

# Responding to the Kairotic Moment: Advancing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Through Allyship in Canadian Mining

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*Organizations are seeking to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) to attract and retain their workforce. To support the mining sector's transition from a traditionally male-dominated workforce, The Mining Association of Canada (MAC) has developed new EDI accountability frameworks. In this paper, I argue that Canadian mining organizations and their leaders are experiencing a kairotic moment — an opportune moment in time requiring action — and need to respond accordingly. Now that the window of opportunity has opened, mining leaders need to act, both to support organizational change efforts and in everyday allyship actions. This article holds significance to equip transformational change-agents.*

*Keywords: kairos, allies, leadership, shifting culture, change management*

## INTRODUCTION

Recent social movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action have raised the awareness of social challenges to individuals and organizations within Canadian society. Additionally, impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic have caused an increase in resignations and retirements which have accelerated labour shortages forecasted in sectors such as mining (Mining Industry Human Resource Council, 2017, 2021). In response to this combination of events, the Mining Association of Canada (MAC) (2020) issued a formal statement that "equity, diversity and inclusion are strategic priorities for our sector and are core values we share." MAC is comprised of more than 50 mining companies across Canada and works to establish best practices in mining sustainability. MAC's statement marked a pivotal, kairotic moment in Canadian mining. Since that time MAC has begun to develop equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) frameworks, which intend to hold mining organizations accountable and provide transparency in reporting as they strive to advance EDI across their operations.

In this paper, I argue that Canadian mining organizations and their leaders are in a *kairotic* moment and need to respond accordingly to calls to advance EDI and shift workplace culture within the sector. *Kairos* — while not commonly discussed in leadership theory — is an ancient Greek term that consists of the dimensions of "situational contingencies" and the "effort/desires of subordinates" (Kinneavy & Eskin, 1994; Sipiora & Baumlin, 2002; White, 1983). Accordingly, *kairos* involves an understanding and awareness of context which may motivate individuals. Additionally, White (1983) describes *kairos* as "a passing instant when an opening appears that must be driven through with force if success is to be achieved" (p. 3). Thus, *kairos* contains elements of situational awareness and timeliness in taking action. Simply, Frost Benedikt (2002) describes *kairos* as "the right person doing the right thing at the right time and for the right

reasons” (p. 233). In particular, leaders need to be aware and prepared to respond to calls to action in a timely and appropriate manner. MAC in particular, and the Canadian mining industry in general, have entered into a *kairotic* moment whereby this “window of opportunity” (Rothgang & Lageman, 2021, p. 238) has opened and an opportunity exists for action. The challenge then remains for mining organizations and the leaders within the industry to act. Organizations can act to establish EDI strategies, take steps to align actions with their “core values,” and engage leaders to operationalize EDI within the Canadian mining sector.

At this pivotal time, leaders and organizations risk missing opportunities to implement effective EDI processes, whether through failing to recognize *kairotic* moments for persuasive action or else through inattention to *kairotic* elements in the situations which are calling for action. While *kairotic* moments may be substantial — like the COVID-19 pandemic — or small — like speaking up about an offensive comment in a meeting — the result of acting or failing to act holds the potential to have a big impact on employees and organizational work culture. Those with situational awareness who act in the moment to support those in need can have a positive impact by ensuring that organizational values are modelled in daily occurrences (Warren, Sekhon, & Waldrop, 2022). Importantly, those that act in these everyday *kairotic* moments to support EDI can motivate others to also take action. I noted, Frost Benedikt’s (2002) description of *kairos* which observes that the “right person must do the right thing at the right time” (p. 233); to build on that description we must consider how individual leaders will respond and engage in this call to action. Path-goal theory is one leadership theory that closely aligns with *kairos*; both concepts acknowledge that leadership styles and behaviours must shift to customize the persuasion of people in different situations. Path-goal theory was originally proposed by Evans (1970) to understand “the effects of leader behaviour on the motivation of subordinates” (House & Mitchell, 1997, p. 260) to accomplish goals or tasks. House then advanced Evan’s work and “added considerable sophistication to the definition of the context, the range of leader behaviours considered relevant, and the causal mechanisms linking context and leadership to new criteria” (Osborn, Uhl-Bien, & Milosevic, 2014, p. 595). Although it is nuanced, the value of Path-goal theory is in emphasizing “the relationship between the leader’s style and the characteristics of the subordinates and the work setting.” (Northouse, 2013, p. 137). Additionally, Situational Leadership Theory is useful for recognizing subordinates’ skills and motivations and promoting development (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 1985). Therefore, *kairos*, Path-goal, and Situational Leadership theories require degrees of situational awareness for a leader to act in a timely and appropriate manner to effectively motivate and guide their subordinates to act inclusively.

