



How much diversity is too much?

For French carmaker Renault, diversity – men and women, young and old, engineers and non-engineers, different nationalities – means increased creativity, imagination and performance.

"Whenever we have a problem we cannot solve, we put together a cross-functional team and I am always amazed at the solutions they come up with," says **Carlos Ghosn**, President and CEO of Renault and Nissan.



Ghosn, a keynote speaker at the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society which was held here recently, says that there is no limit to the amount of diversity he would accept because diversity is not only right; it is a powerful source of performance and wealth.

However, he says we need to define our goals regarding diversity, and the best way to do this is to ensure we are approaching diversity from the right direction. We must also be prepared to accept some segregation while waiting for diversity to arrive.

Customer satisfaction and commitment

Customers are satisfied when the carmaker's team is as diverse as the customers themselves. "How can you understand and support your customers if your team is not equally diverse?" he argues.

Diversity is also an excellent tool for motivation and commitment, says Ghosn. "You cannot motivate people when there is a glass ceiling. If the employee knows that he can't be CEO of the company because of his citizenship, why does he need to be loyal? If he feels like a second-class citizen because of his age, why should he go the extra mile?"

Challenges

It is easier to relate to people similar to us in age, cultural background, gender, and language. However, says Ghosn, facing differences is less comfortable but more enriching. While the solutions that come from a diverse team are better than a uniform group, the problem is that at the outset, it takes time and energy to overcome differences. We have to be patient, he says, but in the end diversity will prevail.



Would diversity become easier or more difficult for societies to integrate people from different ethnic backgrounds in the years to come, a discussion group was asked. **Liz Padmore**, a director and associate fellow at Britain's Oxford Said Business School says the group's overwhelming conclusion was that it would be easier but it would be a rocky road.

The internet, education systems that teach children about different cultures, the spread of English as a common world language, the media and global travel are also aiding integration. However, technologies like the internet could also lead to less integration, creating even bigger divisions between those who are connected to it, and those who are not.

"Other barriers to integration could be nationalism, the perception of threat, religious extremism and the fear of immigrant populations losing their own national identities," Padmore says.

Encouraging cohesion



A second discussion group led by **Jennifer Jackson-Preece**, a senior lecturer at the London School of Economics, identified the best ways to manage and encourage national cohesion and avoid fragmentation. "There's a need for common values and shared goals, and it's crucial to involve governments, the private sector and individuals as 'stakeholders' in the process," she says. "We believe a top-down approach from the government at improving integration does not always work on its own. There needs to be common involvement."

Legislation to outlaw discrimination and prejudice is vital, and the media could be encouraged to promote more positive aspects of immigration, rather than always focusing on the negative, she adds.

Making diversity an asset

When asked to consider what action could be taken to make diversity an asset in companies and

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societies, moderator **Anita Pratap**, an independent writer and journalist from Norway, summed up the views of her discussion group: "We found that there was no single individual action that would be enough, but rather a combination of actions from macro-government level right down to the micro level of communities and families."

The group also felt that education was essential as the very first step in making diversity an asset to our societies, she says.

Ghosn concludes that in order to promote cohesion at all levels, it is vital to get to the very root of the differences that exist between people. "A prime example of this is perhaps the fact that women still cannot be priests in the Catholic church. But it just so happens that if you look in the Bible, you'll find that Jesus never actually said that. Jesus fought segregation and so should we."

The Women's Forum for the Economy and Society was held in Deauville in mid-October.

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