

MMSD – North America: Facilitator’s Evaluation

R. Anthony Hodge, Ph.D., P.Eng.

Facilitator, MMSD - North America and Leader, IISD Mining/Mineral Team

4 December 2002

1. Introduction

MMSD - North America was aimed at reviewing practices of the mining/minerals industry and developing prescriptions for how the industry might do things better – that is, in a way that might bring better alignment between the industry and the broad societal transition to sustainability. From the beginning the hope was that the exercise would generate an “ongoing platform of engagement” that would spark the possibility of continuously improving relationships between the many implicated communities of interest while simultaneously offering concrete and practical suggestions for action.

The exercise was unprecedented both in scope and in the nature of the process that was implemented. In terms of scope, MMSD was charged with addressing:

- a complex, multi-faceted industry involving thousands of companies from tiny to huge focusing on dozens of primary commodities and operating in developed and developing countries;
- a time horizon that spans a project life cycle, typically about a century from exploration through to post closure, and a mineral life cycle that can extend to time periods significantly greater;
- a range of interests that included companies (including shareholders and employees of juniors, intermediates, majors, technical service and supply companies, financial service companies, industry associations); indigenous peoples, governments (local, provincial/state, regional, national), organized labour, non-government organizations (of many types), mining-affected communities; and the academic support system (teachers, researchers, learners).

In terms of process, the MMSD team embarked on a facilitated, multi-interest solution-building exercise that involved at the global level, thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations. In North America, the reach was more limited but still involved hundreds of individuals and dozens of organizations.

The above characteristics of scope and process had a particular expression in MMSD - North America. The purpose of this short note is to articulate an evaluation of success in the hopes that some lessons might be drawn out that can encourage learning from the experience.

In offering this evaluation, three caveats are important to state. First, the focus here is on MMSD - North America only and does not extend to MMSD Global or the other regional partners (Australia, South America, Southern Africa) except in a few instances where MMSD - North America was implicated. Second, the concern here is with actions of those within the MMSD - NA process – what we did well or could improve upon. Thus, this does not review external constraints such as timeframe or resource levels. Review from that perspective is another important exercise, but it is not this one. And lastly, although much has been learned from the comments of participants throughout the MMSD - North America process, this evaluation reflects a personal synthesis.

2. Did MMSD - North America Achieve its Objectives?

Appendix 1 contains a listing of the MMSD North America objectives organized by Task. While the degree of success may have varied, each of the objectives was addressed and the results summarized in the final report, *Towards Change*. In short, the objectives were achieved.

3. Aspects of MMSD - North America that Worked Well

Relationship Building

Relationships between participants and between the MMSD – NA team and participants were positive throughout and marked by both respect and encouragement without exception. The project left a well-founded platform of engagement that is poised for further development.

Focus on Substance and Process

An explicit effort was made throughout to maintain a focus on both the substance of the deliberations and the integrity of the process that was being used. This two-dimensional focus is also reflected in the final recommendations which ultimately dealt with both the substance of follow-up action as well as a process of seeing each action addressed.

Organization and Decision-making

MMSD - North America used a 3-person core group of individuals linked electronically to lead, facilitate, and manage the entire process. No dedicated office was established. The project functioned as a virtual organization.

For management control, project activities were periodically reviewed by a small Project Committee chaired by the President of IISD and including the Chief Financial Officer, the Vice

President, and a Senior Fellow. Reporting to sponsor organizations was maintained on a regular but informal basis.

The core team functioned in a facilitative role. Once created, Work Groups maintained autonomy to report out as they saw fit. The final recommendations were crafted by the core team as a result of the collaborative input of all MMSD - North America participants drawn in through several cycles of review. However, participants were not asked to officially “sign off” on these recommendations or on the final report. Throughout MMSD - NA work, an explicit commitment was made to work towards consensus to the greatest extent possible and ultimately, report on both where consensus was achieved and where differences remained. In reporting out, however, the core team ultimately assumed responsibility for what emerged.

The issue of decision-making is sensitive, as it should be. Amongst MMSD - NA participants there seemed to be broad support for how decision-making responsibilities were being shared which in turn led to a sense of trust amongst participants.

Limited Tasks, Well-defined, Simple Integrative Design

The collaborative development of a limited number of specific tasks (five, see Appendix 1) provided a focus for MMSD - NA that was critical for effective implementation. The overall design – (retrospective (profile/story), prospective (scenarios), practical application on the ground (seven questions assessment framework), strategy for change and final communication) – was simple to understand and aided in (1) clarifying the overall project direction for all participants, and (2) providing a strong structure for the final report.

