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Diversity management: Oscars so white*

For a second year in a row, all of the 20 acting nominations for the Academy Awards 2016 went to white actors. As happened in the preceding year, this resulted in a heated debate about racial bias in the Oscars, and the opinions of film artists and activists varied from a blatant denial of racial bias to an outright allegation of racism. The nomination process for the Oscars appeared to reflect institutional bias, given that racial privileges, choices, and networks seemed to perpetuate a dominantly white organisation in which the inclusion of non-whites was either an exception or a token. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science, the organisation behind the Oscars, was an overly white organisation in terms of its composition. Most of its members were white actors, writers, directors, and other professionals. New members needed to be sponsored by two current members from within their own field or had to be nominated for an Oscar. There was further scrutiny involved, and the final decision laid with the Board of Governors. According to a 2012 study, with more than 6,000 voting members, the Academy was predominantly white (94 per cent of members) and predominantly male (77 per cent). Black members accounted for just 3 per cent. Moreover, within its various branches, whites represented 98 per cent of producers, 98 per cent of writers and 88 per cent of actors. Thirty-three per cent of members were previous winners of or nominees for Academy Awards. In other words, the dominance and perpetuation of whiteness in the Oscars was hard to ignore.

Questions:

1. Read the entire article (see footnote) and discuss the extent to which institutional racism may be a factor in the nomination and award of the Oscars?
2. Critically discuss this statement: 'The dominance and perpetuation of whiteness in the Oscars is hard to ignore.'
3. What can various stakeholders do to eradicate racial and ethnic discrimination in organisations?

* Professor Jawad Syed (Lahore University of Management Sciences) wrote this mini case as a basis for class discussion rather than to serve as an endorsement, source of primary data, or illustration of effective or ineffective management. It has been adapted from: Syed, J. (2016) Oscars so white: An institutional racism perspective. *CounterPunch*, January 29. Available at: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/01/29/oscars-so-white-an-institutional-racism-perspective/>