

Effectiveness of using a Capability Maturity Model (CMM) to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in the mining sector – Sandfire Resources case study

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Problem statement

The mining industry in Australia has a poor track record of achieving successful diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) outcomes. The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy's (AusIMM's) 2024 survey of nearly 700 mining professionalsⁱ revealed a significant gap between organisational commitments and employees' lived experiences, with troubling levels of sexual harassment, bullying, ageism, racism and homophobia persisting despite substantial investment in DEI initiatives. Notably, several indicators declined compared with previous years, and these behaviours were reported as having a detrimental impact on psychosocial wellbeing and mental health.

In Western Australia specifically, both the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA's 2024 *Diversity and Inclusion in the WA Resources Sector* reportⁱⁱ and the WorkSafe Commissioner (2025)ⁱⁱⁱ have highlighted the ongoing need for deep cultural change.

Their findings emphasise the importance of eliminating unacceptable behaviours including harassment, discrimination and other unsafe conduct to reduce risks to workers and communities and to build safer, more inclusive workplaces across the sector.

These problems point to a need for meaningful changes to position DEI to support holistic and systemic, strategic, cultural and behavioural change informed by evidence. As Dr Ashley McGrath, Chief Executive Officer, CEOs for Gender Equity, in her 2025 PhD dissertation said^{iv}:

“Driving inclusion isn’t a checklist – it’s a commitment to culture, systems, and accountability for all.”



Benefits of DEI for the mining industry

Organisations across the resources sector increasingly recognise that strong DEI practices can help address some of the above issues while enhancing workforce performance, innovation, and overall organisational effectiveness, while strengthening reputation and social licence to operate. In the mining sector, as in other male-dominated sectors, this is considered critical as the lack of diversity, and gender inequality, are acknowledged to result in a power imbalance that drives sexual harassment and other psychosocial hazards. Additionally, recent industry reviews highlight that effective DEI strategies directly contribute to improved attraction, retention and engagement, with cultural shortcomings linked to negative employee experiences and reduced workforce stability.

Indeed, the KPMG Australian Mining Risk Forecast (2025)^v in acknowledging that expectations around inclusion are rising and more needs to be done to diversify talent pipelines noted:

“Talent attraction and retention rose significantly in this year’s list, climbing from #10 last year to #5 in 2024-2025. (...), the recent resurgence suggests that as the Australian mining sector accelerates its shift toward decarbonisation and digital transformation, its ability to attract and retain talent is under growing pressure.”



How might capability maturity models help?

Capability maturity models (CMMs) provide organisations with a structured way to assess the strengths and limitations of their current practices, helping them understand how effectively different approaches are contributing to operational success^{vii}. They offer a clear framework for evaluating performance against defined maturity levels, enabling companies to identify gaps, prioritise improvement initiatives, and progress toward more consistent, optimised operations.

When applied systematically, CMMs support continuous, organisation-wide improvement by aligning people, processes, and systems behind a coherent roadmap for building capability, an approach increasingly recognised in the mining sector as essential for achieving sustainable cultural and operational transformation.

Sandfire Resources and its commitment to DEI

Sandfire Resources (Sandfire) is a global copper producer of significance and continues to make strong progress toward its goal of being a sustainable mining company. Sandfire has more than 1,300 employees and an additional 3,500 contractors, and is actively engaged in fostering an inclusive culture that values diversity, where people are empowered and accountable, and can achieve their full potential. This commitment to building an inclusive workplace is championed from senior levels of the organisation with Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director Brendan Harris saying:

“If the world is to meet its decarbonisation goals, it needs the mining industry more than ever. We will need to foster the best minds and the broadest talents, and this will only happen if we have a supportive, progressive and inclusive workplace. As the CEO and Managing Director of Sandfire Resources, a global company with a footprint across four continents, we know this will be critical if we are to deliver our strategy.”^{viii}



Overview of the project

In 2024 and 2025 Sandfire collaborated with Edith Cowan University (ECU) researchers in a WA Government MARS Program funded research project run by ECU's Mental Awareness, Respect and Safety (MARS) Centre. Project leads, Dr Judy Lundy and Associate Professor Uma Jogulu, set out to evaluate how the ECU Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Capability Maturity Model (ECU DEI CMM) (see Appendix 1) could be used to advance DEI maturity to support the development of an inclusive culture to help address gender inequality and other forms of inequality in the WA Mining Sector.

