



KPMG Law professionals' perspectives on innovation and technology for gender equality

Featuring Hanim Hamzah, Asia-Pacific Regional Leader of Legal Services, based out of KPMG in Singapore, Angelina Lagana, National and ASPAC Leader, Tax Dispute Resolution & Controversy, KPMG Law, KPMG in Australia, and Yuen Wei Cheong, Partner on the Technology, Media, and Telecommunications, KPMG Law, KPMG in Malaysia.

Announcer:

Hello and welcome to another episode in our podcast series for Tax and Legal leaders. In a special new series, we bring you perspectives on innovation and technology as it relates to gender equality within specific business functions across KPMG.

In today's episode, and to lead the legal discussion, I'm pleased to hand the mic over to Hanim Hamzah, Asia-Pacific Regional Leader of Legal Services based out of KPMG in Singapore.

Without further ado, Hanim, over to you.

Hanim Hamzah:

Thanks for listening in. I am joined today by Angelina Lagan, my dear colleague from Asia Pacific. She is also a KPMG law partner in Australia, the National and ASPAC leader for Tax Dispute Resolution and Controversy in KPMG Law. And you're also hearing the voice of Yuen Wei Cheong, who is a partner in KPMG Malaysia's TMT practice.

I am Hanim from Asia Pacific KPMG Law, and today will be going to discuss with you our experience as KPMG women leaders, legal transformation, technology and innovation.

So let's kick off with a fun question, shall we Yuen Wei? As a child what and when was your first exposure or introduction to technology?

Yuen Wei Cheong:

Well, this was actually my parents mobile phone. So think Wall Street with Michael Douglas – it's a black rectangle, a green screen of barely large enough to read messages on the little stump of an antenna, which might be a little bit difficult to imagine nowadays.

Hanim Hamzah:

That's really showing my age and I think in my time, we didn't even have a mobile phone yet. It was just like big green, black screen with green font. So yeah.

Angelina turning to you, as a child what did you want to be when you grew up?

Angelina Lagana:

It's really quite boring, actually. I've always been better with words, the numbers. So I wanted to be a journalist or a lawyer, but never did I think about the impact that technology would have in the work that we do now as a lawyer.

Hanim Hamzah:

Oh my gosh, that's quite similar. As a child, I wanted to be a lawyer too.

So Yuen Wei back to you, in a word or two what do your loved ones think about your current specialization in legal technology? Tell us a bit about the kind of work you do.

Yuen Wei Cheong:

Okay. It's going to be three words. So my family and friends are broadly supportive, which is great because they don't really understand the specificities of the work that I do. Broadly speaking, I'm a partner in the TMT practice, which stands for Technology, Media and Telecommunications in KPMG Law, Malaysia. I advise my clients on technical and regulatory issues in three verticals basically telecommunications, fintech and e-commerce.

I have a very varied clientele. We are looking at everything from start-ups, to mid-tier technology companies, to members of big tech. And finally I also assist corporate teams of the regulatory aspects of their transactions which can be quite a varied experiences.

Hanim Hamzah:

Was there a certain person or circumstance that made you want to get into legal technology? TMT is a specialized area of practice.

Yuen Wei Cheong:

I've always had an interest in technology from a young age, probably from my obsession with video games and pressing a lot of buttons on a console.

Hanim Hamzah:

Angelina, can you tell me about your current role leading the ASPCA Tax Dispute Resolution and Controversy Practice?

Angelina Lagana:

So in addition to specializing in tax dispute resolution and controversy, I am also on the KPMG Australia Diversity and Inclusion Board. And that is something that I am incredibly, incredibly passionate about. Day to day I advise large corporates, multinationals and high wealth individuals in the management of their tax issues from ATO, risk reviews, audits, objections right through to litigation in the Federal Court of Australia or the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

But what I'm most passionate about beyond tax, of course, is encouraging our people to bring their true self to KPMG and ensuring that our people offer a diversity of viewpoints and ideas.

This means that, of course gender diversity is critical, but I think we have come a long way in respect to gender diversity. And now what we're focused on here in Australia is cultural diversity.

Hanim Hamzah

That sounds really fantastic Angelina, How is the use of technology influencing your area of practice?

Angelina Lagana:

Technology is it's part of everything that we do. We need to use technology in the way that we draft advice, the way that we communicate with each other, the way that we manage litigation or ATO audits and large volumes of documentation. And of course the way that we research. So it's absolutely critical that we continue to use technology to ensure that we are more efficient and that we're dynamic in the way that we deliver legal services.

Hanim Hamzah:

Brilliant. Growing inequalities are becoming increasingly evident in digital skills and access to technologies, with women being left behind as a result of the digital gender divide. What can a company's legal function do to make a career in digital more accessible to all Yuen Wei?