The topic of *kairotic* moments and leaders’ responses to operationalizing EDI is significant to many organizations across Canada and beyond. Organizations which successfully advance EDI are thought to be safer, more innovative, and better places to work, and therefore have lower instances of employee turnover (BCG, 2018; BHP, 2020; Catalyst, 2004; Sull, Sull, Cipolli, & Brighenti, 2022; Thorpe-Moscon & Ohm, 2021). Additionally, organizations with equitable systems and inclusive cultures can better attract and retain a representative workforce. However, successfully operationalizing EDI is complex and nuanced. Advancing EDI requires a commitment of resources and may involve transformational changes which occur over several years. Organizations which are ineffective at navigating through this pivotal transition period risk falling behind their competitors, missing out on key talent, or being subject to reputational damage (Mata, 2016; Osler, 2021; Sull et al., 2022). Answering the call to action to advance EDI in an appropriate and timely manner is therefore critically important to an organization’s success in a constrained labour market.

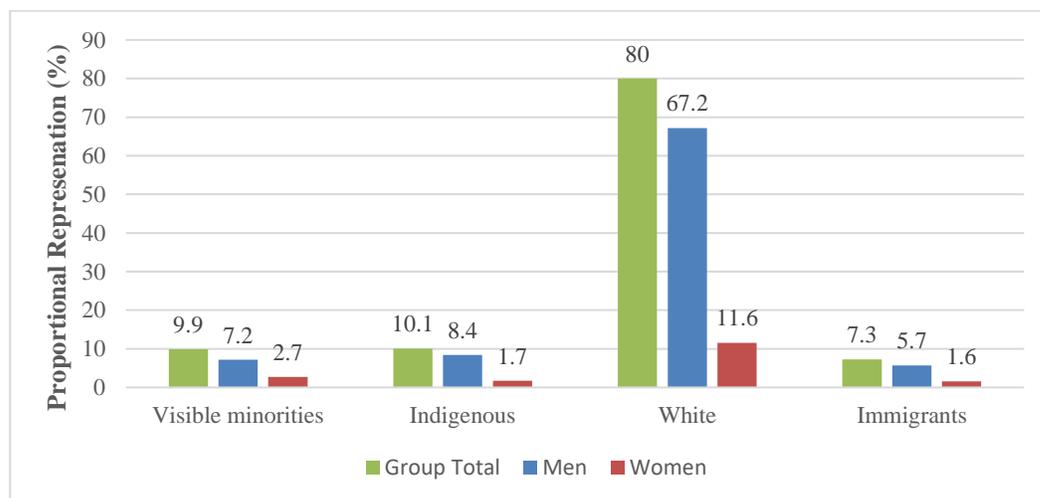
This paper will first describe the situational contingencies around how organizational culture in mining is most likely to be responsive to ongoing messaging around EDI. Next, I will describe the factors in the ambient culture which contribute to the time being optimal for substantive action. Finally, I will explore how key principles of Path-Goal and Situational Leadership theories might aid leaders in recognizing *kairotic* potentialities and developing appropriate responses to them.

## MINING’S SITUATIONAL CONTINGENCIES

Certain elements in organizations and work cultures are most likely to be responsive to ongoing messaging around EDI. Understanding these contextual elements or situational contingencies is one of the two aspects of *kairos*. Furthermore, Frost Benedikt (2002) notes that “self-knowledge to be able to assess the situational context... without becoming constrained by too great a respect for the norms of the present” (pp. 230-231) is essential to recognizing *kairotic* moments. Norms within a parent organization may differ between regional locations, which is particularly relevant in resource and place-based industries such as mining. As a result of the cyclical nature of mining economics, mine sites and mining communities across Canada each have a unique history and have developed unique workplace cultures (Angus, 2022; Mouat, 1995; Rouse & Fleising, 1995; Russell, 1999). *Kairotic* moments, therefore, require leaders to have a deep understanding of nuanced situational contexts which may be specific to the sector, region, or organizations in which they work. Additionally, research by Lantz and Just (2021) found that “*kairos* is an ongoing and collective process in which organizational actors can influence the organization while also becoming influenced by the organizational context” (p. 12). Therefore, organizations and their leaders are both influenced by and shape the social contexts in which they operate.

