

Women in IP Leadership

Celebrating achievements and continuing
the empowerment of women



This segment is dedicated to women working in the IP industry, providing a platform to share real accounts from rising women around the globe. In these interviews we will be discussing experiences, celebrating milestones and achievements, and putting forward ideas for advancing equality and diversity.

By providing a platform to share personal experiences we aim to continue the empowerment of women in the world of IP.



If you would like the opportunity to share your experiences with *Women in IP Leadership*, would like to nominate an individual to be involved, or would like to learn more about sponsorship, please contact our Editor.

Zixuan Wang: Partner at Kommit

An interview: inspirations, experiences, and ideas for equality.

Zixuan studied mechanical engineering from Imperial College London. She began her career in the insurance industry before moving from the UK to India in 2020 to set up her firm, Kommit Techno-Legal LLP. Her firm specializes in technical consulting for patent litigations.

What inspired your career?

I was inspired to work in intellectual property as I felt it was an industry that is a perfect blend between utilizing my technical skills as well as my love for connecting with new people. The intellectual property industry, and in particular patents, requires collaborative working amongst individuals from different disciplines, from engineers and scientists to accountants and lawyers. Patents especially compel me because of the many different vertices of thinking you have to apply – from filing to monetization through licensing or litigation.

Several factors in my professional career directed me towards starting my own firm. Prior to starting Kommit, I had the opportunity to work in a variety of industries varying from engineering, technology, private equity, insurance and even hospitality. One thing I have always been cognizant of is my ability to make an impact, no matter how small or big. There were several threads of thinking that led me here after experiencing the working culture in different industries and company structures. One was that, in smaller firms, I was able to make a large impact. The second is that in larger corporate firms, you may be doing great work, but the speed of innovation or ability to bring about change is long. A combination of these two learnings inspired me to set up my own firm as I felt this would be the most effective way to feel the impact I have created and in the way I want.

How have you found the pathway to your current position? And can you offer advice from your experience?

I graduated from Imperial College university in 2019 as a mechanical engineer. When I started my degree, my focus was on becoming a

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mechanical engineer and my aspirations back then were to eventually work in the automotive industry. During my time at Imperial, I had the opportunity to be exposed to a wide variety of industries and potential careers. I realised that I wanted to explore other career options. I took on several internships between startup firms and a venture capital firm (RLC Ventures) as well as joining Imperial's mechanical engineering society where I had the opportunity to lead a team and manage industry sponsorships, and social events.

I had a few key learnings from these experiences. One was that I really love interacting and connecting with people. The second is that my interest lies in the business aspects of working,



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and that I find technology-focused industries the most fascinating. The roles I took on were predominantly in the operations and sales roles which really allowed me to maximize my opportunities to connect with new people. I also loved the excitement of the startup ecosystem and the passion that was ingrained within individuals who worked at startups, working together towards creating something new. Seeing how hard and passionate those around me were for their business, it really made me think “well, I would rather be this passionate about my own dream instead of someone else's”. At that point, I knew I wanted to start something myself, but I didn't expect that I would do it so soon and immediately after my first job. I had also joined RLC Ventures as an investment analyst over one summer and was able to see the other side of the startup industry, which really gave me key insights into the how similarly or differently the interests of VCs lined up with the startups they invested in, and further consolidated my thinking that starting my own businesses would be fulfilling and would enable me to make a greater impact.

After graduating university, I worked at Willis Towers Watson (WTW), one of the largest insurance brokerages in the world. I worked in their sales team for their financial, executive, and professional risk areas. WTW was a fantastic place to work at. I had an extremely steep learning curve due to the variety of work and the stimulating challenges that came with it. Before graduating university, I was only applying for consulting and banking roles. I had applied for WTW really on a whim. It was at my interviews when I had the opportunity to meet individuals who worked at WTW and I immediately knew that it would be an environment that I would enjoy working in. I was so lucky to have two amazing managers who taught me so much both about the industry as well as for my general personal development.