A representative group of experienced mining industry employees from non-managerial to senior management levels participated in the project. Participants initially collaborated with the research team to contextualise the ECU DEI CMM to the mining industry, ensuring it was fit for purpose. The researchers applied the contextualised tool to conduct a benchmarking maturity assessment which involved a series of researcher-facilitated workshops where participants used the tool's evidence guides to evaluate Sandfire's maturity across the four CMM dimensions.

Participants later engaged in additional sessions to identify desired future-state maturity levels and to discuss priority focus areas for closing the gaps between current and aspirational performance.

This process was considered valuable to Sandfire, both in raising awareness of DEI and in supporting the identification of actions and assigning accountability. The significance of this impact is reflected in the following participant feedback:

"Discussing it at length through this process has been really valuable, not only to understand the importance of DEI and the DEI concepts, but also, where we are as a business."

"The biggest thing for us is identifying those gaps so we know where to focus our efforts. So, I think we've taken an approach of listing some initiatives out around what we want to take forward as a result of the study."

In 2025, Sandfire and the researchers agreed that there was significant value for both parties, and for the broader WA mining sector, in exploring the capabilities and resources required to conduct maturity assessments in-house, as well as undertaking a further assessment. The ECU team developed a suite of tools and piloted these resources through a Train-the-Trainer workshop for Sandfire personnel who had expressed interest in building their maturity assessment facilitation skills. Following this training, Sandfire facilitators led several in-house maturity assessment workshops, with some sessions observed by members of the research team. Facilitators found that:

"The CMM model, assessment process and supporting materials were helpful in identifying gaps."

“Resources were great and were very helpful and have been adapted for use in the organisation.”

“There’s an opportunity for the assessment results to inform the organisation’s DEI strategy.”

Further feedback addressed the value of the CMM model and supporting materials to assist mining sector organisations in WA progress their DEI maturity:

“The tool provides a guiding language about how to as best as possible objectively assess where the felt experiences are. The model gives a language to distinguish different levels of maturity. This can help smaller mid-tier organisations to be ready to have the conversations and self-assess to see where they’re at. This is a great step forward which takes away the subjective side of this topic and provides a simple framework to present to leaders.”

Evaluation of the second assessment conducted a year on from the baseline assessment reaffirmed Sandfire’s view that progress in DEI maturity is a multi-year commitment.

