Workshop

One of the simplest ways to improve productivity in a garage is to identify what we call “\$10 tasks.”

These are the small operational jobs that need to be done every day, but don't require the skill level of a qualified technician.

They often happen without much thought. In many workshops, they've simply always been done by whoever is closest to the job — which usually means the most experienced person in the building.

The problem is not the task itself.

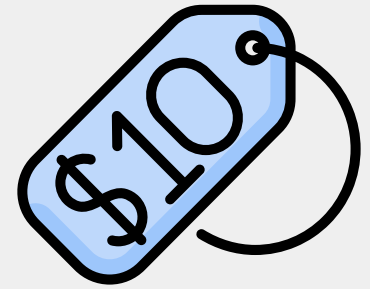
The problem is who is doing it.

When a technician who should be focused on diagnostics, repairs or complex servicing is regularly pulled into low-value activity, valuable labour hours are lost. In busy garages this happens dozens of times each day.

Over a week, those interruptions add up to several hours of skilled labour spent on work that could easily be handled by a junior team member or support role. Across a year, the economic impact can be significant.



## What is a “\$10 Task”?



A “\$10 task” is any job that:

Is necessary for the workshop to run smoothly  
Happens frequently throughout the day  
Requires limited technical skill  
Interrupts technicians while they are performing higher value work

These tasks are not unimportant. They keep the garage functioning.

But they don’t require a senior technician’s skill level.

When these tasks are handled by the right role, technicians can stay focused on the work that generates revenue.

### Common Examples of \$10 Tasks

In most automotive workshops these include things like:

- Moving vehicles in and out of bays
- Cleaning and resetting work areas
- Collecting parts from the parts counter
- Returning unused parts
- Staging tools for upcoming jobs
- Putting tools away after a repair
- Cleaning wheels or components before installation
- Preparing vehicles for inspection
- Driving vehicles for basic movement within the yard
- Emptying waste containers or recycling bins
- Basic documentation preparation
- Organising tyres, parts or components for upcoming work

Individually these jobs take only a few minutes.

But when technicians are interrupted repeatedly to handle them, it disrupts concentration and slows overall workflow.

## **A Simple Exercise for Your Workshop**

To identify your workshop's \$10 tasks, try the following exercise with your team. Over the next two days, ask technicians to note every time they stop technical work to perform a different task.

At the end of the day, review the list together.

You will likely see patterns emerge quickly.

Look for tasks that:

- Happen repeatedly throughout the day
- Break technician focus
- Do not require diagnostic skill or trade-level decision making

These are your \$10 tasks.

## **The Goal Is Not to Eliminate These Tasks**

Every workshop needs these jobs done.

The goal is simply to allocate them differently.

When these tasks are handled by:

- Apprentices in early-stage learning
- Junior technicians
- Workshop support roles
- Senior technicians gain back uninterrupted technical time.

This improves:

- Productivity
- Diagnostic accuracy
- Workshop flow
- Staff satisfaction

It also creates meaningful learning opportunities for junior staff.



## Protecting High-Value Labour

A useful question for any garage owner or workshop manager is:

***“Should my most experienced technician really be doing this right now?”***

If the answer is no, it may be a \$10 task.

Protecting high-value labour is one of the most effective ways to increase throughput without increasing headcount.

Small structural changes in who handles everyday tasks can free up dozens of skilled hours each month.

Those hours are where a workshop’s real value is created.

## Start Small

**You do not need to redesign your whole workshop overnight.**

**Start by identifying three to five tasks that regularly interrupt technicians.**

**Reassign those tasks to a junior team member or support role and observe the difference.**

Even small adjustments in workflow can have a noticeable impact on productivity and stress levels in a busy garage.

Over time, these small improvements build a more efficient, sustainable and profitable workshop.



## HOW THIS LOOKS IN A DEALERSHIP ENVIRONMENT

Structural Optimisation in a Franchise or OEM Dealership

Dealership service departments operate in a high-volume, high-accountability environment.

They must manage:

- Warranty compliance
- Manufacturer procedures
- Fixed-price servicing
- Customer satisfaction metrics
- Service advisor coordination
- Technician efficiency targets

In many dealerships, master technicians and senior diagnostic staff are routinely interrupted by workflow inefficiencies:

Vehicles not pre-staged  
Parts delays  
Unclear job allocation  
Apprentices requiring informal supervision  
Administrative crossover

This creates bottlenecks in the most valuable part of the dealership — technical diagnostic capacity.

### What Structural Reform Looks Like

In a dealership setting, this model focuses on protecting diagnostic time.