I can't explain the exact moment I decided to leave but the one main influence was that I felt that in a firm of nearly 50,000 employees, in order to either make significant impact or innovate, one would have to be in a decision-making role (which would likely take a substantive time). In early 2020, my now business partners Karmanya, Sahib and I jumped on a Zoom call and discussed what business we would start. Intellectual property was a natural choice as all three of us were engineers with one of my business partners also being a lawyer. They had both worked with patents previously. I knew it would be a good fit as it would allow me to combine both my technical knowledge as well as connect with people. I currently head up Kommit's business development but working for yourself requires

you to wear many hats outside of your main role.

One key learning was from my manager, Rohin Odell, who is an associate director at WTW. He would always ask me whenever I had completed any tasks “what question do you think I will ask you next?” This really enforced the practice of self-checking as well as understanding the purpose of each task. This one question has been invaluable to me now that I am responsible for decision-making as often there isn't someone to double check the output of my work. This has been the key singular skill that has carved my thought-process and my approach to the way I do things now.

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What challenges have you faced? And how have you overcome them?

There have been three major challenges: joining the legal industry as a non-lawyer, starting our business in the pandemic, and understanding the cultural differences in India.

The legal and intellectual property industry was not an industry that I had previously worked in, although my business partners had. Part of the challenge was catching up to their knowledge level as well as speaking the language of lawyers. In my role as a business development professional, much of my time is spent speaking with lawyers. Lawyers are extremely savvy individuals who are meticulous in the words they use and have great clarity of speech and writing. Understanding both, their thinking behind their words as well as deriving their true meaning, were two challenges. Initially, this involved simply increasing my vocabulary but the second part is being comfortable to articulate these words in my everyday speech. As an engineer, we're taught to be explicit in our meaning while lawyers are cautious with their words to carefully mitigate risk and liability.

Starting a business in the pandemic had both its advantages and challenges. A week into starting our business, we had to work remotely due to government imposed lockdowns. At that time, I had only been in the country for two weeks and met one of my business partners for the same length of time. The pain points were working out how the three of us were going to work together, how we were going to refine our individual responsibilities and how to succeed in our business. The pandemic came with many advantages too. As a result of remote working, we were able to attend virtual networking events and conferences which gave us the opportunity to connect with a wider variety of intellectual property professionals than we could have in person. It also helped us open our

business for international clientele.

There have also been several cultural challenges which I have faced in expanding our business. In particular when it comes to hiring, I've noticed that awareness about intellectual property is still low especially amongst engineers and scientists. As my firm's focus is technical consulting for patents, we primarily hire technical individuals. The dilemma is that very few of such individuals go into the patents industry (it's not that there isn't interest, but that the industry is just relatively unknown as a viable career option even for STEM individuals). There are many lawyers in the intellectual property industry, but typically they do not have the technical expertise required for the specific work we do. So when it comes to hiring, we frequently have to hire based on potential rather than experience. While in other jurisdictions where IP is a better advertised career option, experience would be the factor for hiring a candidate. This makes team growth and scalability extremely challenging.

What would you consider to be your greatest achievement in your career so far?

Professionally, running a successful business and carving out our own place in the patent consulting and litigation finance spaces is definitely the greatest achievement of my career so far. But being able to tangibly see the impact my team and I are making, not only for our clients but for each other and our colleagues, is a feeling that is truly rewarding.

What are your future career aspirations? And how will you work to achieve them?

One career aspiration I have is that I'd like to inspire more individuals to consider a career in IP. One misconception about the IP industry is that you have to be a lawyer or an engineer. In fact, there are many roles that require neither of these. For example, there are plenty of tech firms building IP products, that are mostly made up of software developers, marketing, sales individuals and client relationship managers. Along the way, I'd like to create a positive change around me. I believe that creating true impact on even a small handful of individuals has a snowball effect and has the power to influence hundreds if not thousands more.

For Kommit, I'd like to see us grow in scale in the coming years and become a larger player in the Indian market. Most of the work we currently do is in nations where the IP industry is more mature, such as the US and Europe, due to the high volumes of both innovation and patent litigation. As India continues to grow in terms of research, innovation and enforcement of IP rights, we'd like to be part of leading that growth.