In this project, the design cut across issues in a way that gave access to them for review and encouraged them to be seen in a broader context than would have been the case had an issue-by-issue stance been assumed. This approach (which is consistent with the bridging and integrating nature of the concept of sustainability) emerged as a result of discussions in the two initiating workshops and seemed to set a tone for the entire project that worked particularly well.

Treatment of Both Big Picture and Well-Grounded Practical Perspectives

The particular set of tasks that emerged from participants ensured coverage of issues from both big-picture and practical, more detailed perspectives. Such differences often emerge between mining practitioners whose focus is in the practical detail of operations, and observers from outside the immediate operation who are often most concerned with how the mining/mineral operation fits into the larger scheme of things and how they touch people, their community, or the environment.

Both of these perspectives are needed to move ahead but they can sometimes clash. The particular combination of MMSD – NA tasks encouraged both of these perspectives and seemed to function in a way that turned out to be a real strength.

Work Groups

The use of 20 – 30 person Work Groups focused on specific tasks and existing over about a 6-month, limited period worked very well. The size allowed for effective interaction while the length of assignment allowed individuals to develop useful working relationships. At the same time, the limited life ensured a reasonable work load for people that typically already had too much to do.

Financial Support for “Un-supported” Workshop Participants

MMSD - North America budgeted for and offered a modest honorarium (in addition to covering direct costs of participation) to those individuals who volunteered their time and were otherwise un-supported (it was not part of their job) to participate. Doing so was an essential ingredient for success. It is not reasonable to expect purely volunteer participation in a demanding activity that has as a partial outcome, a more financially viable mining industry. In addition, taking this step reflects a recognition that the contribution of these individuals is respected and valued. There is no doubt that the pay-back for this policy was many greater than the original investment.

Mix of Commissioned Research and Workshop Deliberations for Each Task

The most effective results were achieved when commissioned research was used as input to Work Group deliberations. This in turn led to a collaborative Work Group report that emerged only after several cycles of review brought the comfort level up to a satisfactory point. In one task (Task 1, story/profile) resources were not available to convene the needed work shop and the results suffered significantly. In contrast, the tasks that had the benefit of two face-to-face Work Group meetings were extremely successful (one workshop is not enough, three would have been preferable).

Workshop Process

Effective workshop process was achieved through:

- collaborative development of clear Work Group Terms of Reference including an overall goal (with clear links to the overall project goals), specific objectives, timeline, and budget as a first step in implementing any Task;
- development, review and modification of a workshop agenda with all participants several weeks in advance of the workshop;
- distribution of a workshop package 1 – 2 weeks in advance of any given workshop that included agenda, participant bios (1-page maximum), contact sheet (name, affiliation, telephone numbers, e-mail address), rules of procedure, a clear (but draft) statement of the workshop purpose (that would then be reviewed and confirmed as the first agenda item) and appropriate substantive material to support the discussion;

- explicit use of (written) procedural rules that were reviewed at the beginning of every meeting and that dealt with intentions of the meeting, attribution of comments, record keeping;
- use of the following workshop formula:
 - an initial evening gathering (usually for dinner) that allowed introductions to be made, purpose and procedures to be discussed and an overview of the substance to be offered;
 - a 2-day subsequent process with a light evening in the middle to allow informal discussions;
 - a mix of presentations, plenary, and small group work with flexibility built into the agenda to allow for encouraging the flow of the meeting as needed;
 - a final (typically 90 minute) closing round table in which each participant was asked to share their views on what went well, what might be improved for the next time, and any final observations they wished to offer;
 - close by 4:00 p.m. on the second day; and
 - circulation of a summary of action-items emerging from the workshop for review (and amendment if required) by participants as soon as possible following the workshop.
- encouragement of interaction between Work Group participants between meetings through sub-group work on specific assignments and discussions either by teleconference or e-mail.

Administrative Support, Management by Objectives, and Financial Control

Administrative support was provided by IISD staff working in Winnipeg. The project would not have been possible without this support. In particular, a system of management by objectives (tasks) and financial control was established that provided effective monitoring of resources throughout the entire project.

Publications

Current technology makes possible a turn around in publications from final manuscript to fully-published a matter of weeks. MMSD - North America was able to take advantage of this approach as well as effective editing capacity through the support of the publications group at IISD. This turned out to be a tremendous asset.

