



## **Mining Misfits – Roundtable Discussion: Unpacking the Institution of Mining**

### Discussion Overview & Debrief of Major Topics/Themes

#### **1.0 Introduction**

To close out the year, we had a deliberately open-ended topic for the Misfits to discuss when we asked them to “unpack the institution of mining”.

We invited a panel of contributors, some tenured Misfits and some joining in the conversation for the first time, with a wide range of professional backgrounds to ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives were considered.

Why did we take this approach when each previous roundtable discussion had a very specific and targeted topic? Well, we wanted to hear what was at the front of the Misfits’ minds; we wanted to know what was keeping them up at night during this age of our industry.

Some of what we discovered aligned very closely to concepts discussed previously by our group. Some topics surfaced that before had only been mentioned in passing.

We will share with you here today some of these concepts and ideas.

#### **2.0 Cross-functional Integration**

A good portion of this discussion was focused on breaking down siloes within the industry. The group identified two challenges we face with integration: first are the siloes built up within an organization between functions and departments, and the second are siloes between organizations, between owners and their contractors/consultants.

Possibly a third fracture seen in the industry is the time-fracture across the lifecycle of a project (information not passing efficiently or effectively from one phase to the next).

The Misfits understand that successful capital projects are partnerships. As we like to say, people build projects. Alignment between functions and project partners is paramount to the health of a project.

Focusing on the cross-functional integration, one Misfit had an interesting observation that project folks prefer to talk to like-minded individuals; we speak with those who share the same perspectives, objectives, and opinions. With this, it means that people are not inclined to share ideas with folks who have differing perspectives because this may lead to conflict. It is human nature to avoid conflict, even if this means withholding information (as an aside, if this topic is of interest stay tuned for an upcoming interview on Cognitive Diversity coming soon).

Unfortunately, what we see in the industry is functions only come out of their silo when something goes wrong, and they are looking to assign blame. This fracturing between functions is not setting us up for success.

It is the responsibility of project management to break down these walls, ensure complete information sharing between the groups, and fostering an environment of integration and development rather than individual pride and ego.

### **3.0 Cross-organizational Integration**

In addition to fractures between disciplines, and information lost throughout the lifecycle of a project, we also face the challenge of acting as “independent” partners, rather than true owner-contractor partnerships in the industry.

As you can see, there are layers of defensive shielding setup without anybody really intending to do that: information gaps between functions, between organizations, and from one phase to the next.

One Misfit shared a golden nugget of wisdom when they said that we need to empower people to make decisions by sharing information and deliberating openly.

Project stakeholders are generally receptive to participating in wholistic project planning exercises and cross-functional reviews. We need to allow for more opportunities to share information from all disciplines and all partners involved in the project, and we need to ensure everybody has a voice in these integrated planning exercises.

Any one project individual rarely understands the full magnitude of risk, projects are incredibly complex and difficult, and relying on one person to break down silos and manage all risk is rarely a winning combination. The key to stakeholder management is establishing credibility with all partners and employing open and constructive communication.

The Misfits felt Integrated Planning Sessions should (i) start at the concept / pre-feasibility stage, (ii) should involve all functions and project partners, and (iii) should focus on the one shared interest – project success.

Some solutions to integration mentioned were a cross-functional risk register that is kept current through every phase of the project, employing or assigning an integration manager to every function and to every partner, and generally fostering an environment of information sharing to ensure everybody wins rather than digging trenches to protect each their own.

### **4.0 New Ideas and Talent**

As the conversation advanced from integration, the Misfits discussed different methods and personality types required for true project integration. This led us into a topic we have discussed many times before – the need to introduce new ideas and new talent in the industry to tackle the challenges we face.

If there is one thing that is abundantly clear about our industry from the outside looking in, it is that with exception for new technologies and machinery, our thinking hasn’t evolved very much (certainly not enough to change the trajectory of the industry and bring us into current times). The “good ol’ boys” club continues to be prevalent in our industry. If you ask me, it’s time for us to take a good look in the mirror and to start challenging our own thinking. What can we do differently to do better?

One observation is that we don’t seem to learn from other industries. One easy way we can do this is to bring in new talent from outside our own halls. With them will come new ideas (or at least ideas new to our industry that have been tried, tested and proven elsewhere).