Yuen Wei Cheong:

I think it's just something as simple as flexible working hours and working from home, especially since we now have the technology, and more importantly, the internet connectivity and internet speeds to support this. I have friends who are working mums and their ability to now work from home and have a flexible schedule has given them options to continue their career when maybe even just a few short years ago they might have to take a career break to care for their kids.

And since we now have technology to bridge this, I feel that working mums should not be left behind. So I think it's a great first step to make a career in digital accessible to everyone.

Hanim Hamzah:

That's great. Angelina, can I get your thoughts on the same question? What can a company's legal function do to make a career in digital more accessible to all?

Angelina Lagana:

Sure, look from my perspective, I think having and embedding quotas and targets are really important, and this will ensure that we hire with gender balance in mind. Then in order to attract and retain that diverse talent, we need to ensure we genuinely have authentic role models for everyone to look up to.

Hanim Hamzah:

Well, globally here at KPMG, the goal is for women to hold 33% of leadership roles at the partner and director level by 2025, helping to drive a commitment to advancing gender equality across member firms. What impact Angelina do you see this making in the world of legal and specifically within tax technology?

Angelina Lagana:

The impact is really quite simple. There's absolutely no doubt that diverse thinking achieves better outcomes. It's better outcomes for us, KPMG and for our clients. So it's clearly a win win for all if we get it right.

Hanim Hamzah:

Totally agree on that, thanks. Moving to you Yuen Wei, Catalyst, a nonprofit organization with a mission of accelerating progress for women through workplace inclusion, found that men continue to dominate the science, technology, engineering and math STEM workforce globally, especially at the highest levels. As a leader within this space, what do you think can be done to help in achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women in the digital age?

Yuen Wei Cheong:

Again, I think it's the small things. We should start with awareness and education, leading by example and demonstrating that women in the workforce today are equal to men. So what we need to do is to open the doors. We need to provide women have the option to choose. And

once they know that these options are there, I'm sure that we can come a long way with them, gender equality and empowering women.

Hanim Hamzah:

At the core of our KPMG values and vital to our purpose is KPMG's commitment to gender equality. What actions Yuen Wei will you take to help push forward this commitment?

Yuen Wei Cheong:

In following from my previous response, I think it's the little things that's quite important. We're looking at fireside chats, one to one coffee breaks with trainee associates and young associates entering the TMT sector. For myself, just to show that not all of us are Voldemort (?), for example, it's accessible, it's easy to chat with each other and we can do this one person at a time.

Hanim Hamzah:

Thanks for your insights, Yuen Wei. How about you Angelina?.

Angelina Lagana:

So, look, I think there's probably three key actions that I firmly believe will make a change. Firstly, it's the importance of allies. As a leader in the firm, I know that I am lucky enough to have a position of privilege and a voice that is heard. Therefore, it's important for me and other leaders in the firm to be allies so that we can be the voice for those who are under-represented.

Secondly, a really simple way to contribute to a positive, inclusive workplace is thinking about who is in the room in your next meeting, and then asking yourself whose perspective might be missing because subconscious bias does have a role to play. And finally, we must work towards our gender and cultural diversity targets, and we should call it out if we think there is more that we can and should be doing in this space. We have come a long way, but there is still a lot more to do.

Hanim Hamzah:

Thanks, Angelina. To finish off this episode, what single piece of advice would you give the next generation of female leaders?

I'll go to Yuen Wei first and then, and then to Angelina.

Yuen Wei Cheong:

I think my response would be quite TMT specific given my practice. I think it's quite key to always ask questions. So the work I've done in the TMT sector is very technical and the advice we provide to clients hinges on a complete understanding of the client's product offering and systems. And surprisingly, I know it might seem a bit strange to junior lawyers, but clients are very understanding of any questions we ask them due to the nature of the advice we provide and we should not feel embarrassed to ask questions just because we are expected to lead on these matters. Absolute clarity I think is quite possible.

Hanim Hamzah

So in one piece from you, Angelina?

Angelina Lagana

So be curious. Step out of your comfort zone and don't feel like you need to fit in and most importantly, be true to yourself. Stick with your core values and make sure your voice is heard. It's probably more than just one piece of advice.

Hanim Hamzah

Well, thank you, ladies, for your insightful discussion. I really appreciate you taking the time to chat with me for this special episode.

Announcer

Thanks Hanim and a big thank you to all who participated in today's episode. We hope you'll join us again next time. And please email us with any questions you have about today's episode at tax@kpmg.com.

We'd also love to hear from you with any suggestions you have for future episodes. Thanks for listening.

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