4. Areas for Improvement

North America was not really North America: Mexico was Missing

Arguing limits of time and resources, the choice was made to not engage with communities-of-interest in Mexico. This is a significant gap particularly in today's context of the North American Free Trade Agreement. In retrospect, some of the resources may well have been better directed at this end.

Relationships with Other Components of MMSD was Weak

Weak relationships with other components of MMSD were a cause of ongoing concern. No mechanism existed nor were resources available to pursue effective relationship building on this front. The result was a source of tension and a sense that insights from MMSD - North America were not well integrated with those of the other regional Global initiatives and in turn, a sense that insights developed elsewhere were not brought to the MMSD - North American table.

The Network of Interests Could Have been Stronger

In the short life of MMSD - North America, a large network of contacts was developed and used to encourage engagement with the process. However, there are many additional individuals and organizations that would have greatly enriched and strengthened the process as well as the foundation for follow-up action. The key here is to develop a systematic approach to engagement that methodically reaches to various corners of the community (regardless of scale) to establish and nourish contact and somehow records the contact in an information base. MMSD – NA was always playing catch-up on this score.

We Were Not Able to Convince Some Engaged Interests of the Importance of their Participation in our Work Groups

In spite of enjoying very good relationships with all communities of interest, we were unable to convince some key interests that participation in some of our Tasks would be to both their and our benefit. Ironically, this applied to both corporate and non-government interests.

Not Enough Effort Was Put to Ensuring Continuous Learning

One of the great strengths of the MMSD process was that it recognized the mining industry as part of the evolving society in which it is embedded. Furthermore, it amounted to an unprecedented step on the part of the industry to reach out to that society to collaborate proactively on developing suggestions about how the industry might best move forward. However, even with the recognition of the dynamic nature of its situation, MMSD - North America did not put enough thought up-

front into considering how its own processes could be best designed to ensure continuous learning for all interests within the project time frame and in “post closure.”

Part of the way forward on this is to undertake facilitated evaluations at points throughout the project along with an overall evaluation at closure. Some of this was done informally but not on a systematic and rigorous basis, something that is required to ensure that the most is made of the opportunity at hand.

5. Closing Comment

There is no doubt that during certain phases of MMSD - North America, key players were operating on the edge of exhaustion. However, perhaps the most significant mark of success when all is said and done is that MMSD - North America seems to have been an energizing process, not a draining one. There is an appetite to further nourish the relationships that were developed and make effective follow-up happen.

The mining/minerals Industry has traditionally lagged behind others in adopting progressive policies and actions, particularly regarding broad environmental and social implications. Over the past decade a change has become evident and the initiation of MMSD reflects this change. However, MMSD is not an end point in itself. Our work represents a step in an ongoing process of continuous learning and improvement, sometimes slow, sometimes more quickly. In the end, the real test of our success will be seen in the concrete actions that are taken by the various interests: companies, government, communities, organized labour, First Nations/Native Americans, non-government organizations, the learning support system.

Lastly, and on a personal note, the opportunity to facilitate MMSD – North America turned out to be both a tough challenge and a rewarding experience. For all who made it possible – sponsors, participants, and IISD, my heartfelt thanks.

Appendix 1. MMSD North America Work Plan Tasks and Objectives.

Task 1: Story/Profile

Objective 1A: to develop a profile of the companies that comprise the North American mining/minerals Industry (US and Canada).

Objective 1B: to articulate the contribution and implications of mining as they have changed over time (to people and their communities, to ecosystems, to economies) through the eyes of various communities of interest.

Task 2: Test/Guideline for Sustainability

Objective 2A: to develop a set of practical principles, criteria, and/or indicators that could be used to guide or test the exploration for, design, operation, and performance monitoring of individual, existing or proposed, operations in terms of their compatibility with concepts of sustainability;

Objective 2B: to suggest approaches or strategies for effectively implementing such a test/guideline.

Task 3: Agenda for Change

Objective 3: to collaboratively develop an “Agenda for Change” comprising specific actions and timelines for the North American mining industry and related communities of interest to meet in moving towards sustainable development.

Task 4: Scenarios

Objective 4A: to develop of a set of scenarios that bracket the likely futures to be faced by the North American mining and minerals industry and the related communities of interest ;

Objective 4B: to use the scenario-building exercise as a means to identify and discuss:

- risks and opportunities;
- issues, challenges, and areas of both consensus and disagreement on their resolution; and
- potential prescriptions (aimed potentially at any or all of the communities of interest) for adjusting mining- and minerals- related policy, practices, behavior and infrastructure.

Task 5: Final Report

Objective 5: to synthesize and communicate the results of MMSD North America