

In conversation with Mouna Sepehri at ESCP Europe Paris

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Mouna Sepehri, Executive Vice President for the CEO's office and Member of the Renault Executive Committee, met the aspiring batch of MBA students at a conference organised by ESCP Europe's Chair of Intercultural Management. Prof. Dr. Marion Festing, Chair of Human Resource Management and Intercultural Leadership, and Renault Chair of Intercultural Management welcomed and interviewed Mouna Sepehri on behalf of ESCP Europe.

Mouna Sepehri expressed her gratitude of being a part of Groupe Renault for the last two decades, an organisation encompassing 110 nationalities. She also advocated on the sense of engagement in her role as Sponsor for the MBA in International Management Class of 2019 at ESCP Europe.

Upon being probed about the impact of cultural diversity in business and why it remains crucial for Renault Group, she expressed "You see, a car is an emotional product and carries a distinct emotional aspect. The cultural background is equally important as that of income. In fact, cultural diversity is the DNA of Groupe Renault. Cultural diversity can be the greatest tool of performance and success."

Mouna Sepehri details how diversity can be recognised by way of gender, age, nationality, professional and academic experience. Owing to these factors, it is natural that people belonging to different sub-groups will respond to different business situations, in their own unique way. Therefore, the role of Human Resource managers become paramount – considering the onus is on them to recognise and hone the employee talent and skillset.

To further discuss the commonalities in skill sets of global leaders, she outlined the following points -

To have the capacity to anticipate risks by recognising opportunities & seizing them before others while at the same time avoiding risks. – She narrated a decade long anecdote of how it was a laughable idea when Groupe Renault pioneered the electric car. However, in the current scenario, almost all the competitors are following the same route. Hence, a leader should always innovate and think ahead of the curve.

The ability to cope with complexity. A good manager must speak the language and convey the correct message which can be understood by everyone and this is the challenge of coping with the complexity.

To be equipped with soft skills such as emotional and situational intelligence. These are extremely important qualities that a successful leader should have, in order to motivate and persuade people to achieve the bigger picture. While pointing this out, Mouna Sepehri shares, "I always say, you can't be a good manager if you don't like people."

She further addressed the students and I quote - "The new generation is flexible, agile, gifted with digitalisation, and has much more empathy. In addition to these advantages, one also needs to have certain talent. And then it is extremely important to 'Be yourself', 'Believe in yourself', work hard by having the 'Willingness to grow' because there is no secret or magic to be successful. Of course, it is not an obligation to become successful as you can be happy in many different ways. However, you need to work hard with your talent if you wish to be successful after a decade."

Mouna Sephari also spoke about leadership styles, and how they are more dynamic, than rigid. With the onset of the global financial crisis, in 2008-2009, the focus of business entities has significantly shifted. Corporate Social Responsibility has become extremely crucial for the long-term sustainability of any organisation.

The gender role game is an old one, especially in the professional sphere. In this day and age, the scenario has improved – considering a larger workforce of women can be seen employed across industries. She spoke of certain common features of working in leadership –

Self-limitation and self-confidence – Contrary to men, women often second guess their own capabilities when they are offered promotion and/or responsibility.

Responsibility of family and children – A woman has to juggle with the responsibility of being super Mum as well as a professional.

To recapitulate Mouna Sepehri affirmed that becoming successful leaders is a matter of talent and not gender. It is also important to grab the opportunity at the right time. 'Be yourself, dream and work hard' is the ultimate Mantra! The entire discussion stood on the following pillar topics - Diversity, Global Leadership and Women on Boards. The Groupe Renault succeeded by accentuating 'Cultural Diversity' as one of the key success tools. Nevertheless, it is now the DNA of Groupe Renault, and ESCP Europe remains exceptionally lucky to have a sponsor like Groupe Renault to affiliate with its 'MBA in International Management' programme that makes and develops tomorrow's global leaders!