

Dear Raj, Constance et al.,

Thanks for the interesting meeting last week, and sorry I had to depart early (to welcome/host Prof Lucie Lamarche for her talk on her new co-edited volume “Women’s Rights to Social Security and Social Protection” [Hart, 2014]).

I just wanted to emphasise the importance of some focus on the positive value of diversity and linking this (with evidence) to good practice to change the culture across the legal community. I would also suggest it would be strategically sensible to link arms with other generally excluded or disadvantaged communities and work towards system change; I do fear there is a risk in reifying “race” – notwithstanding the obvious problems of racists and racism. To prize diversity in practice, transparency is needed... and I would be in favour of robust requirements for reporting amongst firms (especially above a certain minimum size), and then I would identify champions, exemplars and promote them and the successes they enjoy. Ideally, the Law Society might achieve (or work towards achieving) a virtuous competition.

Btw, I trust everyone noted the experience of Starbucks’ campaign south of the boarder regarding “race together” (see: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/trending/racetgether-starbucks-blasted-for-encouraging-baristas-to-discuss-race-issues-with-customers-1.2999586> and <http://www.thestar.com/business/2015/03/18/starbucks-ceo-defends-race-together-push-after-swift-backlash.html>) ... and the irony when it was drawn to public attention that Starbucks’ own leadership team is overwhelming comprised of white men (with just 2 women and 2 people of colour out of 19 members), but see the response from Board member Mellody Hobson (see: <http://news.starbucks.com/news/starbucks-board-member-mellody-hobson-lets-be-color-brave>).

Personally, I applaud Starbucks’ CEO Howard Schultz and I am delighted with the attention it has drawn not only to his own Board, but now increasingly to many others!

This also brings to mind the work of many women’s groups to scrutinize the gender composition of corporate boards, CEO/CFO/COO positions, etc. All very welcome!

The Law Society should be working in this direction.

At the same time, there needs to be targeted helping hands to address the barriers to those minorities or disadvantaged who face real challenges of access and unequal opportunities.

At least such a two-pronged approach should yield results in time. And I think the profession will come along (some pushed and pulled, of course).

Best wishes with your important efforts!

John

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