Raising the Bar Sydney 2018

Dimitria Groutsis – Minority report

Welcome to the podcast series of Raising the Bar Sydney. Raising the Bar in 2018 saw 20 University of Sydney academics take their research out of the lecture theatre and into bars across Sydney, all in one night. In this podcast, you'll hear Dimitria Groutsis' talk, Minority Report. Enjoy the talk.

[Applause]

Thank you, Juliet for the wonderful introduction. Tonight, we're talking about cultural diversity in leadership. And, we're talking top end of town leadership, both [inaudible] roles in our various institutions.

I have one main objective tonight, and, that is, to spark your interest in a movement for change, a movement for change that will transform and reimagine what leadership looks like in Australia, making space for culturally and linguistically diverse men and women. I'm hoping that by the end of the next hour or so that I will have convinced you that this is an important, radical step to take. That it's important for you to come along with me on this transformational ride. I'm hoping that this is the beginning of our conversation, of an ongoing conversation about how we can create this transformation.

But, before we get to that, a little bit of a ditty. When I was a little girl, my mum and dad used to tell me that with hard work I could be whatever I wanted to be. I could soar dizzy heights. The world would be there for the taking. And this, they said, was the case for everyone. Hard work would reap rewards. Fast forward some decades, and I look around me and what I see is that those dizzy heights aren't there to be scoured by everyone at the same rate, at the same pace, and at the same scale. And, merit has little, if anything, to do with this discrepancy. In fact, the research shows that if your name is John, David, William, Andrew, Michael, or Robert, you have a far greater probability of being a CEO or the leader of one of our institutions than any of the women in this room.

So, clearly, I lucked out when mum and dad called me Dimitria. This anomaly makes me wonder why, and this why has occupied a big chunk of my research over the last couple of years, with a particular focus on culturally diverse men and women trying to access leadership and the barriers that they experience in accessing leadership. So, why should we care if Australia's leadership isn't culturally diverse? Well, at the very heart of this why should we care, this concern, is it's really about social justice. It's about equity. It's about having a decent society. Leaders get to shape the agenda. They get to shape the organisational culture. They get to make decisions about how resources are distributed. So, that's where that privileged component, that equity component, comes into play.

Because, at the end of the day, there's lots of us who would like play in that paddock. And, there are lots of us that don't have access to that paddock. Leaders also get to act as role models for future leaders. So, if there's a gap in the senior leadership suite in terms of culturally diverse leaders, this then raises questions for our culturally diverse aspirants. As one of my interviewees recently said, you can't be what you can't see. There's also a very solid business case, and whenever I go and talk to organisational representatives, this is when they prick up their ears. McKinsey produces a biannual report, and in it, from massive surveys and interviews with the most influential organisations in the world, they point out that if you have a culturally diverse top management team, senior leadership suite, that you will reap financial

rewards anywhere from between 25 to 35% greater profit return than organisations that don't have a culturally diverse top management team.

Last year, Jane O'Leary, Rose Remedios, and I produced a report titled *Cracking the Glass Cultural Ceiling*, and we spoke with more than 230 culturally diverse women in senior leadership positions. Only 10% of them strongly agreed that their leadership skills were fully utilised. They felt undervalued and underleveraged. As a result of this, 30% of them indicated that they were planning on moving on, leaving the organisation within the next year. That's huge. That's a huge rate of attrition, 30% of your knowledge capital, your human capital, exiting your organisation, potentially going to a competitor. And, in addition to that, you also have to pay for someone new to fill that gap. The other thing, about 40% of the women that we spoke with indicated was that they identify as bicultural and multilingual.

These are key indicators of both product and process innovation in all the literature. These women move seamlessly across and between different cultures and economic contexts. What a great attribute. What a great contributor to your organisation. The other thing that you get from having a culturally diverse top management team, is that you have a more nuanced understanding of your multicultural customer. The multicultural dollar is said to be with $75 billion annually in Australia. And, finally, a nonfinancial benefit that flows into a financial benefit, millennials are said to be purpose driven. They're drawn to organisations that fight for a greater purpose, that have exemplary diversity and inclusion initiatives and strategies. So, if you want to attract the best and brightest, this should be part of your reputation and your brand. And I know that Stephen might have something different to say about this, but this suits my research and I'm going with this [laughter].

