



Stimulating work, high-calibre people, and money

AS a female under the age of 30, Trang Nguyen seems something of an anomaly in the male-dominated industry of geophysics.

However, the Perth-raised and now UK-based 28-year-old is not one bit perturbed.

"The industry, as a whole, is very respectful of women, and women are certainly treated as equals on all levels," she said.

"(From the point-of-view of others), it is probably more the astonishment associated with being such a young woman in a high-profile career, than it is about a male-dominated industry."

After toying with studying mathematics and engineering at university, Ms Nguyen settled on geophysics and completed a Bachelor of Science (Hons) degree in Geophysics at Curtin University in 2000.

She said geophysics' diversity prompted her to pursue it as a career, with elements of geology, geophysics, maths, physics and computing.

"My current role as a geophysicist – depending on the project – involves interpreting seismic data to develop an image of the earth's subsurface and then quite literally telling the engineers where to drill to find oil or gas," she said.

"Once the oil is found, I then create reservoir models with the geologists and engineers to predict oil production and assess various ways in which the oil/gas can be developed to surface."

After starting work for a small consultancy in West Perth, she decided to take her career further at ExxonMobil, in Melbourne, where she stayed for several years before moving back to family and friends in Perth and taking on a stint at Chevron.

Determined to pursue an international career, she moved to the UK early last year to work for Canadian-owned oil company Nexen.

Her global geophysical odyssey over the past few years has taken in the USA's Texas, Utah, Louisiana, Colorado and California, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, Paris, the French Alps, London, Aberdeen, Brisbane and Adelaide.

"It has provided me with education and appreciation of different cultures and countries," she said.

"The benefit of gaining knowledge about the world we live in speaks for itself."

And the world of geophysics has delivered other benefits: "Mentally stimulating work, meeting many high-calibre people and money," Ms Nguyen said.

"When oil prices are high (like now), this can be one of the highest paying industries around, probably second to banking."

But she is quick to point out there can be drawbacks.

"Sometimes it can be that work comes home with you, particularly if you are drilling whereby a drilling rig charge is at a rate of \$400,000 per day," she said.

"If you are required to make a decision at 2am Sunday morning then it is expected of you to be on call. If they wait til you come into the office at 8am Monday, then the extra standby time has potentially cost your company an extra \$500,000.

"The realisation that your decisions can amount to phenomenal amounts can make one feel very nervous at times."

Having been encouraged to pursue pharmacy as a high school student, Ms Nguyen has some sage advice for other young women considering a similar career.

"If science is your passion, then go for it and don't let anything stop for you," she said.

"The key for me was that I followed my heart and what felt right for me."

Emilia Vranjes