Culture is “the learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people” (Northouse, 2013, p. 384). Similarly, work culture is influenced by the contextual elements of norms, rules, and traditions. In the Canadian mining industry, the business of mining involves realizing the economic potential of resource extraction through the efforts of human labour and the application of various technologies (Angus, 2022; Mouat, 1995; Russell, 1999). Furthermore, mining technology requires both a practical and dynamic application of science to ensure that natural resources can be economically and safely extracted and processed from naturally occurring geological formations. Even with the extensive application of technology, the dynamic nature of mining still relies heavily on people to do things ranging from manual labour to designing extractive technology (Mining Industry Human Resource Council, 2021; Russell, 1999). Therefore, place, technology, and people primarily shape mining culture. Despite the key importance of people to mining, mining employment in Canada has been restricted primarily to “white men” (Karim, 2022); see FIGURE 1. In particular, colonial-era laws banned women from working in mining for decades (Nightingale, Czyzewski, Tester, & Aaruaq, 2017; Saskatchewan, 1909, 1940) and helped to shape mining culture into one often described as masculine, dirty, and physically demanding (Angus, 2022; Wick, 2002).

**FIGURE 1**  
**INTERSECTIONAL EMPLOYMENT IN CANADIAN MINING INDUSTRY**



(2016 Census Data derived from Mining Industry Human Resource Council, 2020; Ng & Gagnon, 2020)<sup>1</sup>

Leaders are accountable to enact strategies which have the potential to influence workplace culture. Similar to the workforce, the leaders in Canadian mining are often white men. However, these leaders may not have lived experiences with witnessing or experiencing discrimination and harassment due to their relative power and privilege in Canadian society (Peltier-Huntley, 2019; Sonnenberg, Do, LeBlanc, & Busari, 2021). As a result, they may fail to recognize everyday *kairotic* moments. Furthermore, those with privilege can be resistant to acknowledging and reflecting on their privileges (Johnson, 2006; Nixon, 2019), a necessary first step before leveraging one's privilege to shift social systems. Additionally, these situational contingencies to which leaders will be called to respond to, require acknowledging and addressing instances of inequity that disproportionately impact women, Indigenous peoples, and other underrepresented groups (Peltier-Huntley, 2022; Rio Tinto & Elizabeth Broderick & Co., 2022; Thorpe-Moscon & Ohm, 2021). Employees in the majority groups may lack the motivation or knowledge to change their behaviour on their own. Furthermore, in moments following discrimination or harassment incidents, leaders or peers may be called upon to support those who have been on the receiving end of inequities. Because of a lack of awareness or experience with inequities, leaders and others may fail to recognize the systemic and prevalent nature of discrimination and harassment and dismiss these as one-off instances or isolated personal conflicts (Howard, 2022). However, these disrespectful and psychologically unsafe behaviours, which may range from unconscious bias to sexual violence, are the result of cultural norms and are more likely to occur in traditionally male-dominated places, such as mining (Howard, 2022; Umereweneza et al., 2020). Mining leaders who can validate and support those who experience disrespectful behaviours and inequities can effectively shift the norms and culture of mining. Furthermore, mining leaders can prepare for these instances by taking bystander intervention training and by advancing their own awareness of challenges faced by underrepresented groups in their workplaces (Aday, Bergsieker, Denney, Schmader, & Trickey, 2022; Cunningham, Drumwright, & Foster, 2021; De Souza & Schmader, 2022).

Consistency is particularly important to the second dimension of *kairos* which considers the desires of subordinates. As outlined in Situational Leadership Theory, the development level — the degree of competency and commitment — of subordinates may differ (Blanchard et al., 1985). Therefore for a leader to show consistency in promoting EDI advancement leaders may need to shift their leadership style to delegate, support, coach, or direct subordinates — as outlined in Blanchard et al.'s (1985) Situational Leadership Theory — to be seen as behaving inclusively. When considering EDI advancement, consistency and the psychological safety of subordinates are also critical. For leaders in mining to advance organizational EDI strategies, they will also need to be able to consistently and credibly interpret the past, present, and future values, practices, and priorities of an organization to the greater workforce (Lantz & Just, 2021). As mentioned previously, the mining industry highly values health and safety (Peltier-Huntley, 2022). Therefore, EDI strategies that link psychological safety with mining's values of health and safety have greater potential for success. Similarly, connecting EDI strategies to other strategic focus areas in mining, such as technological advancements to improve resource extraction's economics or reduce the environmental impacts of mining may indicate further organizational consistency. Furthermore, in line with recommendations from Lantz and Just (2021) and House's (1971, 1996; 1997) Path-goal theory, leaders who consistently and credibly align their understanding of EDI with their organization can help an organization to shift its work culture to one that practices allyship — a clear demonstration of supporting EDI.

