



Leading Mining Companies into Tomorrow

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Rowan Phendler, Global Head of Natural Resources, Cripps Leadership Advisors

Rowan heads our Natural Resources practice. He has 13 years' experience supporting boards, senior executives and management teams across the natural resource industry. Before joining us, he was Managing Director at Stratum International, a global mining executive search and consulting firm, and Director of Human Capital at Tetra Tech, a global engineering consulting firm. Rowan has a degree in Economics, MBA in Global Leadership, and an Executive Certificate from Wharton, and is fluent in French.



Tom Blower, Advisory Consultant, Cripps Leadership Advisors

Tom is an accredited executive coach with the International Coaching Federation and a business consultant with over 20 years' experience in people development. To date, Tom has worked with businesses internationally across energy, extraction, construction, technology, financial and professional services, government, and non-government organisations. He has extensive experience in designing and facilitating large scale and transformative leadership development interventions.



Mark Cutifani, Chairman, Vale Base Metals

Mark is a mining engineer by training and started his career in deep underground coal mining in Australia in 1976. In his +46 years of experience, he has had line and support responsibilities across all forms of mining, processing, and product marketing, working across 6 continents, 20 countries with more than 30 minerals and metals. Mark is currently a Non-Executive Director of TotalEnergies based in Paris, is the Senior Independent Director for Laing O'Rourke based in the UK, and Chair of Vale Base Metals.



Jody Kuzenko, President and CEO, Torex Gold

Jody Kuzenko was appointed President & Chief Executive Officer of Torex Gold in June 2020, having previously been Chief Operating Officer, and is Non-Executive Director of Mosaic. She is a senior mining executive with over 20 years of operational and business experience. Jody holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Western Ontario, an Honours Bachelor of Arts from McMaster University, and is a certified Director from the ICD-Rotman Directors Education Program.



John O'Brien, Global Lead, Sustainability and Climate in Mining and Metals, Deloitte

John is a partner in Deloitte & Touche LLP's Risk & Financial Advisory Practice, with a focus in Energy, Sustainability & Climate along with clean energy and technology. He also serves as Deloitte's Global Lead for decarbonization in the Mining and Metals sector, he co-founded the Australian Climate Leaders Coalition, and is the global lead for Deloitte's work with the World Economic Forum on leading practice climate governance for boards.



Mining industry of the future

Rowan Phendler, Global Head of Natural Resources at Cripps Leadership Advisors, explores where, when and how executive teams can build the skills they need to lead mining companies to future success.

The mining industry and the way in which it delivers value to society is changing fast. Increasing volatility in global geopolitics, a decline in the wider availability of talent and skills, calls for increased transparency and accountability, and issues surrounding reputation, trust and access to land are converging to shift stakeholder expectations and drive evolution in this age-old sector.

As companies and their priorities shift, so too must the skills and capabilities of the people who lead them. The traditional command-and-control hierarchy which served the industry well for over 100 years, is no longer enough. Today, leaders must bring humility, curiosity, empathy and courage to all that they do if companies are to adapt and flourish through uncertainty.

To better understand the qualities and capabilities that are required of leaders today and how best to foster them, we at Cripps Leadership Advisors assembled an expert panel for a debate.

Jody Kuzenko, President and CEO of Torex Gold, set the scene: “Society is coming to a renewed realisation of the importance of mining, particularly when it comes to the energy transition,” she said. “And we can use that to our benefit to educate, inform, energise and inspire the next generation of leaders to come into mining.”

Mark Cutifani, Chairman of Vale Base Metals and former CEO of Anglo American, agreed: “There are some big challenges ahead of the industry, particularly around talent, community relations and access to land. But today, the tools and technologies we have to solve them are as good as they’ve ever been. The biggest challenge leaders face is bringing together all these pieces and empowering teams so that organisations can navigate their way through challenges and seize opportunities as they arise.”

Taking a proactive rather than reactive stance to challenges, both internal and external, and learning to operate (and lead) in an environment that’s constantly in flux is key. However, it can be difficult to break out of established ways of working and to forge new paths when pressure mounts.



It’s not just the scale of change that mining and metals companies face, but also the speed. Change is coming at the industry from all angles, and leaders need the skills and tools to lean into change rather than resist it.”

John O’Brien | Global Lead, Sustainability and Climate in Mining and Metals, Deloitte

Tom Blower, Executive Coach and Leadership Advisor at Cripps Leadership Advisors, explained: “Often today, the level of adaptation that’s required of organisations is beyond the knowledge and expertise of individual leaders. The skills required to lead this transformation are also very different from traditional leadership skills, and it’s critical that we help executives to think differently about challenges and the ways in which they can tackle them.”