High-value diagnostic technicians remain allocated to:

- Complex electrical and fault tracing
- Warranty-critical repairs
- ADAS and calibration procedures
- Escalated cases

Structured support roles and clear service lane staging ensure:

- Vehicles are prepared before diagnostic time begins
- Parts are pre-verified
- Documentation is organised
- Workshop flow is predictable

Apprentices are assigned defined progression pathways rather than floating between technicians.

Commercial Effect

When master technicians are shielded from low-value interruptions:

- Warranty rework reduces
- Diagnostic throughput improves
- Efficiency targets stabilise
- Comebacks decline
- Customer satisfaction increases

In dealership environments where time efficiency is tightly measured, even small structural improvements compound across dozens of jobs per day.

The goal is not more technicians.

It is protecting the productivity of the highest-skilled ones.



## HOW THIS LOOKS IN AN INDEPENDENT WORKSHOP

### Structural Optimisation in an Independent Garage

Independent automotive workshops operate under different pressures:

- Lean staffing
- Direct owner oversight
- Margin sensitivity
- Broad service scope
- Cash flow awareness

In many independent workshops, senior technicians – often the business owner – carry excessive operational load:

- Diagnosing vehicles
- Managing customers
- Ordering parts
- Moving cars
- Cleaning bays
- Supervising apprentices
- Managing workflow informally

This creates dependency risk. If one person slows down, the whole operation slows.

### What Structural Reform Looks Like

In a small to mid-sized independent garage, structural reform begins with clarity.

Separating:

**High-value diagnostic and repair time**

**Core servicing and mechanical work**

**Operational staging and preparation tasks**

A defined support function – even part-time – can manage:

- Vehicle movement
- Tool reset
- Parts staging
- Basic prep
- Workshop flow

This protects billable hours.

Apprentices are assigned structured supervision blocks instead of informal learning.

Commercial Effect

In an independent workshop, regaining even 3–5 billable hours per week for the senior technician can materially affect monthly revenue.

- Reduced fatigue lowers the risk of:
  - Missed diagnostics
  - Rework
  - Customer dissatisfaction
  - Owner burnout

The workshop becomes less personality-dependent and more system-dependent.

That increases both profitability and long-term business value.



## HOW THIS LOOKS IN FLEET OPERATIONS

### Structural Optimisation in Fleet & High-Volume Service Environments

Fleet operations and high-volume service centres operate under pressure for:

- Turnaround speed
- Predictable scheduling
- Cost control
- Asset uptime
- Maintenance compliance

In these environments, inefficiency compounds rapidly.

When skilled technicians are interrupted or misallocated, fleet downtime increases. Small workflow disruptions across dozens of vehicles create large operational delays.

What Structural Reform Looks Like

Fleet workshops benefit from clear task separation and predictable workflow lanes.

#### **High-skill technicians remain allocated to:**

Advanced diagnostics  
Complex mechanical failures  
Critical safety repairs  
Compliance sign-offs

#### **Core maintenance teams handle:**

Routine servicing  
Brake and suspension replacement  
Scheduled checks

#### **Support roles manage:**

Vehicle staging  
Tool and bay reset  
Parts logistics  
Documentation flow

Structured progression allows junior technicians to move through defined competency tiers rather than being thrown into high-pressure repairs prematurely.

#### **Commercial Effect**

In fleet environments, the economic impact is magnified.

- Improved workflow structure leads to:
- Reduced vehicle downtime
- More predictable turnaround
- Lower overtime cost
- Reduced fatigue-related error
- Improved technician retention

In asset-heavy environments, time is revenue.

Structural inefficiency increases fleet idle time.

Structural intelligence reduces it.



## The 5 Interruptions That Slow Every Garage

Most garages don't lose productivity because technicians are working slowly.

They lose productivity because technicians are constantly interrupted.

In a busy workshop environment, these interruptions often feel normal. They happen dozens of times a day and are rarely noticed because they've become part of the routine.

But each interruption breaks concentration, slows workflow and pushes technical work further down the queue.

Over time, these small disruptions compound into lost hours, longer job completion times and increased stress for the whole team.

Across the automotive industry, five interruptions appear consistently.

Identifying and managing them is one of the simplest ways to improve workshop efficiency.



### 1. Vehicle Movement Interruptions

One of the most common disruptions is technicians stopping technical work to move vehicles.

This might involve:

- Moving a car from the yard
- Repositioning vehicles between bays
- Driving a completed vehicle to the parking area
- Retrieving the next job from outside

Each movement may take only a few minutes, but when technicians leave a job mid-task to move vehicles, they lose focus and momentum.

In high-volume garages this can happen several times a day.

When vehicle staging is managed by a junior team member or workshop support role, technicians can remain focused on diagnostics and repair work.

## 2. Parts Chasing

Another common interruption occurs when technicians leave the bay to collect parts. Examples include:

- Walking to the parts counter
- Searching shelves for components
- Confirming availability
- Returning unused parts

Parts delays can easily turn into 10–15 minute disruptions that interrupt multiple jobs throughout the day.

