

INTREPID PATHWAYS—FLEUR MULLER

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Formal qualifications

Bachelor of Science (Honours), majoring in Geology from University of Western Australia.

Current professional role & responsibilities

Director of my own consultancy company, Geostat Services Pty Ltd.

Current employer - type

Provision of resource modelling consultancy services to the mining industry.



Overview of career in the industry

I have spent over fifteen years working in geology, eleven of which been in resource consulting. After graduating from the University of Western Australia in 1991, I worked in both exploration and mining at several gold mines in Western Australia, specialising in database management and computer geology applications at sites including Marvel Loch, Tuckabianna, Bannockburn, Norseman and Kanowna Belle. In 1996, I joined Snowden as a Resource Analyst, specialising in statistical and geostatistical analysis, geological modelling and resource estimation, feasibility and reconciliation studies for various commodities. In 1999, I founded my own company, Geostat Services Pty Ltd, and have consulted with a broad range of clients. My computer experience includes Surpac, Gemcom, Isatis and Access.

EXPERIENCES WORKING IN THE RESOURCES SECTOR

Was working in the resources industry what you expected it would be when you were studying/training?

No, not at all! My university experience was very theoretical, with lots of microscope work. Upon graduation, it was all fieldwork and I never saw a microscope again... (which is not a bad thing in itself!)

If at any time you left the industry and came back, why did you leave, how long were you gone for and what motivated you to return?

The only time I left the industry was for 8 weeks after the birth of my first child. I returned to work as it was my own company and I had requests from mining companies for my resource modelling services.

What is the single most risky step you have ever taken your career? Did you find it paid off? Is there anything you would have done differently?

The biggest risk was going out on my own and becoming responsible for my own income. It paid off, as it gave me my freedom to plan my family and work around my children. I wouldn't have done it any differently!

What would you say have been the most significant 'step changes' in your career pathway, and how have you adapted to these?

The first one was moving from a grade control role in a Kalgoorlie-based mining company to a consultant position in Perth. This was a steep learning curve as I knew nothing about geostatistics and had to learn it all very quickly on the job.

The second step change was going out on my own and earning my income directly, leaving a paid salary position. I learnt a lot about managing a business, surviving the pitfalls and maintaining the business growth.

Have you ever been in a supervisory or senior management position? If so, what are the pros and cons of being in such a role?

Yes, I am the sole director of my own consultancy company. The pros of this role are that I can determine what work to take on, and timing of this work. I can also work to fit in around my children's needs. Cons of this role include not being able to take long periods of annual leave, and the responsibility of obtaining further work and marketing to clients.

If you undertook any additional formal study whilst in the industry, did you find it useful in progressing your career?

I have completed several short courses in mining software, for use in my consulting business. They have proved very useful and ultimately made myself more marketable to mining companies.

What have you found most rewarding about the industry and what would you most like to get out of your career in resources in the future?

I find my current role very rewarding in delivering a quality service to clients, and to receive their feedback upon receiving the results. I would like to continue the expansion of my knowledge base in geostatistics and to apply this knowledge in future work.

WORKING LIFESTYLE

What are your current work/accommodation arrangements?

Capital city based (with limited travel)

Do you have a preference for any particular working arrangement? What have your experiences with different types of arrangements been like?

I do prefer to be based in Perth, with limited travel to sites as necessary. Working in resource geology allows me to do this, as opposed to exploration and mining geology, where you would be required to work on site regularly.

I have previously done FIFO, as a young single graduate geologist for 18 months. It was a great experience, and suited me at the time. This FIFO arrangement enabled me to save up the deposit for my first house!

I have also lived in a regional mining community (Kalgoorlie) for three and a half years, again which I enjoyed and enabled me to experience the life of living in a regional city.

What changes or compromises have you had to make in order to balance family or other responsibilities or interests with a career in the industry? Have you found the right balance for you?

I ensure that my site trips away from my children are brief (maximum of four days) so that my children do not miss me too much. In my daughter's first year, she travelled six times with me to Darwin on site trips! Nowadays when I am required to make a site trip, I arrange with my nanny for her to work extra hours in looking after the children.

Achieving the right balance has been difficult at times, but I believe I have close to the right balance at this stage.

Has your employer been open to negotiating changes to your role or roster to accommodate non-work interests or responsibilities?

I work for myself, so can accommodate other responsibilities as necessary eg children's needs, appointments, etc.

BEING FEMALE IN THE INDUSTRY

What challenges have you experienced by virtue of working in an industry that is predominantly male? Do you feel you have had to adapt to 'fit' the industry?

I have had to speak up for myself and be more assertive to overcome the male bias in the industry. On the positive side, it has taught me a lot about my strengths and what I can achieve regardless of the situation at hand. I have found that some men don't like women in a position of influence, and have had to work around that while still delivering my services.

Do you feel that you faced any obstacles or discrimination by virtue of your gender in your career and if so, how did you address these issues in order to continue to progress?

It is perhaps not so much my gender, but more so my 'disability' of being profoundly deaf. I had one experience when one chief geologist refused to let me work in the pit as he thought I

wouldn't be able to cope with the trucks because of my deafness. When I met the pit superintendent, he asked me why I wasn't working in the pit, and upon hearing my explanation he went straight to the chief geologist and thereafter I was allowed to work in the pit!

I have had several other similar experiences, but found by talking to the right people, I usually overcame these obstacles.

On the other hand being deaf had its own advantages – I got out of doing night shift as people couldn't wake me up in the middle of the night to go to work in the pit!