What changes would you like to see in the IP industry regarding equality and diversity in the next five years?

One thing I do believe in is the equality of opportunity which I think plays a large role diversifying the different types of people in the IP industry. I think the IP industry does a great job of providing equality of opportunity. In fact I think, more often than not, it is self-hindrance of those communities rather than the availability of opportunity that stifles growth. As an ethnically Chinese person, I was taught when growing up that the acceptable career opportunities are jobs which are financially stable. This mentality stems from minority groups who have possibly immigrated and you are taught that your career goal should be about surviving rather than thriving. Growing up, I never knew that the legal industry was an option for me because I didn't know what opportunities were there and neither did I know a single lawyer or professional working in the industry. If I did know about the industry, the question would have been "well, where would I start?".

Luckily, the internet has allowed better access to information about industries like the legal and IP. One thing I have noticed is how little engineers and scientists are aware about IP as a career. Many engineers and scientists will know of IP but it's not ingrained into the teaching. Innovation thrives on creativity but I'd really like to see IP taught in more detail around how to protect your creative works and how IP is a viable career option for people from different backgrounds. I think this will both diversify the types of individuals and skill sets in the IP industry as well as diversity of backgrounds and thinking styles.

How do you think the empowerment of women can be continued and expanded in the IP sector?

Empowerment is derived from competence, but part of this is also about working in a role that fits an individual's strengths and skills. Some of the efforts in promotion of equality and diversity have had an adverse effect because it can put individuals in rigid boxes because certain roles are viewed as "more successful" than others. For example, in the IP industry, if you're a litigator, you're likely to be considered an A type individual. In contrast, it makes those who perhaps work in sales, academia or prosecution in IP seem "softer". To truly empower women, it is important to promote equal access to opportunities without influencing choices and ensuring that the definition of success is whatever success means to the individual instead of an onlooker's definition of success.

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Maria Zamkova: CEO, Partner and Head of Patent & Design Department at Fenix Legal

An interview: inspirations, experiences, and ideas for equality.

Maria Zamkova is CEO, partner and Head of Patent & Design Department at Fenix Legal. She has a Master of Industrial Design, and has education in law, management, marketing and business economy from the University of Stockholm. Maria is a patent attorney and authorised European trademark and design attorney (EUIPO). Before joining Fenix Legal, she had experience from both global industry and other private practice IP firms. She is especially focused on patent prosecution, freedom-to-operate and IP due diligence (IPDD), and has led a number of IPDD projects involving both national and international client's business development in the Scandinavian market.

What inspired your career?

What inspires me daily is to see ideas develop into new technology that creates solutions globally and new jobs. In other words: To help both individual inventors and global companies to get protection for their intellectual property assets, and follow them through both the technical development and the business development, with their patents as the necessary basis for everything. I have the privilege of working internationally with something that has been of great interest throughout my life, together with a team who feel the same way.

What has also inspired me are a couple of the managers that I have had the privilege of meeting and working with early in my career, people that had the same view of technical solutions and business as I, with new productive ideas.

Further, I want to mention the female General Directors of the Swedish Patent and Registration Office (PRV), Gun Hellsvik (2001-2007) and Susanne Ås Sivborg (2008-2017), that during their mandate periods made a fantastic work in order to streamline the internal work, arranging open policy meetings with all Swedish IP attorneys where we could exchange our pros and cons in order to make our mutual daily work more



efficient, activating politicians in their budget and legislative decisions, as well as educating the Swedish industry of the importance to protect their IP rights.

How have you found the pathway to your current position? And can you offer advice from your experience?

A lot of work, creativity, seeing the possibilities and being decisive. Always being in the frontline with new ideas is necessary to grow positively, not only in your career, but also personally. And do not forget to inspire people with a bit of humour and positive examples. I have never been afraid to take the next steps in my working positions, and to learn new things.

My advice to women is: it is clearly important to actively show that you can contribute to both the company's and clients' development.

What challenges have you faced? And how have you overcome them?

Working with intellectual property is a positive challenge *per se*, as you need to keep updated on all new legislation, practice, and new technical development – independently of the technical or geographical area. I love these challenges and the opportunity to find new creative solutions for my clients.