So, who is culturally diverse? What does it actually mean? Well, with the exception of our First Nations people, everyone is culturally diverse, right? No, they're not. Culturally diverse people include those who have migrated from a non-English speaking country and those who have an ancestry from a non-English speaking country. It may be a paternal and maternal ancestry. So, my parents migrated from Greece in the 1950's, so that makes me culturally diverse. So, who's included? There are two big categories, and we can break these down still further. But, it includes those who have a European background and those who have a non-European background. Those who are non-culturally diverse include [audio skip] have an Anglo Celtic background. And, again, we can break this down still further.

So, are you confused? Well, many of us are. And, when I go and talk to organisational representatives, there tends to be a collapse between culturally diverse, cultural awareness, and global mindset. So, for instance, one of my interviewees said, oh, we've got Bob [assumed spelling] coming from the Indonesia office. He's originally from the UK, and we're ticking that cultural diversity box. No, Bob is not culturally diverse. Bob has a global mindset. Another interviewee said, well, I'm culturally diverse because I have a Lebanese nephew. No, you may have an awareness of the foods, the values, the festivals, the ethno-religious nuances, but you're not culturally diverse by association. This is something that we need to clarify, and this is part of my quest for transformation. We need to get a clear definition out there. We do have that clear definition, but it seems to be that it hasn't been – the narrative hasn't been communicated very clearly.

And, the thing is, until we get that narrative clearly out there, and we have a clear definition with objective criteria where we can start measuring, monitoring, and reporting on cultural diversity, we won't know what our organisational landscape looks like. We won't know how our culturally diverse men and women are travelling up the leadership pathway. We won't know where the blockages are. We won't know where the exit points are. And, we won't know how to respond to these blockages. So, we need to start measuring, monitoring, and reporting on cultural diversity immediately. For me, this quest at this historical juncture is really, really,

really important. Australia boasts one of the most culturally diverse populations in the world. Fifty-eight percent have an Anglo Celtic background, 18% a European background, 21% a non-European background, 3% have an aboriginal [audio skip] background. With this breadth and depth of cultural diversity – so, this breadth and depth of cultural diversity, for me, it's both troubling and curious that this diversity isn't represented in our senior leadership suite. The evidence speaks for itself.

In 2016 the Australian Human Rights Commission released its blueprint for leadership, and in it they noted that 93% of Australia's leadership is occupied by largely men of Anglo Celtic and European backgrounds. Two years later, they produce their Leading for Change Report, and in it they noted that 97% of Australia's leadership, in terms of the two and a half thousand senior executives they surveyed, had an Anglo Celtic and European background. And, when we break down European still further, it's Northwest European. The Diversity Council Australia indicated that of 200 listed companies, if their directors were 100 people, two would be culturally diverse women, six would be Anglo Celtic women, 28 would be culturally diverse men, and 64 would be Anglo Celtic men. Clearly, when we intersect gender with cultural diversity we end up with a cement ceiling. The barriers become even more intransigent for culturally diverse women to access those leadership positions. So, what can we do? What have we seen in this research? Well, I thought for the last bit of my talk I would talk you through a couple of the main overlapping findings from some of the work that I've done with the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and the Diversity Council Australia, and the findings are from two main reports. The first one is Cracking the Glass Cultural Ceiling Report with the DCA, and the second one is the Beyond the Power Report, and my coauthor, Professor Rae Cooper, is here for any difficult questions that you may ask [laughter]. So, there are a couple of overlapping themes that emerged.

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The first one was that we don't understand what cultural diversity is, and this raises problems with regards to measuring, monitoring, and reporting. And, as we know, as the literature points out, what doesn't get measured doesn't get done. The second point that seems to be an overriding theme in the research that I've done, that we've done, is that there's a primacy placed on the male western leadership model. So, in our interviews what we find is that, you know, leaders have to be aggressive, assertive, confident, have gravitas. As one of our interviewees said, can you buy that from Coles, gravitas? They need to be confident and really visible and loud. One of our interviewees in the Beyond the Power Report, a very senior executive in an executive search firm, indicated that there are particular cultural groupings that don't fit into this mould and they're immediately knocked out, that they're given strict instructions to look for particular people with these particular traits.