Key practical takeaways for industry

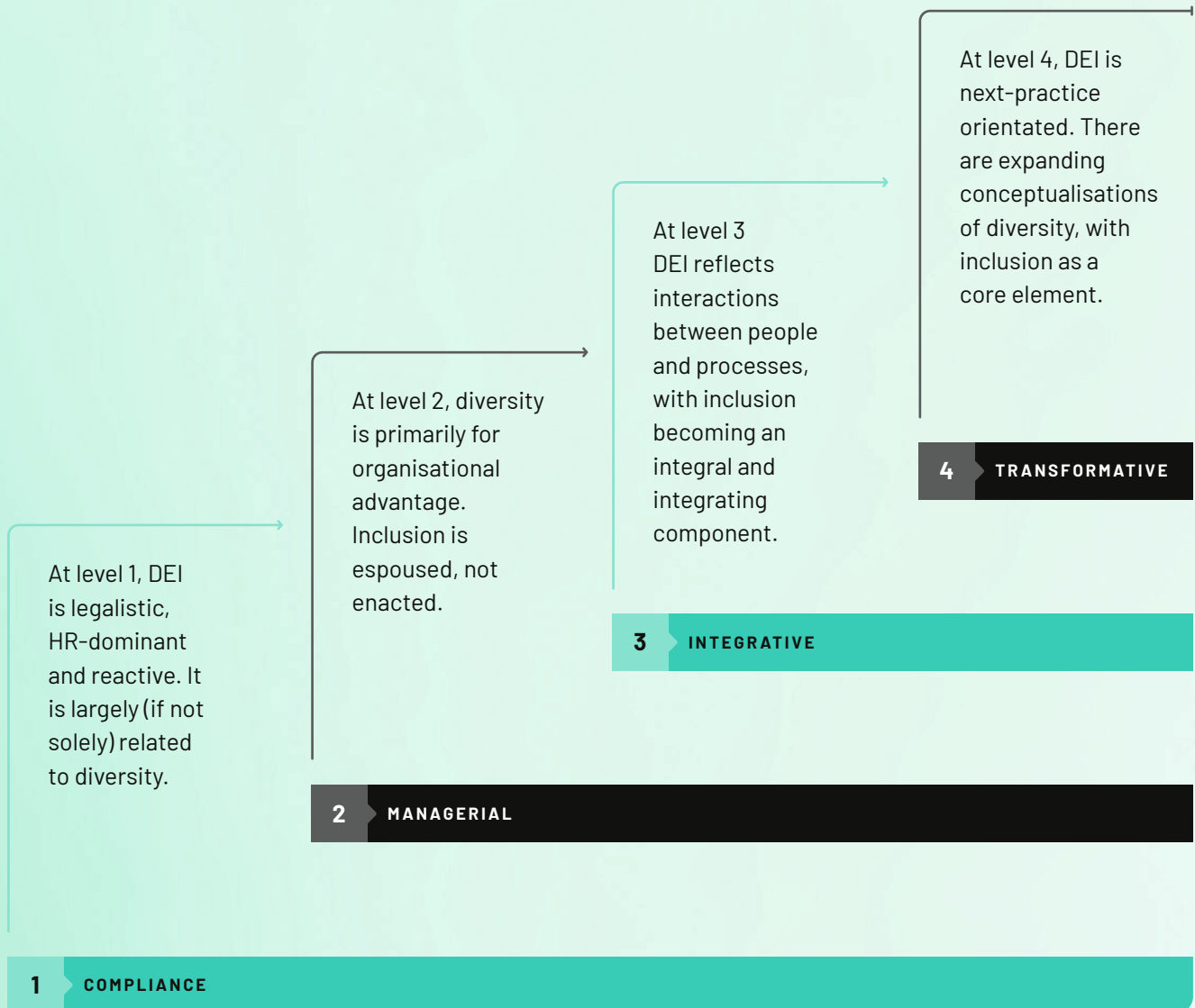
- Mining organisations in Western Australia benefit from adopting intentional and evidence-based DEI strategies that support meaningful, sustainable cultural change.
- A structured maturity model provides leaders with a clear way to understand current capability, prioritise actions, and track progress over time.
- The ECU DEI CMM and its accompanying resources offer practical guidance that has already demonstrated value for WA mining companies. In using the ECU DEI CMM participants should consider what meaningful progress means and is appropriate for them and the required timeframes to undertake assessments.
- Looking ahead, the planned digitisation of the tool in 2026 is expected to further streamline adoption and reduce implementation barriers for organisations of all sizes.¹

¹ A digitised version of the ECU DEI CMM assessment tool is expected to be available for use free of charge for WA mining sectors organisations by the middle of 2026.



Appendix 1 – ECU DEI CMM

MARS DEI CMM Maturity Levels



MARS DEI CMM Dimensions



Drivers & Focus

The drivers and focus dimension focuses on the drivers of workplace diversity and inclusion and where the key focus of activity is in the organisation.



Responsibility & Leadership

The responsibility and leadership dimension focuses on the leadership approach and how responsibility is devolved throughout the organisation.



DEI Measurement

The DEI measurement dimension focuses on where the emphasis is placed on measurement on how DEI is measured throughout the organisation.



Mechanisms & Defining Features

The mechanisms and defining features dimension considers how DEI is being achieved throughout the organisation and includes tools and activities.

The full suite of ECU DEI CMM resources is available on the ECU Mental Awareness, Respect and Safety (MARS) Centre website: <https://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/business-and-law/research/mental-awareness-respect-and-safety-centre/resources-for-industry/mars-project/Supporting-Diversity-and-Inclusion-Workplace-Maturity>

Mental Awareness, Respect, Safety

The MARS Centre is a Western Australian Government-funded initiative based at Edith Cowan University (ECU). We work with the mining industry to create safer, more respectful, and mentally healthy workplaces across the resources sector.

Who We Are

Research & Insights

- Psychosocial safety and mental health
- Respectful behaviours and workplace culture
- Leadership capability and organisational change
- Workforce wellbeing and risk factors

Industry Collaboration

- Co-designed workplace interventions
- Culture assessments and diagnostics
- Pilot programs and evaluations
- Support for organisational improvement initiatives

Training & Capability Building

- Leadership development tailored to mining
- Short courses and workplace programs
- Graduate Certificate of Leadership in Mining Workplace Safety (S11)
 - 100% and 50% scholarships available through industry partnerships

Why It Matters

Creating safe, respectful, and mentally healthy workplaces leads to:

- ✓ Better safety performance
- ✓ Higher productivity
- ✓ Improved workforce retention
- ✓ Stronger culture and leadership capability
- ✓ Reduced psychosocial risks

MARS works with organisations to turn research into real, measurable outcomes.



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