A structured parts staging process, where components are prepared before the job begins, dramatically reduces these interruptions and keeps technicians working continuously.



## 3. Tool and Equipment Interruptions

Even in well-organised garages, technicians frequently stop work to locate tools or equipment.

Examples include:

- Searching for shared tools
- Waiting for diagnostic equipment
- Looking for torque wrenches or special tools
- Resetting or reorganising tool areas

These interruptions are rarely dramatic, but they add friction to every job.

Ensuring tools are staged in advance and resetting shared equipment between jobs reduces unnecessary downtime.

# STRUCTURAL DIAGNOSIS WORKSHEETS (Understanding the Current State of your workshop)



## **Task Allocation Audit Worksheet**

A useful starting point for improving workshop productivity is understanding where skilled technicians may be spending time on tasks that do not require their level of expertise. In busy garages, many small operational jobs happen automatically throughout the day, often performed by whoever is available at the time. Over time, this can result in highly trained technicians regularly stepping away from diagnostics, repairs and complex servicing to complete lower-value activities that could be handled by a junior team member or support role.

**To help identify these opportunities, a [Task Allocation Audit Worksheet](#) has been included at the back of this guide.** Workshop owners or managers can complete this exercise with their team by listing the common tasks performed in the garage, noting who currently performs them, how often they occur and whether they require a high, medium or low skill level. By reviewing this information together, it becomes much easier to see where technician time may be misallocated and which tasks could be reassigned. This simple activity often provides clear insight into how labour is currently used and where small structural changes could improve workflow and productivity.

## **Technician Time Recovery Calculator**

Understanding where time is being lost is important, but understanding what that lost time costs the business is even more powerful. When skilled technicians regularly spend time on low-value tasks, the impact is not just operational, it is financial. Even a small amount of misallocated time each day can accumulate into a significant number of hours over a year that could otherwise be spent on billable technical work.

**To help visualise this, a [Technician Time Recovery Calculator](#) has been included in the worksheets at the back of this guide.** By entering a technician's hourly rate, the estimated hours spent each week on low-value tasks, the workshop's billable rate and the number of technicians on the team, the worksheet calculates how many high-value hours could potentially be recovered and the possible annual revenue impact. This exercise helps translate everyday workflow interruptions into real financial terms, making the case for structural improvements clear and measurable.

## **Workflow Interruption Map**

Small disruptions in workshop flow can quickly add up to lost time and reduced productivity. Identifying where technicians are most frequently interrupted helps reveal the hidden bottlenecks that slow a garage down. These interruptions often occur when technicians stop technical work to chase parts, move vehicles, handle paperwork or resolve issues that interrupt the job they are currently performing.

**To help visualise these disruption points, a [Workflow Interruption Mapping Worksheet](#) is included at the back of this guide.** This worksheet allows workshop owners and managers to map the typical flow of work through the garage and identify where delays, interruptions or rework are occurring. By asking simple questions about who is chasing parts, moving vehicles or managing documentation during repairs, garages can quickly identify structural friction in their workflow and begin making small adjustments that improve efficiency and reduce unnecessary interruptions.

**The Following exercises are helpful to design better systems.**

Grab a pen and paper and give them a go!



## **Task Clustering Design Sheet**

Purpose: Separate work into categories.

Create 3 columns called:

- High-Skill Technical
- Core Service
- Support & Operational

List all the garage tasks you can think of under each.

Then answer:

- Which tasks must remain with qualified technicians?
- Which can be structured?
- Which require defined supervision?

Outcome: Structured labour hierarchy.

## **Role Definition Template**

Purpose: Clarify boundaries.

Create 5 columns and name them:

- Role title
- Primary responsibilities
- Tasks not included
- Supervision required
- Sign-off authority

This prevents ambiguity.

## **Supervision & Escalation Matrix**

Purpose: Clarify “who signs what.”

Create 5 columns and name them:

- Task type
- Who performs
- Who supervises
- Who signs off
- When escalation occurs

Reduces rework and confusion.

**The Following exercises are helpful to reduce burnout and injury risk.**



Grab a pen and paper and give them a go!



## **Physical Load Assessment**

Purpose: Identify fatigue exposure.

Create 5 columns and name them:

- Heavy lifting tasks
- Frequency
- Who performs them
- Rotation system? (Y/N)
- Injury history linked?

Outcome: Smarter task rotation.



## **Technician Fatigue & Overtime Monitor**

Purpose: Identify burnout risk.

Track:

- Weekly overtime
- Consecutive long days
- Error/rework patterns
- Sick leave frequency

Outcome: Early intervention.

## The Following exercises are helpful to link structure to profit.



Grab a pen and paper and give them a go!

