



# TOWARD AN AGENTIC THEORY OF OUTSIDER OUTLIERS: THE CASE OF CARLOS GHOSN

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***Outsiders* must overcome the constraints of their social status to succeed. In contrast, *outliers* leverage social capital to achieve extraordinary levels of performance. It has been suggested that outsiders who successfully emerge as outliers exercise agency. We purposefully select the rare case of Carlos Ghosn—the former CEO of Nissan and Renault—to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between outsiders and outliers. Data collection involved 16 face-to-face interviews with Mr. Ghosn at his Beirut residence and another 11 with senior Nissan or Renault executives. Our findings highlight outsider identity and efficacy as key mechanisms in the development of agentic capabilities critical to outlier performance. We identify how intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness enabled Ghosn, an outsider, to emerge as an outlier. His agentic capabilities were underpinned by his motivations for self-distinction and autonomy—offering new insights into what drives outsiders to achieve breakthrough change and outliers to achieve extraordinary performance. The findings advance an agentic theory of outsider outliers and explicate the boundary conditions between the two.**

As marginal actors, *outsiders* are “structurally distant from the influence of prevailing social norms” (Cattani, Ferriani & Lanza, 2017: 967). Unshackled by conformity, they can embrace ideas deemed too risky by others (Ferriani & Cattani, 2025; Forsyth & Roberts, 2025). Though motivated to accept innovative ideas, group members typically reject outsiders as deviants who threaten the group ideals, rules, and assumptions (Lampraki, Kolympiris, Grohsjean & Dahlander, 2024). Consider, for example, Elon Musk, an outsider to the space industry, who successfully pioneered reusable rocket technology, significantly reducing the cost of space travel and disrupting an industry dominated by government agencies. As a high-risk, high-reward group, outsiders possess breakthrough potential (Ferriani & Cattani, 2021; Van de Poel, 2000). While not all outsiders transcend the dictates of their position, those who do have a meaningfully distinct path to

outlier outcomes—a phenomenon that warrants further research.

*Outliers* perform at extraordinary levels relative to their peers. The few who account for a disproportionate share of output (Aguinis & O’Boyle, 2014) offer unique sensemaking opportunities (Booyavi & Crawford, 2023; Crawford, Linder, Lechner & Villani, 2024). Outsiders, or those on the periphery, can also exert profound influence, albeit for different reasons (Cattani, Ferriani & Colucci, 2015; Ferriani & Cattani, 2025). In contrast with outliers, whose performance is objectively identifiable, outsider identities are socially constructed (Nigam, Sackett & Golden, 2022). Their marginal social status is a double-edged sword, representing an obstacle to their emergence as outliers while providing a unique perspective capable of facilitating radical innovation (Ferriani & Cattani, 2021). Not all outliers are outsiders (Gieryn & Hirsh, 1983; Simonton, 1999; Uzzi & Spiro, 2005)—most are insiders.

Few outsiders overcome the constraints of their social position to emerge as outliers (Bourdieu & Nice, 1980; Cattani, Colucci & Ferriani, 2023). Indeed, many outsiders “crash and burn,” while some do more than transcend—they become outliers. Their path to “outliership” is meaningfully different from

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that of other outliers. Outsiders are a unique high-risk–high-reward group, since when “they win, they win big”—an occurrence worthy of scholarly attention (Cattani et al., 2017; Sgourev, 2013). Examining outsider outliers can therefore yield important insights into the dynamic interplay between, and boundary conditions of, the two constructs. Accordingly, the research question we address is, *How do outsiders leverage agency to become outliers?*

To address this question, we examine the tensions in the literature on outliers and outsiders. Theoretically, social capital is a prerequisite for outliers to emerge. However, outsiders lack social capital and access to resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Merton, 1972). Agency presents a possible resolution in explaining how outsiders overcome the constraints of their social position to emerge as outliers. We conduct an exploratory case study of Carlos Ghosn, a former auto-industry CEO and self-proclaimed “outsider” (Ghosn, 2002). Credited with rescuing two failing auto giants (Greimel & Sposato, 2021; Millikin & Fu, 2005; Muller, 2006), Ghosn was an outlier both at the peak of his success and in the magnitude of his fall, when arrested in Japan on charges of financial misconduct, and later escaping dramatically to Lebanon. In-depth interviews with Ghosn offer unique insight into the outsider-outlier dynamic. The findings unpack the psychological mechanisms that enabled Ghosn to relentlessly influence his functioning and life circumstances. We also examine the interplay between personal agency and collective social dynamics in the pursuit of performance and find that outsiders follow a unique path in achieving outlier outcomes.