## **WHY EDI NOW?**

Various social movements, the global pandemic, and the current labour shortage across Canadian workplaces have created this *kairotic* moment. As documented in my Master's work (2019), various mining companies had been moving towards advancing EDI since the United Nations *Sustainable Development Goals* (UNSDGs) were developed in 2015. Due to the place-based nature of the natural resource industry and evolving laws related to Indigenous peoples in Canada (Joseph & Joseph, 2019), Indigenous peoples have engaged with mining companies in negotiations related to economic, environmental, and social advancements well before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of George Floyd in 2020

(Day, 2019; Faircheallaigh, 2013; Nightingale et al., 2017). As a result, long before MAC's EDI announcement, many mining organizations were already working to implement actions outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) *Calls to Action*, United Nations (2007) *Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and UNSDGs (2015b). MAC's 2020 EDI announcement also follows the formation of Women In Mining organizations across Canada, which have been established since 2010.

My previous research (2019) highlighted how the UNSDGs catalyzed some multi-national mining companies, such as Teck and BHP, to establish EDI strategies and take action. Since that time public sustainability reporting is now commonplace in the resources sector. Despite attempts at transparency and corporate accountability, employee and shareholder activism has been steadily increasing (Reitz & Higgins, 2022; Shecter, 2022) and peaked in 2020 (Black Lives Matter, 2020; Mining Industry Human Resource Council, 2021). Frost Benedikt (2002) argues that "concern for *kairos* begins with an effort to recognize opportunity, making one sensitive to the critical character of moments requiring a decision. The decision concerning the right moment signifies understanding concerning this moment as distinct from others, concerning this moment as the culmination of a series of events" (p. 227). The social movements following George Floyd's murder coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 created this distinct *kairotic* moment whereby activists demanded organizations respond. Although it had previously been silent on social issues, MAC recognized action was required (Karim, 2022). As a result, mining organizations and leaders collectively responded to this moment by issuing MAC's 2020 EDI statement and developing the *Towards Sustainable Mining Inclusive and Respectful Workplace* framework which was issued for public comment in 2022 (Karim, 2022). The development of this industry-wide standard is a clear recognition of the *kairotic* moment whereby action needs to be taken towards advancing EDI.

## ENGAGING LEADERS IN EDI IMPLEMENTATION

Leadership is "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2013, p. 5). While organizations must recognize and respond to substantial *kairotic* moments, much of the success of EDI advancement hinges on the capacity to recognize everyday *kairotic* moments and take appropriate action. Culture is shaped not just by strategies and policies but by the norms and values present in everyday actions. Therefore, leaders, in particular, hold a large amount of influence in recognizing and responding to everyday *kairotic* moments. My previous study (2019) found that front-line mining leaders, in particular, were not engaging in EDI discussions and, as a result, employees viewed leaders as being inconsistent with their organizations' values. Front-line leaders who fail to engage in discussions around EDI advancement can erode the credibility of the organization and senior leaders who intend to advance EDI, ultimately maintaining the status quo. As a result, women, as an underrepresented group, are less likely to see their values reflected in the mining organizations and, thus, often feel less valued (Peltier-Huntley, 2019). To effectively shift workplace culture, leaders need to consider the values of *all* employees while aligning their needs with the organization. Path-goal leadership theory, in all its complexity, relies on leaders selecting the right behaviour at the right time to motivate their employees (Evans, 1970; House, 1971, 1996; House & Mitchell, 1997). Additionally, House (1996) argues that leaders will likely choose leadership behaviours based on their skills, abilities, and comfort levels and can supplement any deficiencies they may have by engaging other members of their team. Furthermore, similar to the concept of development levels of subordinates outlined by Blanchard et al. (1985) in the theory of Situational Leadership, leaders will need to be aware of the competencies (skills) and commitment (motivations) of their subordinates. Thus, to appropriately respond to everyday *kairotic* moments leaders need to be attuned to the motivations, competencies, and resulting behaviours of themselves and their employees.

In support of EDI advancement, allyship is the practice of fostering inclusion. Allyship requires taking action in solidarity with those from underrepresented and marginalized groups. In line with the theories of *kairos* and Path-goal leadership, leaders will need to practice allyship by developing allyship competencies and modelling inclusive behaviours to motivate employees to adopt similar behaviours. De Souza and

