



Establishing a new mining workforce



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The importance of the mining sector to the Australian economy was recognised early on in the COVID-19 pandemic and was quickly listed as an essential service in all states. This meant that the Australian mining sector had to adapt quickly to the restrictions and evolving requirements, particularly regarding the workforce. Rosters had to be altered to accommodate quarantine requirements, numbers of workers on site were restricted and special attention needed to be given to vulnerable remote Indigenous communities.

The sector has reported a somewhat mixed performance for 2019-20. While revenue fell by an estimated 14 per cent¹, this was not due to restricted performance, but contractions in prices for coal and natural gas. However, strong iron ore prices have helped bolster the sector, as has the increase in gold prices. While some commodities fared better than others, all can now realise the opportunity that COVID-19 is offering mining companies, especially when it comes to shaping a workforce for a new reality. Mining organisations should think differently about the job roles that need to be done and move towards shaping a workforce that's prepared to respond to the vulnerabilities of its human workforce².

1. <https://www.ibisworld.com/industry-insider/coronavirus-insights/the-outlook-for-australian-mining>

2. <https://home.kpmg/au/en/home/insights/2020/05/coronavirus-covid-19-building-pandemic-proof-workforce.html>

Redesign all roles to reshape the workforce

The opportunity now exists for the mining sector to consider a fundamental enterprise-wide redesign of roles. Technologies can augment tasks and offer alternative ways to deliver work remotely, introducing new skills and capabilities into the workforce. These emerging technologies mean that the sector needs to look beyond solely transforming whole roles, and instead reimagine all roles by transforming parts of them. Consider that some elements of a role could be done remotely, could be automated or need to be done on-site – therefore resplicing what a particular role might be, and re-joining the capabilities with a consideration of how the capability can be delivered to create new roles. These new generation roles will require reskilling the current workforce in addition to embracing new and diverse talent in line with the future of work and an enterprise-wide operating model fit for the new reality.



There are three key elements for mining organisations to consider as they look to reshape their workforce.



1. Embrace, and accelerate, technology

Where we work and the way we work has changed forever. The mass exodus from the office to home, the need for technology-enabled connectivity and, in some cases, replacement of the human workforce to keep them safe has taken off. The opportunity to deliver outcomes through technology is not a new concept in mining – the sector has seen the rollout of autonomous trucks, trains and blast hole rigs all of which have made mining safer and more efficient and reduced the reliance on a human workforce. The opportunity this tech can offer needs to continually be explored. Many miners currently have good financial stability or are even enjoying a period of high returns and this presents an opportunity to

consider how to further accelerate and embed their digital transformations. They should consider how investment in new, or extending existing, technology can continue to drive more efficient production and enable the human workforce to focus on greater value work that cannot be delivered by technology to the same effect. For example, the maintenance function of mining companies already has technology to better plan activities in terms of efficiency of operation (reduced downtime) and workforce (improved scheduling and utilisation of skills). However, these technologies have had limited implementation and even less adoption with many still relying on Excel and other outdated tools.



2. Enable remote working

With working from home now the norm for a large proportion of the workforce, the mining sector can evolve certain roles, or parts of roles, to remote delivery to a greater extent. This will involve a broad consideration of what work must be delivered on-site, and what has the potential to be delivered remotely. This should drive a complete reconsideration of what each individual role looks like. Driven by the current need for social distancing, remotability presents further benefits beyond addressing the limitations that

COVID-19 has created. Properly enacted remotability can enable the mining sector to reduce its reliance on a FIFO workforce, which given the potential impacts on safety, fatigue and mental health, can only be a good thing for the sector and its workforce.

In KPMG's *Global CEO Outlook 2020: COVID-19 Special Edition – Australia* survey, of the Australian CEOs surveyed, 70 percent said widespread remote working had widened their potential talent pool.



3. Accelerating Diversity

According to the Australian government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) the mining sector workforce comprises 17 per cent women and 83 per cent men³. Mining organisations still have a long journey to improve the gender diversity of its workforce. Some of the key barriers to attracting and retaining a diverse workforce includes work culture, inflexible FIFO rosters or remote residential locations which results in extended time away from home.

When mining organisations embrace technologies that enable outcomes to be delivered remotely, it challenges these key barriers and provides a more inclusive workplace. This is a significant inflection point for the mining sector to rethink the roles and capabilities it requires and position itself to attract new and diverse talent through more accessible pathways into mining.

3. <https://data.wgea.gov.au/industries/87>

Attracting new talent

Reshaping and reimagining the roles in the organisation would enable the sector to attract a workforce from non-traditional talent pools, and to rebrand the industry to be more future-focused – a critical step at a time where a mining career is not necessarily seen as desirable as it once was. The sector needs to reimagine its value proposition to the workforce. Recent events that have been covered heavily in the media have brought into question the sector's social license to operate and a strong social compass is an important decider for the next generations joining the workforce.

The mining workforce has the potential to emerge into the new norm in a different shape, in some cases for efficiency, in others to drive greater opportunities to attract the talent but ultimately to limit potential harm to a vulnerable workforce. Introducing new roles that drive innovation, reduce the reliance on FIFO and enable a more flexible approach to work will help rebalance the view of a career in mining and create opportunities to invest in new talent that can take the sector forward.



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