We're getting into this discussion of having a trait-based approach to recruitment, and I find this really, really, really problematic. It's a very narrow and a very exclusionary approach to who we think makes a good leader. So, what I think we need to do is to broaden the discussion on who is leader? What sort of leadership style do you have? What sort of leadership style would you like to be led by? So, we need to turn the male western leadership model on its head. The second point that we found in both reports was that networks and relationships, or relationship capital, are really, really, really significant when it comes to gaining access to a leadership position. So, there are two key criteria. There are the measurable criteria, your skills, your qualifications, your paper – your paper credential, and then there's a much less transparent cycle of issues that you need to try and navigate your way through. And, these are part of that building that relationship, accessing those networks. Networks provide you with visibility. They build your reputational profile. But, they need to be the right networks. As one of our interviewees said in the Beyond the Power Report, you need to have trust amongst trusted networks.

So, it's particular networks that you need to gain access to, not all networks are equal. And this, for me, raises several issues or concerns. We need to start broadening those networks. We need to assist people with building that relationship capital. Not everyone has that understanding of how to go about this, and this is key to gaining access to those leadership positions. As one of our interviewees said in the Cracking the Glass Cultural Ceiling Report, it's who you know rather than what you know that gets you that promotion. In our Beyond the Power Report it was pointed out that there are cliques in a Metis club that block out particular groups. Hello again. So, what we need to do is broaden those networks, broaden those relationship pathways as a way of responding to those cliques. The next point that I suppose was a – was reinforced in reproducing both of the reports was that there tends to be a biassed philtre and an assimilationist mentality that blocks out, or knocks out, particular groups. This assimilationist, this mentality, for me, is particularly troubling.

One of our interviewees said that you need to speak with an Australian accent, put your head down, and work really hard. It's almost like we're wiping away that distinction, that differentiator, that organisations can capitalise on, and I find that incredibly sad. We should be mining that distinction. We should be capitalising on that distinction. One of the funnier anecdotes that I got was from one of the women who was in an executive – a senior executive team and she was saying, you know, she didn't mind talking about sport. It allowed her to fit in. She actually really liked AFL. But, then she found that the blokes started riding their bikes on Sundays, and she said wearing Lycra was a step too far. So, fitting had its boundaries. For me, this also feeds into that whole notion of what inclusive leadership is. I read the reports, I read the literature, and I find that it's a very narrow understanding, a very narrow conceptualization of what inclusive leadership means, what being valued, what being recognised is.

We need to reconceptualize what inclusion means. And, this is something that I'm really excited about pushing the boat out over the next couple of years.

So, where to from here? I think we need radical change, because without radical change the pace of change will be glacial. We need to change the ingrained systems, structures of inadequacy, of privilege and of power. We need to shake the cage a little bit. I think that we have a wonderful opportunity to overcome, to reinforce, and reproduce patterns of leadership in Australia. And, we can do so by starting to get that definition out there and to start to measure, monitor, and report on cultural diversity within our organisations.

The very close second being on my wish list for this transformational movement is that we set targets. And, I know that I'm speaking to an audience who is very much in line with this, but I know that this won't so popular, and usually you have eye rolling and a sigh of relief. Thank goodness I'm short sighted and I can't see the eye rolling. But, we won't actually get anywhere, we won't make any inroads until we create this sort of jumpstart to change. We can learn a lot from other diversity campaigns, particularly the diversity campaigns that have led to shifts in terms of gender outcomes in leadership. The 30% Club, the Male Champions of Change, without these campaigns we wouldn't have had the significant change, and we've still got a long way to go, but we wouldn't have had the significant rate of change that we've seen in terms of how women are accessing leadership positions. When people raise the counterargument to me about, well, targets are a bit of a, you know, you'll feel like you're a bit of a token, I'm the first one to put up my hand to be a token, because I worked really hard. And, the thing is, merit is inequitable.

So, I would rather be a token appointment than keep fighting – than to keep fighting the inequitable structure of merit. That's far more difficult to disentangle. So, I think this is what we need, and I'm hoping that over the course of the next two years my campaign for change, hashtag counting culture, will continue to have traction. I draw a lot on the cultural theorist,

Stuart Hall, who says that he doesn't view the world, and he doesn't do research, by looking at race as a subcategory of society. Society is racialized, and that's how we need to view them. That's how we need to start thinking about them. I'm hoping that over the next decade we will meet at some point as we change things, but we won't be having this discussion. We'll be having a much different discussion.

And, I'm hoping that we'll end up creating equitable and accessible pathways to leadership for everyone, because I think there are lots of people who should be playing in that paddock and they just don't ever have access. But, I'm looking forward to transforming things, shaking the cage, and finding out why this isn't the case. So, thank you.

[**Applause**]

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