

FORETHOUGHT CONVERSATION

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## Sparking Creativity at Ferrari

A Conversation with Mario Almondo

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Ferrari is best known for its cutting-edge cars. Less well known are its creative approaches to creativity. HBR asked Mario Almondo, the Italian automaker's director of human resources and organization, how the company inspires its nearly 3,000 employees.

## **Many companies invest in employee training. What does Ferrari do that's different?**

Four years ago, we launched a program called Formula Uomo that combines the creation of an architecturally pleasing and healthy work environment—a place that actually feels people centered—with the development of some unusual training and wellness programs. This isn't just a philanthropic exercise. It's a way to link employees' well-being and personal growth with company performance. For example, staff members can start the day brushing up on their English in a program called English@breakfast. They can also sign up for English@lunch or gather in the afternoon for English@tea. Deutsche Party is a similar program, in which employees meet with a teacher to practice speaking German. These meetings are free and open to everyone. You can join with a click of the mouse on our intranet. Employees really enjoy these sessions, and, obviously, having multilingual employees is good for Ferrari.

## **How do you train employees to be creative?**

You can't methodically teach creativity. But you can provide an environment that nurtures it. Several times a year, we run a program called Creativity Club that is designed to get employees' creative juices flowing. Each time we hold the club, we have six events at which employees meet various types of artists. We also offer three classes, in six to eight sessions, where these artists teach their skills. We've had painters, sculptors, a jazz musician, a writer, a radio DJ, a photographer, a chef, an actor, an orchestra conductor, and others. The goal is for our employees to learn about how artists generate ideas and solutions.

## **How do these events work?**

Within hours of posting Creativity Club events on our intranet, they're filled. We try to keep

most of them small—18 to 20 people—to make sure participants can really interact with the artists. Sometimes, though, if the artist is particularly popular, we'll allow as many as 100 people in the class. Before the event, which is held outside of business hours, we'll set up a room to create an atmosphere related to the artist's work. For instance, for the sculptor, we put up photos of his work, displayed some of his sculptures, and put his tools on display. The artists talk about their work and the source of their creativity. And they talk about how they use their tools and media to express particular creative ideas. A facilitator—once we had a TV talk show host—gets the conversation going. Then the employees are invited to ask their own questions.

## **Is this just for the rank and file?**

No. We wanted to create an environment where people from all levels of the company, from executives to workers on the assembly line, could mix comfortably and get to know one another. When you get a senior executive and a machinist in the same room talking about photography, they start to communicate about their interests outside of Ferrari. They forget the business and next quarter's numbers for a while.

## **How do club activities translate into creativity at work?**

We're careful not to prescribe what people should take from Creativity Club sessions. We want to activate people's deep, individual creativity—something that traditional training activities rarely do. But by holding the club at the firm, rather than, say, encouraging employees to take art courses elsewhere, we're hoping people will make links between the inspiration they get and their professional activities here. We want to let the creativity metaphor work at the level of their unconscious.

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