Schmader (2022) distinguish between reactive and proactive allyship. In reactive allyship, allies will exhibit inclusive behaviours in reaction to inequities, such as speaking up in the presence of bias or discrimination (De Souza & Schmader, 2022). Reactive allyship, therefore, requires awareness of the situation and timeliness of a response — *kairos* — and, as suggested by Path-goal and Situational Leadership theories, an understanding of the right response to guide an inclusive behaviour change in employees. Conversely, proactive allyship involves pre-planning ways to support underrepresented groups (De Souza & Schmader, 2022), such as mentoring someone from a marginalized group or learning about the social challenges groups of people may face. Proactive allyship requires awareness of situational contingencies — *kairos* — and identifying and developing employee competencies, as outlined in Path-goal and Situational Leadership theories, required to practice allyship. A combination of reactive and proactive allyship behaviours will enhance a leader's ethos — the credibility of their character outlined by Aristotle as involving goodwill, good judgment and good character (See MacLennan, 2009). Additionally, associating allyship with virtue ethics may be important for sustaining an ongoing practice of inclusion (Warren & Warren, 2021). Furthermore, leaders' inclusive behaviours have been shown to have a significant and positive effect on employee engagement with minority groups in the workplace (Randel, Dean, Ehrhart, Chung, & Shore, 2016). Therefore, leaders will need to adopt both reactive and proactive allyship practices, using an understanding of *kairos*, Situational Leadership theory, and Path-goal theory, to effectively motivate employees to support EDI advancement through developing an allyship practice.

Leaders and employees can develop their allyship or inclusive practices by establishing a personal action plan to enhance their reactive and proactive allyship behaviours. A personal action plan will support potential allies to increase their awareness and ability to recognize and respond to everyday *kairotic* moments. For example, a leader may recognize they want to enhance their skills to better address workplace microaggressions, so they include the proactive action to attend a bystander awareness course on their personal action plan. Through learning and practicing bystander interventions the leader may feel more confident to speak up and creating a more psychologically safe workplace for others. Furthermore, in line with Path-goal and Situational Leadership theories, leaders can guide employees to establish their own action plans to develop allyship competencies and behaviours. Leaders can also model their desire to become an ally by sharing their personal action plans with employees. Previous studies indicate that accountability is especially important to motivate men to adopt inclusive practices (De Souza & Schmader, 2022). Therefore, in the male-dominated Canadian mining industry, establishing allyship action plans — such as the described in the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies of British Columbia's Allyship Guideline (ACEC-BC, 2022) — may be especially effective. Additionally, male allyship support groups can also provide a safe place to practice inclusive behaviours (Wilson, Dance, Pei, Sanders, & Ulrich, 2021). Catalyst's Men Advocating Real Change (MARC) is an example of a male allyship support group to help men progress along their allyship journey. Furthermore, male allyship support groups can supplement skill deficits present in individual leaders, as House (1996) suggests, by allowing male leaders to engage with their peers to resolve inequities.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that Canadian mining organizations and their leaders are in a *kairotic* moment and need to respond accordingly to calls to advance EDI and shift workplace culture within the sector. If Canadian mining organizations fail to implement effective EDI strategies, they risk missing the substantial *kairotic* moment before them and falling behind other sectors. Similarly, if mining leaders fail to adopt allyship practices, they risk missing everyday *kairotic* windows of opportunity in which they can shift their workplace's culture. Responding to the *kairotic* moment involves understanding the situational contingency or context. In the context of the Canadian mining industry, the existing work culture within the sector was shaped by legislation to be predominately male-dominated and white. The Mining Association of Canada has responded to the *kairotic* moment caused by increasing social pressures and is developing an *Inclusive and Respectful Workplace Framework* to advance EDI (Karim, 2022; Mining Association of Canada, 2020). As a result, mining leaders are now being called, in part by employee and shareholder activists, to

advance EDI and transform mining culture which can attract and retain a diverse and representative workforce. Similar calls to advance EDI and transform cultures are being heard throughout many Canadian organizations. Leaders and employees need to seize the moment and be prepared to respond as allies in the many *kairotic* moments that occur in everyday workplace interactions. Leaders can set an example by adopting an allyship practice which fosters inclusion by incorporating an understanding of Path-Goal theory (Evans, 1970; House, 1971, 1996; House & Mitchell, 1997) and *kairos* as it applies to De Souza and Schmader (2022)'s distinctions of reactive and proactive allyship. Additionally, leaders can evaluate the competencies and motivations of their employees to adopt inclusive behaviours using an understanding of developmental levels (Blanchard et al., 1985) and support advancement using allyship action plans. Through creating a personalized allyship action plan leaders and employees can develop inclusive skills and behaviours to best prepare them for the everyday *kairotic* moments required of allies. By acting as allies for all employees, leaders will be aligned with their organization's EDI strategies (logos), can act in alignment with employees' values and needs (pathos), and maintain their credibility (ethos) as agents for change.

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## ENDNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> Note, that ethnicity and immigration elements in Figure 1 are not meant to add to 100% because some individuals may identify as more than one category.

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