

A framework for change

Richard Roberts, [9-15 November 2009](#)



Gemcom's Brian Spence ...
Mining Process Framework
removing miners' technical
and operating systems chaos.

FORMER WMC and Woodside information systems manager Brian Spence will continue the formal unveiling of Gemcom's Mining Process Framework at a mining symposium in the Philippines this week. It is a campaign, he says, that could redefine Gemcom as a mining software supplier as much as it helps to sharpen customers' profit focus. Spence is heading to the Philippine Society of Mining Engineers Mining Symposium 2009 at Baguio to speak about the "Practical integration of people, process and technology through the mining value chain to improve profitability."

Only last month Gemcom 'AustralAsia' business unit vice-president Andrew Pyne travelled to Vancouver to present the company's board with an outline of the Mining Process Framework (MPF) initiative. "I think it's fair to say Brian is a bit of a thought leader in the company. We need more guys with

his experience who can provide these sorts of solutions to our clients globally. Our clients are really starting to see some value out of this here, and the other regions are well aware of that. There is certainly a change in direction in the way we're engaging with our clients globally and it's really just a matter now of recruiting the personnel that we need to be able to roll these things out," Pyne said.

"Our clients are very excited by this. We're going and talking to people who've been our clients for 20-plus years, and there's a lot of excitement about this."

'This' is not a new piece of software, or re-layering of existing products.

Spence, who has worked for 30 years in information systems and technology implementation in the resource sector, said Gemcom already had geoscientific information management, resource modelling, mine planning, scheduling and optimisation, and value-chain management software products in the market, obviously along with a number of other software vendors. None of these was a "silver bullet" designed to deliver mining value-realisation outcomes or solve business problems.

"We use the term framework because it's really combining a variety of elements," Spence said. "It's a holistic approach to introducing a business solution into an organisation."

"Traditionally mining companies select a software product and they install the CD but they find it's not a silver bullet. Invariably the system isn't used as effectively as it could be or it becomes disused over time: a new person joins the organisation and everything changes again.

"A lot of companies try to drive organisation change through strategy, KPIs, cost drivers ... which is fantastic, but they hit this implementation barrier where technical systems that must deliver the information to facilitate actions are broken. What we're doing in the context of the framework is we're putting all of the elements together that are required to actually achieve what is the real goal which is providing information with integrity.

"It's really the client's need to solve a business problem which drives us to effectively integrate the [software] products, and that's really where we're heading."

Spence, who has worked for Gemcom for three years, said MPF projects varied in size and complexity. They might, for example, help address a miner's grade control issues, or lay down comprehensive business process guidelines.

"We understand the business process, we also set up the systems that facilitate that process and document that in a procedural fashion, and we can also address the data management issues that our clients have, so we're really pulling all of those threads together," he said.

"I firmly believe that by keeping it simple and addressing the basics we will produce the most value. We don't have to gold plate this. We can come in and do some very practical things, and leave behind some very simple concepts behind data management, procedures and process that will add tremendous value."

Tier-one consulting firms such as Ernst & Young (with whom Spence previously worked) and KPMG "don't play at the level" Gemcom was focused on with MPF, while Pyne said other consulting firms had different modus operandi.

"One real differentiator between what we do and what the mining consultants do is we're there to basically hand over the ownership back to the client," he said.

"We do not want these clients to become reliant on our consultants. This is really about installing a process which is sustainable over a long period of time, and also through changes of employees.

"We're trying to remove some of the [technical and operational systems] chaos by standardising the process and that's a big chunk of engagement with the client – understanding what they're trying to achieve, what are the key issues they're dealing with, and getting the process right.

"But it's not about us wanting to provide them continuously with consulting services month after month after month. That's exactly the opposite of what we're trying to achieve."

Spence is heading an Australian-based team of consultants doing MPF work. According to Pyne, the group is set to expand "very quickly".

"In some respects this is an evolution for Gemcom – attaining another level of organisational maturity," Spence said. "We've been doing a lot of these things for individual clients, it's just we haven't actually strung it all together and that's what we're doing now."

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