Our study provides several important insights. First, we identify social learning as significant to the emergence of outliers. Second, we demonstrate that identity and efficacy moderate the ability of an outsider to break norms. Finally, we illustrate the effects of self-distinction and autonomy motivations on the core features of agency. We discuss the implications of our findings for both research and practice. To advance the transferability of our exploratory work, we also offer several research propositions. In so doing we hope to inspire future inquiry on outsider outliers.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: OUTSIDERS, OUTLIERS, AND AGENCY

Outliers are a subset of individuals whose outcomes deviate from a broader population in unexpected ways (Ruef & Birkhead, 2024)—namely, by their extreme performance or success relative to that of their peers (Aguinis & Bradley, 2015). Outliers are

of interest not only for their outstanding performance but also because of their unique, distinguishing traits (Crawford, Linder, Villani & Lechner, 2017; Villamor, Aguinis & Gabriel, 2021). Individual differences in capability, motivation, and opportunity can seemingly lead to significant outcome differences. These unique individual differences underpin and serve to explain outliers’ disproportionately high performance (Oldroyd & Morris, 2012). We examine the literature that addresses the interplay between these inherent traits and enabling conditions, beginning with cognitive ability, opportunity, and motivation.

Behavioral genetics establishes that the cognitive traits of extraordinary individuals appear at an early age and are linked to outstanding human accomplishments in various contexts (Lubinski, 2004, 2009). The profoundly gifted simply have a greater capacity for accomplishment and creativity (Lubinski & Benbow, 2006). Thus, cognitive abilities clearly impart an advantage, though other personal attributes, such as commitment and opportunity, matter as well (Lubinski, 2009: 353), evidencing a relationship between social behaviors and cognitive processes.

The literature on exceptionalism underscores the significance of opportunity and motivation in the context of outliers (Aguinis & O’Boyle, 2014; Asgari, Hunt, Lerner, Townsend, Hayward & Kiefer, 2021; Clark, Crawford & Pidduck, 2023). Opportunity favors those with social capital. Social capital is the value inherent in relationships or the goodwill others have toward an individual through which resources, information, influence, and solidarity flow (Adler & Kwon, 2002). It creates opportunities and likewise determines who benefits from those opportunities. In and of itself, social capital does not guarantee success (Call, Nyberg & Thatcher, 2015). Arguably, all CEOs endeavor to strengthen social ties; however, their fundamental motivation differs. Motivation, which broadly refers to the reasons for behavior, can provide insight into the extraordinary performance of outliers (Call et al., 2015). Non-outliers develop social capital to increase belongingness. Identity motivation theory suggests that outliers may have different reasons for developing social capital (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge & Scabini, 2006). The distinction highlights outliers’ unique drivers, signaling an underexplored area of research.

Whereas outliers benefit from the dynamic interplay of innate cognitive capacity and favorable conditions, outsiders, or actors who are not members of a specified group or collective, must overcome oppositional conditions to succeed (Cattani, Ferriani & Allison, 2014; Cattani et al., 2017; Merton, 1972). A rich sociological tradition on outsiders establishes the duality of their

social position (Bagnoli, 2007; Kersen, 2016; Merton, 1972). By virtue of their “outsiderness,” outsiders possess a useful “ignorance of prevailing assumptions” that enables them to “attack” problems generally regarded as impossible or uninteresting by specialists (Gieryn & Hirsh, 1983: 91). As such, their role as change agents and innovative thinkers is well established (Kersen, 2016; Nigam et al., 2022; Sgourev, 2013). Paradoxically, the same position that enables them also constrains them, signaling to insiders their lack of standing (Cattani et al., 2017). Unlike insiders, outsiders lack the necessary social ties and access to resources (Cattani et al., 2014; Sgourev, 2013), both of which are significant to legitimacy (Baumann, 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013). Outsiders represent a threat to the establishment. They face skepticism and “deeply entrenched” resistance that can be insurmountable for some and debilitating for others (Barber, 1961; Cattani & Ferriani, 2008). Thus, while all outsiders can potentially be novel and creative, not all are successful.