Skills for today and tomorrow

Given these challenges, the ability to lead through disruption and complexity, and to think about the impact of actions across systems is vital. This is quite different to approaches of the past where leaders tended to operate within the confines of their own organisations. In contrast, stakeholders now expect executives to demonstrate care and consideration for the effects of their decisions up and down the value chain, and not just to people, but to nature too. To do this requires exceptional communication skills and the ability to build and maintain relationships with diverse groups. It also requires the democratisation of leadership, and investment to build the mentality and skills which enable this, throughout the organisation.



Communication is a two-way street. That doesn't just entail speaking, but active listening too. Leaders must go into discussions willing to open up, share and try new things based on what they're hearing."

Jody Kuzenko | President and CEO, Torex Gold

Blower believes that humility and curiosity are also vital qualities.

"Often, when leaders have worked in an industry where their expertise plays a dominant role in their identity, the ability to open themselves up to being wrong sometimes, and to embracing the expertise of others can be difficult," he said.

"Creating spaces where leaders can engage with and listen to others is important in shifting that. Also, having the curiosity to explore new ways of doing things and to ask questions that get to the heart of issues is crucial, because some problems are symptomatic of bigger underlying challenges."

Having the courage to create structured experiments, some of which go beyond organisational boundaries, and to extend the hand of partnership to landowners, communities and peers, will also reveal new ways forwards.

A good example is the leadership approach that Anglo American took with its Quellaveco copper development in Peru.

Cutifani explained that the project was delivered on time and on budget in 2022, partly thanks to the extensive work that the company did upfront with local and Indigenous communities.

Following an 18-month consultation process, Anglo engineered the project to incorporate 26 propositions from these groups and implemented a streamlined chain of governance for critical decisions. The result was that all parties were aligned on their priorities and continue to see benefit from the mine.

O'Brien offered a perspective from his work with the [Climate Leaders Coalition](#) (CLC); a CEO-led community of organisations which is leading the global response to climate change and includes major miners, such as BHP, Fortescue and Rio Tinto.



The ability to bring diverse voices to the table and for leaders, not just to listen, but to learn and act upon what they're hearing, is so important. The CLC has hosted multiple engagement sessions for executives with diverse voices, including youth delegates, climate refugees and First Nations. They're really valuable experiences which have helped those leaders to build future-proof climate transition action plans."

John O'Brien | Global Lead, Sustainability and Climate in Mining and Metals, Deloitte

Providing regular opportunities for leaders to leave the boardroom and immerse themselves in the perspectives and experiences of diverse groups, is vital. This not only increases their chance of learning from new voices but could also challenge them to rethink their own beliefs and world views.



Scaling leadership development

Just as the mining industry needs to scale its response to the energy transition, it must also scale the development of its leaders.

“Many of the skills required for adaptability are universal across industries,” explained Blower. “But exploring when and where companies can foster them within their workforces can help to build a powerful employee value proposition.”

Traditionally, leadership development is focused on the top 10% of candidates across businesses but, given the pervasive and transformative nature of the challenges ahead, going forward, this approach may be insufficient. Democratising coaching and development, and broadening access to learning resources and experiences will not only help build resilience and prepare the industry for future uncertainty, but also make it more attractive to new recruits.

“We also need to open up the aperture for leadership talent, both internally and externally” said Kuzenko.



There’s long been a view in the mining industry that to occupy a leadership role, you need to come from a technical background and occupy a certain demographic. But by extending the opportunity to leadership candidates who come from different disciplines and walks of life, we could see a corresponding shift in company capabilities. This would better equip organisations to deal with the range of issues that present to them in the future.”

Jody Kuzenko | President and CEO, Torex Gold

Leadership skills and qualities are usually developed via educational frameworks, but many have been taught in a way that keeps them in separate siloes or functions – diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) is a prime example. Some organisations are struggling to integrate DE&I throughout their businesses as a result. However, many of the challenges and changes that mining companies face are systemic and addressing them requires the ability to blend skill sets and work beyond one’s own field of expertise.

Exposing leaders to a range of challenges and their impacts on different groups can prompt the shift in thinking required. But it’s also important for coaches and trainers to meet leaders where they’re at. One way to do this is through small group coaching. This allows individuals to leverage the insight of their peers while working through problems. Providing connection with external agencies to unite around common societal challenges is another way.

Blower explained: “Key development shifts often happen when leaders are taken out of their comfort zone and exposed to new challenges. This requires them to think creatively, collaborate effectively with different people and influence others in solving problems, without falling back on expertise and positional authority. It’s often a big moment in their learning when executives realise that they can lead and work in this way without being the smartest or most powerful person in the room.”





