

Empowering Minds at Mines: From Underperformance to Excellence

Challenge

The mining and metals industry in the Asia Pacific region faces significant challenges, including fluctuating global demand and price volatility. Sustainable and resilient operations are required to ensure the mines and processing plants remain at the low end of the cost curve, with a social licence to operate, in the medium to long term. Additionally, the need to attract, retain, and develop a committed workforce, along with aging infrastructure, makes it challenging for operators to maintain efficiencies and sustain growth.

Amidst these challenges, a mining and metals company in Asia Pacific was grappling with a perfect storm of people and site performance issues at a large gold mine that threatened its ongoing performance and potential growth.

Numerous 'top down' efforts in the past to improve performance had all failed, and productivity levels were deteriorating once again. The site was generating less than US\$20m in free cash despite an annual spend of more than one billion USD. The mine's inability to deliver planned tonnes year after year, had resulted in an acceptance of poor performance, and management finding excuses for missed targets rather than addressing root causes. Productivity levels were falling, and the efficiency of operations was compromised, leading to increased operational costs and reduced output. Chronic leadership turnover was disrupting operations and leading to a loss of trust among frontline workers.

The erosion of trust and morale were critical issues that needed an immediate intervention. The company recognised that to turn the tide, it had to address deep-rooted cultural issues related to mindsets and behaviours to drive substantial and sustainable improvements.

dss+ Approach

A meticulously co-designed program rooted in the company's core values was implemented. This included a detailed assessment of the **'full potential'** of the mine, which generated a business case to reach a medium term objective of **'gap to achievable'**, and an ultimate stretch target of **'gap to perfect'**.

Central to this program was the **"Back to Basics"** concept, which aimed to recalibrate frontline workers and supervisors by aligning behaviours to the company's purpose and values, clarifying what good performance looks like and detailing the requirements to achieve site goals.

Over 100 Focus Groups were conducted, attended by 85% of the workforce, from the General Manager to Operators, Maintainers and office support staff.

The approach was deliberately bottom-up, involving comprehensive engagement through focus groups with frontline workers, including operators and support services staff, to ensure no role was perceived as too small, or not relevant to the business objectives of the site.

This inclusivity approach reinforced the message that every role is vital to the company's success. In-field coaching sessions provided continuous technical guidance and reinforced best practices at the operational level. Originally the focus groups were delivered by dss+ consultants in English, but within six months they were led by operators in their local language. This sent a powerful cultural message that local operators are capable, are trusted, and are empowered. Delivering in the local language also lifted frontline worker comprehension of the performance concepts being discussed.



Case Study.
Australia.
Mining & Metals.



To harness the collective wisdom and on-the-ground experience of the workforce, an idea pipeline was established. This idea pipeline drove the improvement efforts, enabling the implementation of practical solutions such as designing fit for purpose ramps, improving road conditions, and enhancing operational techniques and practices.

Value generating workshops were conducted with more than fifty middle managers and supervisors to ensure they embraced and demonstrated visible felt leadership to foster trust and inclusiveness.



Assignment

To foster a culture of trust, proactiveness, and ownership among frontline workers and middle managers, and lift overall site performance and operational efficiency by **30%**.



Offering

In-Field Coaching: This program combines a focus group with ongoing coaching, helping supervisors and operators to internalise corporate purpose and values while sharpening their skills.

Idea Log: Creation and maintenance of idea logs to address operational problems and foster continuous improvement.

Leadership Coaching: Workshops and training for middle managers to practice visible and felt leadership, enabling frontline success.



Impact

Sustained **40%** improvement in ex pit material movement performance.

Improved site resilience with recovery from significant rain events **reduced from 2-3 days to less than 8 hours**.

Spatial Planning Compliance lifted from **55% to 76%**.

An engaged workforce with clear understanding of each individual's role in the mining process, supervisors are equipped to proactively respond and address challenges, and a strong base of trust in leadership.

The comprehensive approach not only enhanced operational outcomes but also fostered a more engaged and empowered workforce, laying the foundation for long-term success and resilience in a challenging economic and technical environment.

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