The challenge within this challenge is that mining is rarely even in the top three choices for the next generation of leaders coming out of school or entering the workforce. We don’t even show up on the radar for this new talent.

So many in our industry believe we need to change and do things differently, but often the conversation (or ideas) end there. We will not evolve living in this echo chamber.

So how do we advance? We take chances on new talent, on new ideas. It's time for us to be ridiculously open minded and explore new ideas, concepts, philosophies. If we are smart, we would put time, effort, and energy into attracting new talent from other industries, and other walks of life.

Simply put, I believe it's time for us to get really, really good at failing forward. In the words of billionaire [Ray Dalio](#), "Failure + Reflection = Progress". As one of my coaches [Rich Litvin](#) says: "If you want to get good at anything, you have to start by being bad at everything...". And you want to know what, he's absolutely right. Master chefs don't magically start making delicious and delectable entrees – first they have to learn how to cook! That's right, at one point in time Wolfgang Puck was an awful cook. He too started from the bottom, left school at 14 to work in kitchens, and now is probably the only chef on the planet that both you and your grandmother recognize by name. He failed forward, really, really well.

## **5.0 Risk Management**

Here is a statement that will raise eyebrows "most mining business executives are terrified of projects". Ask any of them, most will likely even tell you the truth. For one Misfit, it is a condition of analysis paralysis. As mentioned previously, it is impossible to weigh every risk on a project and make a definitive decision resulting from a clean and accurate calculation. And you know what, I think it's completely logical for executives to be terrified of projects. All you have to do is look at our track record to appreciate how likely it is to become another failed statistic.

We all know, at the end of the day when the dust settles on a new mine site, that all risk flows back to the owner. So why do most owners try to pass as much risk as contractually possible down to the contractors? Does this not foster the trench warfare-style fracturing of partners we wish to avoid?

Risk management falters when the decision makers try to assess all risk (no decision can be made, because not every risk can or will be identified), or they are unable to effectively prioritize risk. I will point again to the golden rule, project success should be the ultimate decision-maker. What is good for the project, is good for all parties.

Projects often have a very long lifecycle. New risks are identified at every stage. A good business professional, given all of the necessary information, needs to be able to take all of this into consideration to make a decision. That decision maker needs to be supported by every discipline of every partnering organization throughout every phase of the project up until that point to identify and prioritize risk. Does this sound a little bit daunting? This is why we have systems, processes, and people to support the analysis and decision.

What we need is to make these systems, processes and people better, and more empowered to make the right decision by assessing the right information.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

As I reflect on this paper, I realize that while the Misfits have presented new ideas and concepts here, the overall shape of the conversation is strikingly similar to what we have discussed before.

That is, we need to start acting like partners instead of competitors on our projects. We need better solutions for sharing information and making decisions. And perhaps the foundation to all of this is we need to bring in new talent and new ideas to advance those methods.



Before a foundation can be placed, the groundwork needs to be prepped and complete. In this metaphor I am using, the groundwork is us building an environment that fosters change; we need to build an environment where new ideas and new talent (the foundation to our evolution) can feel at home, respected, and playing a critical part in the shared success of our industry.

Change should not be a necessary evil, nor a shiny new object passed down from the executives that will be outcast at the first opportunity to go back to the old ways.

Change can be scary. However, if our industry is to survive and evolve, change is necessary. And it's okay to feel scared, it's part of the human experience, we just can't let fear stop us from taking action!

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*Do you want to be an industry insider, and see what other leaders think about the challenges you encounter? We talk about the issues, so we can develop solutions and build better projects. It doesn't have to be so hard. Connect with me to learn what other leaders are doing to manage the challenges you are facing.*

*Or, do you need support on a Commercial Strategy, Request for Proposal, or Contract Negotiation? That's what we do best, and how we support the Mining Misfits' Mission!*

*Finally, if you want to build a life you love, without sacrificing your values, beliefs, or principles along the way, then please connect with me. I've helped 100's of seasoned mining professionals and entrepreneurs unlock their unique superpowers! If you've got what it takes – I'd be honored to serve you too!*

Many thanks, and much appreciated.

Jason Fearnow, Founder & CEO – Prime Contract Solutions

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