

MyPeople **MEETS**

Namrata Sarmah

**FT Top 100 Most Influential Leaders
in UK Tech**



START-UP ADVISOR | BOARD MEMBER | SPEAKER | MENTOR

Namrata is a strategic and delivery-focused Digital Product Leader, with over 12 years experience across the UK, USA and India in both technology and digital product management. She possesses a sharp business insight and is on a mission to help fellow professionals in their career journey.

CAUSES I CARE ABOUT: WOMEN IN TECH, DIVERSITY IN BOARDS, BAME LEADERSHIP & WORKING MOTHERS

PERSISTENT, ASSERTIVE, BOLD, YET APPROACHABLE... THAT'S PROBABLY THE BEST WAY TO DESCRIBE ME.



As well as being one of the FT Top 100 Most Influential Leaders in UK Tech, Namrata operates a Facebook group called 'The Career Mums Club', a network of 1500 career mums in London, who juggle high-powered jobs with demanding family needs. The group is focused on supporting mums strike the perfect balance, during times when they can often feel quite lonely.

Tell us a bit about who you are and what you do...

My name is Namrata Sarmah, and I work as a Senior Product Director in London. I have been working in Product & Tech for last 12 years and had the opportunity to work in multiple sectors like IT, FMCG, Telecom, Healthcare, Media Production, Beauty & Broadcast. I have worked in both large companies and start-ups in all these years. My speciality lies in building consumer-facing products.

I am a strong advocate of Diversity & Inclusion at the workplace, and the founder of two popular networking groups – The Career Mums Club and The BAME Leaders Network.

I live in North London with my husband and our 2-year-old son.

What are you passions?

Oh! So many things. To start with, I am passionate about building digital products that can 'wow' the user, and products that can solve genuine problems or add value to the overall user experience. I truly believe that technology is the greatest enabler and driver of major changes to business models, and the way traditional businesses are run. I am fascinated by young businesses, as the level of passion and drive are probably the highest when a business is new and is on a growth trajectory. I am fortunate that I get to advise young businesses and founders through my association with Virgin Start-up and Antler.

I am also passionate about helping the society and wider community through my

work. I am a Trustee/NED at the Middlesex Learning Trust; it is a multi-academy trust that comprises of two outstanding secondary schools in North London.

You've accomplished many academic credentials over the years, at some of the top educational institutions in the World. Does your love of academia and continuous learning drive you to improve and adapt your leadership practices?

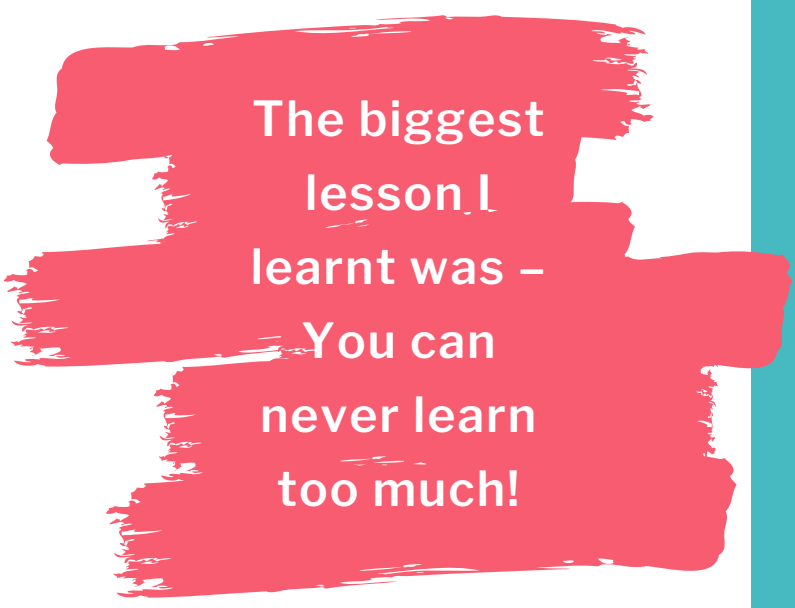
Yes, absolutely! I love academia, learning is very sacred to me. I don't think learning ever ends and it shouldn't. I have been extremely fortunate for the great opportunities I've had and exposure to learning during my lifetime. My parents have a huge role to play in this and I am very grateful.

Leadership is very important. And let me tell you – leadership has nothing to do with management. Leadership starts when you're a child and evolves as you grow older. My leadership style has definitely evolved over the years. I have always been a democratic leader, I believe in empowering people around me to bring out the best in them and encourage free thinking, creativity, and innovation. In today's testing times, authentic leadership is most needed than ever.

After returning to education later on in your career, to complete the Executive Programmes at University of Cambridge and very recently at Harvard Business School, what did you find most rewarding and what was the biggest lesson you learnt? Great Question! Going back to the classroom is always a great feeling. I love the University environment; it is so positive and energising.