### **High-Value Labour Allocation Tracker**

Purpose: Protect diagnostic time.

Track weekly:

- Hours spent on high-skill tasks
- Hours spent on support tasks
- % of time in premium work

Goal: Increase high-value allocation.

### **Throughput Before & After Sheet**

Purpose: Measure structural impact.

Columns:

Vehicles per day (baseline)

Overtime hours (baseline)

Rework incidents

Injury reports

Same metrics after redesign

Outcome: Evidence-based refinement.

### **Retention & Stability Dashboard**

Purpose: Measure workforce sustainability.

Track:

- Annual turnover rate
- Exit reasons
- Average tenure
- Recruitment cost per hire

Structural reform should reduce instability.

#### Worksheet Use Disclaimer

The worksheets provided in this guide are intended as practical tools to support discussion, reflection and operational improvement within automotive workshops. They are designed to help owners and managers better understand how work currently flows through their garage and to identify opportunities for improving productivity, workflow and workforce sustainability.

These tools are not intended to replace professional business advice, industrial relations guidance or workplace health and safety obligations. Each workshop operates in a unique environment, and any changes to roles, responsibilities or work allocation should be implemented thoughtfully and in line with applicable workplace policies, employment arrangements and safety requirements.







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## **Customised Employment in the Automotive Industry**

Customised employment is an approach to job design that focuses on matching the needs of a business with the strengths and capacity of its workers. Instead of expecting every employee to perform the same bundled role, it looks at how work actually happens in a workshop and organises tasks so that the right person is doing the right work.

In many automotive businesses, technicians regularly perform operational tasks such as moving vehicles, collecting parts, preparing bays, organising tools or completing simple documentation. While these tasks are essential to the smooth running of a workshop, they do not always require trade-level expertise. By grouping these activities into structured support roles, technicians can stay focused on diagnostics, repairs and other high-value work that drives revenue.

These types of structured support roles can also create meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability. Many of these tasks suit individuals who work well with routine, structure and clearly defined responsibilities. With the right supervision and clear processes, people with disability can contribute strongly to the day-to-day operation of a workshop while becoming part of the broader team.

There are also well-documented benefits for businesses that employ people with disability, including:

- Access to a wider and often underutilised workforce
- Higher levels of employee loyalty and retention
- Strong reliability and attendance rates
- Improved workplace culture and team morale
- Positive reputation with customers and the community
- Increased diversity of thinking and problem-solving
- Potential access to government employment supports and workplace modifications

At its core, customised employment is simply smarter job design. By aligning tasks with the appropriate skill level, automotive businesses can protect valuable technician time, improve efficiency and build a more sustainable and inclusive workforce for the future.

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If you are looking for assistance to Customised Employment, please contact Jade Burgmann. As the Director of Australia's first automotive disability program and Australia's only tyre fitting Social Enterprise, she is also a Certified Customised Employment Practitioner through the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice, Melbourne.

Email: [jade@wheelnutzgarage.com](mailto:jade@wheelnutzgarage.com)



## About us

Wheelnutz Garage began as a passion project for Jade Burgmann and Gavin McCarthy, who in 2020 recognised a gap in practical, high-quality skills programs for young people with disability. Starting with a non-running GU Nissan Patrol in their home garage, they set out to create a hands-on learning environment connected to the real automotive industry.

Six years later, that idea has grown into a network of four Wheelnutz Garages and two TyreNutz tyre fitting shops across South East Queensland. The organisation continues to be run by Jade and Gavin alongside their daughter Shannon McCarthy and mechanic Anton Kelleners, both of whom have been involved since day one and remain central to daily operations.

As the first model of its kind in Australia, Wheelnutz Garage is not only creating new pathways into the automotive industry, it is also challenging long-standing industry narratives about workforce shortages. With more than 1.1 million Australians with disability already working or actively seeking employment, the organisation asks an important question: why isn't the industry looking more closely at this workforce?

It also challenges the assumption that people with disability entering the automotive sector are necessarily unqualified. In reality, there are thousands of individuals with significant skills and experience who have stepped away from the industry due to illness or injury and are now ready to return to work. Wheelnutz Garage is working to change that narrative by demonstrating what becomes possible when opportunity, structure and industry demand align.

Wheelnutz Garage & Logo are now a registered trademark, symbolizing a significant milestone in brand protection and identity. This registration ensures that the unique brand elements, including the distinctive logo, are legally safeguarded against unauthorized use or imitation. For customers, it represents a seal of authenticity and quality, reinforcing trust and recognition in the market. For Wheelnutz Garage, it solidifies their reputation and offers exclusive rights to their branding, allowing them to confidently expand their business while maintaining their unique identity. This trademark status is a valuable asset, contributing to the long-term success and integrity of the brand.