One example is when you assist an SME that has limited budget but good ideas. You need to find a way to give the client the best combined protection in a cost-efficient way, in order to form a base for their business to expand. You need to educate both inventors and business leaders of the importance of good protection.

My general advice, independent of which kind of contact you have at the other side of the table is: Never take a "no" or "perhaps" in a negative way, see it is a new positive possibility to create an alternative solution.

What would you consider to be your greatest achievement in your career so far?

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company I have built, Fenix Legal, that has become well-known world-wide and offers full IP service based on our excellent staff consisting of patent and trademark attorneys, patent engineers, lawyers, business consultants and branding experts. I am proud each time a new global business or individual client, international organization or government contacts our specialists in order to get new protection, advice, creating IP policies, or feedback on legislation.

What are your future career aspirations? And how will you work to achieve them?

My aspirations are to meet all these new chances in IP which are now coming every day, consistently, and to adjust the business with even better result, as well as to meet all these new challengers. For that, I need to – and look forward to – be continuously updated and in line with all the new possibilities and services in our intellectual property business.

What changes would you like to see in the IP industry regarding equality and diversity in the next five years?

It is important to continue to encourage more women to take the leading positions in the IP industry.

It is well-known during history that innovative minds are equally presented independent of gender, nationality or age. In order to inspire women in IP, as well as to educate legislators and politicians, I strongly recommend and invite you to come to Stockholm, Sweden and there visit the Nobel Prize Museum in Old Town.

There, you can see good examples from the 59 Nobel Prize Awards to women from all over the world (whereof Marie Curie, Poland/France, has been honored twice: in physics 1903 and in chemistry 1911).

Some of the other female Nobel Prize laureates are:

- Rosalyn Yalow (USA), Physiology or Medicine 1977, "for the development of radioimmunoassays of peptide hormones."
- Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin (born in Egypt, Affiliation at the time of the award: University of Oxford, United Kingdom), Chemistry 1964, "for her determinations by X-ray techniques of the structures of important biochemical substances"
- Andrea Ghez (USA), Physics 2020, "for the discovery of a supermassive compact object at the centre of our galaxy."
- May-Britt Moser (Norway), Physiology or Medicine 2014, "for the discovery of cells that constitute a positioning system in the brain."

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- Donne Strickland (Canada), Physics 2018, "for the method of generating high-intensity, ultra-short optical pulses."
- Barbara McClintock (USA), Physiology or Medicine 1983, "for her discovery of mobile genetic elements"
- Emmanuelle Charpentier (born in France, Affiliation at the time of the award: Max Planck Unit for the Science of Pathogens, Germany), Chemistry 2020, "for the development of a method for genome editing."
- Frances H. Arnold (USA), Chemistry 2018, "for the directed evolution of enzymes."
- Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard (Germany), Physiology or Medicine 1995, "for the discovery concerning the genetic control of early embryonic development."
- Rita Levi-Montalcini (Italy), Physiology or Medicine 1986, "for the discovery of growth factors."
- Françoise Barré-Sinoussi (France), Physiology or Medicine 2008, "for the discovery of human immunodeficiency virus."
- Elizabeth H. Blackburn (born in Australia, Affiliation at the time of the award: University of California, USA) and Carol W. Greider (USA), Physiology or Medicine 2009, "for the discovery of how chromosomes are protected by telomeres and the enzyme telomerase."
- Tu Youyou (China), Physiology or Medicine 2015, "for her discoveries concerning a novel therapy against Malaria."

To summarize: there are creative women all around the world, we just need to get our voice heard and be duly recognized as important inventors, policy makers, business developers and leaders.

How do you think the empowerment of women can be continued and expanded in the IP sector?

It is an unavoidable process, and we can already today see lots of steps in the right direction. Women have to take the opportunity and not be shy but acknowledge their inventive qualities and convey these to decision makers. But, it is also a question of a generational change: the younger generation does not have the same limitations, and judges people on the basis of their individual knowledge and abilities, talent and performance rather than on the basis of gender, nationality or physical characteristics. The future is gender neutral and inventive.