Learning to lead collaboratively

Leadership skills are only one piece of the puzzle. The world is changing and the way that organisations and their routines are sculpted to execute upon work must change too. Most mining companies have a top-down, triangular hierarchy which works well in a relatively stable business environment. But these hierarchies are not necessarily designed for agility. In a fast-moving environment, this can mean that leaders find themselves with authority but without the information they need to make effective decisions.

Kuzenko explained: “Today, a collaborative or collegial leadership environment which draws upon the knowledge and experience of a diverse team of people, and has routines built in to ensure that information flows up and down that structure effectively, is much more adept than a command and control set up.”

Blower agreed: “Today’s leaders don’t necessarily need to be the ones who come up with all the good ideas. Creating a space which allows good ideas to be brought forward is much more valuable and will provide fresh thinking and better workforce engagement. Ultimately, it will change the way that people view mining and metals companies.”

Part of this collegial leadership approach includes being able to assemble and effectively draw upon the expertise of a board of directors. It’s the board’s role to not only support executives by extending their viewpoint and providing insights which enhance their decision-making capabilities, but also to challenge their thinking where necessary.

For example, O'Brien noted the Climate Governance for Boards guidance that has been developed through the [World Economic Forum](#). This considers both the content and capabilities of effective boards in addressing the complex interlinked challenges of climate and nature.



There are three things that I look for in a board member. Firstly, experience; people who have a lot of experience to draw from can add valuable insights. Second, is the ability to solve problems, and help executives to look at things differently. And third is their style. Desirable board members are collaborative. They’re there to support the leaders – not lead themselves – ask questions and draw out different perspectives.”

Mark Cutifani | Chairman, Vale Base Metals

Kuzenko added: “When Torex did its latest board refresh, I also looked for folks with good judgement. Often, during the interview process, I was asked to sum up what I was looking for, and the way I described it was ‘loyal opposition’. I want people who can challenge my thinking and stress test my team’s conclusions in a way that doesn’t overstep into the role of management, and still be our strongest supporters.”





Finding and upskilling board members



Given that today's challenges require boards to be more dynamic, and for members to have a broad range of knowledge and experiences (some of which are in new fields, like data management or environmental and social governance), it makes sense to widen the search for these individuals.



We should deliberately look outside of the mining industry for board members as well as internally. Quite often, the best questions come from people who've earned their stripes in different sectors, because they provide leaders with a fresh perspective."

Mark Cutifani | Chairman, Vale Base Metals

It's important, not just to seek out new board members and executives with these skills and experiences, but also to provide existing ones with chances to upskill. These efforts might include looking externally for partners or groups who can broaden the range of experiences to which leaders are exposed. Industry forums and working groups are a good example. Helping leaders carve out time within their schedules for personal development is another investment that the whole organisation will ultimately benefit from.

O'Brien added: "Providing opportunities for leaders to hear from different voices and perspectives is also important. For example, arranging site visits, meetings with community leaders and dialogues with people from different sectors. We need to help leaders to become comfortable with being uncomfortable, because that edge is where we learn and grow."

Cutifani explained that during his time at Anglo American, the team used open forum events to expose their leaders to different thinking. The mandate was always for 50% of attendees to come from outside of the industry.

"We also used, what we called 'the manager once removed conversation'," he said. "So, the person once removed sitting above the leader would mentor them and help develop their thinking on a particular assignment. Also, encouraging talent with high potential to work on a range of different projects with different teams can be really effective."



Culture allows leaders to learn and grow

Perhaps the most important thing that companies can do to equip themselves and their leaders for future volatility is to instil a culture which encourages learning and experimentation.

“At Torex, we strive to create a feedback-rich culture,” said Kuzenko. “We're all learning to manage in this new, volatile environment. And the best way to learn is to put one foot in front of the other, get it right and sometimes get it wrong. If companies have a culture where leaders can get feedback about their work from anyone at any level of the organisation, and they're open to hearing it, then that collectively raises the bar. Some mining companies are getting this right, and it's important that we look outside of our own organisations, see what they're doing and start to emulate it.”

Kuzenko's thoughts on the importance of a progressive culture echo Cutifani's experience from the Quellaveco project which proved that, by allowing leaders to listen and respond in a way that accounts for people beyond the organisation, there are broader benefits to be gained.



It can be difficult to persuade successful people to undertake active experimentation due to the perceived risk to reputation of failure. Thus, creating a supportive culture and enabling leaders to 'lead beyond their expertise' are critical steps in creating the right conditions for experimentation to take place.”

Tom Blower | Advisory Consultant, Cripps Leadership Advisors

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