The most rewarding element is definitely the people, networks and the friendships. Then of course the learnings, discussions, debates and the toolkit. It's absolutely priceless! Such experiences allow you to take a step back from the daily work routine and focus more on the strategic priorities and forward planning. It also opens up your mind, as you get to mingle with different people who

might have different perspectives and opinions about things.



**The biggest
lesson I
learnt was –
You can
never learn
too much!**

How did your career trajectory ascend you from being a software engineer in Bangalore (India) to being named in the FT Top 100 Most Influential Leaders in UK Tech? Lots of hard work, career planning and the hunger to learn and do more.

I have experimented with my career a lot and pivoted whenever I needed to. I've always believed that the greatest opportunities lie in places least expected. Also, there are absolutely no shortcuts, if you want to achieve something that is valuable and sustainable. Optimism and courage are equally important as there's bound to be roadblocks.

I strongly believe in continuous learning. Learn new technologies, new subjects and new ways of doing things. Technology is continuously evolving and is extremely fast paced, so keeping up with it is essential. My focus has always been to do good work and learn with every new assignment. I never wanted to be pigeonholed to one sector or one technology. Working with different sectors and different types of companies has been a planned move. I like to challenge myself often, and never get too comfortable with anything. Also, I've worked with some



amazing colleagues and managers throughout my career, as well as some great mentors. I don't think any of our achievements are just our own; it is always a team effort.

And humility, lots of humility! It keeps you grounded.

What advice would you give to BAME professionals who are interested in enhancing their capabilities and leadership opportunities? There's a common proverb - "You have to work twice as hard to get half as far."

This proverb is very powerful and very true. For anyone who is a minority you have to work extra hard, there is no other alternative. As a woman in tech, BAME, and coming from a foreign country, I am a minority in all possible ways. But that is not necessarily bad. You can make it work in your favour provided you know your key

strengths and how you can use those strengths to help businesses & communities to drive value. You need to have a strong elevator pitch and you need to understand what you bring to the table.

I strongly believe that there are loads of opportunities in this world, and these opportunities are open to all. The only thing that can stop you is yourself. So, my advice would be to keep your eyes and ears open and grab those opportunities before they're gone.

From working with large, mid-sized and start-up companies in a variety of sectors, what would you say were the most common challenges organisations are facing today? It's very interesting when you

look at companies who are in different stages of their organisational journeys - small, medium-sized, or large, and also companies who operate in a number of disparate sectors. I personally found it really fascinating. The learning is tremendous when you have such a diverse experience. Each company or sector is unique in its own way, but the top 3 challenges that most organisations are facing today are:

1. Adoption of modern technologies to stay competitive in an ever-changing business environment.
2. Agility to change and re-invent business models and create sustainable value.
3. Management & development of young workforce (Generation Z); keeping them motivated and engaged.

With so many different career activities, how do you maintain a healthy work-life balance? As a family we believe in work-life integration rather than a balance. My husband and I are both very committed to our careers, but we are also very hands-on parents. So, integration of work and life activities is the only option.

I also strongly believe in prioritisation of

tasks, be it personal or professional. I multi-task a lot. Having a hobby or two helps, for me it's books.

How do you handle stressful and pressurised situations in the workplace?

This is something that improves with experience, I try my best to stay calm and focus on the positives. Negative situations can truly test one's leadership skills. However, I also believe that something good comes out of every bad or difficult experience. I try to focus on the solution rather than the problem and I use music to de-stress.

What does High-Performance Culture mean for you? This is quite personal as the definition may be different for different people. For me, High-Performance culture means the following:

- A team that is focused on 'outcome' and not outputs.
- A corporate culture based on trust and goodwill.
- A team that pushes boundaries, challenges the status-quo, and dares to reinvent the wheel whenever possible, i.e. a culture of innovation.
- Strong team-bonding, camaraderie, and care for each other, especially in times of adversity.
- Most importantly, a team that is made up of authentic leaders – not bosses.

Which developing technology do you think will transform the future of media?

Immersive technologies will have a huge role to play as the technology matures and becomes more commonplace. Especially, Augmented Reality (AR) will help in making content more interesting and viral.

These types of emerging technologies will not be adopted overnight, it will take time but has a big potential to disrupt the market. In kids media and digital learning, AR can make a lasting contribution.



If you had an extra hour of time each day, how would you use it? Every minute of that hour would be for my son. I love playing with him, he spreads so much joy!

Do you have a lifetime dream that you're still to achieve? So many! I want to build products that solve global problems. I also want to do more in terms of serving the society and communities. Several interesting ideas are brimming in my mind at the moment, I hope I can bring them to life.

Which leadership book would you recommend to others? I have read plenty of leadership books in the last few years, but my top favourites are:

1. Discover Your True North by Bill George
2. The Ride of a Lifetime by Bob Iger

Which people do you think have had the greatest influence on your life? My Dad & my Grandfather – they taught me to dream big, to be fearless and to care.

GET IN TOUCH TO LET US KNOW
YOUR THOUGHTS ON

HIGH PERFORMANCE CULTURE!

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