Exogenous shocks may offer an explanation in this regard. The emergence of outsiders is often precipitated by a convulsive moment in the external environment (Corbo, Corrado & Ferriani, 2016). A dramatic event can subvert the social order and disrupt institutional processes, triggering an opportunity for new actors to emerge (Corbo et al., 2016; Nissilä, 2021; Sine & David, 2003). Such an event, though disruptive for insiders, ultimately creates an opportunity for outsiders to enter a domain from which they may previously have been excluded. Cattani et al. (2017), however, argue that this event in and of itself is not sufficient to explain why some outsiders succeed while others do not. Cattani et al. (2017) propose that the distinguishing factor is agency, or the capacity to enact control over the direction and quality of one’s life (Bandura, 2001).

From an agentic perspective grounded in social cognitive theory, rather than being onlookers of their own behavior, outsiders intentionally influence their functioning and life circumstances (Bandura, 2006: 164). Outsiders may overcome the social pressure of their immediate environment by effecting individual or social change (Bandura, 2006; Sgourev, 2013). Empirical research on outsiders, for example, reveals how they actively mobilize resources and build awareness of their cause to achieve legitimacy (Cattani et al., 2017). This suggests that outsiders can exert power over their functioning, overcoming the limitations of their marginal status to obtain levels of success typically reserved for those with high social capital.

The concepts of outsider and outlier represent two salient, albeit distinct, research domains (see Appendix

A, Table AI, for a comparative synthesis of these concepts). Outsiders must navigate structural barriers and overcome entrenched mindsets that undermine their legitimacy (Andriani, Cattani, Dang & Kaminska, 2025; Cattani et al., 2017), while outliers excel from the interplay of inherent traits with favorable conditions (Asgari et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2023). The literature reveals a tension between these two constructs. Whereas outsiders benefit from favorable social conditions, outsiders must overcome the constraints of theirs (Clark et al., 2023). Agency presents an avenue for reconciliation, explaining how outsiders who emerge as outliers create their enabling conditions *in lieu* of opportunities arising from social capital. Research that explicitly explores the relationship among outsiders, outliers, and agency is scarce, however, motivating us to explore how outsiders leverage agency to become outliers and how outsider outliers leverage agency to succeed.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

The selection of rare cases can help to expand the theoretical boundaries of the outlier and outsider constructs and inspire a deeper understanding of the relationship between the two (Beamish & Hasse, 2022: 708). Considerable knowledge can be gained from the study of individual outliers. Selecting a particular organization or individual is often desirable “precisely because it [allows] one to gain certain insights” that others are unable to offer (Siggelkow, 2007: 20). Following Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), we use a unique case (Carlos Ghosn) to glean revelatory insights into how an outsider became a successful outlier. We begin by outlining the case selection criteria and applying these to Ghosn, before delineating the methods of data collection and analysis.

### Case Selection

We apply the criteria established in our theoretical background to select a case that is (a) an outsider and (b) an outlier. Outsiders are social constructions and defined by their position at the margins of dominant fields or cultural structures. Outliers are defined by their cognitive capacity, opportunity, and motivation. We look for individuals who demonstrate (a) marginality in terms of culture or power structures, (b) exceptional cognitive capacity evidenced by atypical achievement, (c) access to or creation of enabling conditions *in lieu* of traditional social capital, and (d) motivation for high performance.

Carlos Ghosn meets these criteria. First, Ghosn occupies a position at the margins of French and

Japanese sociocultural structures. His outsider status is shaped by both self-perception and how others perceived him. Indeed, the Brazilian-born, Franco-Lebanese engineer has consistently self-identified as an outsider. Within Renault, a French automaker governed by the political establishment, Ghosn was not considered “truly French,” despite his language fluency and French education, and his sociocultural experiences reinforced his marginal status. Ghosn faced a structurally imposed incapacity to fully comprehend the distinct social hierarchies, cultural expectations, and institutional logics of the societies in which he operated. The constraint stemmed not from any personal deficiency but from his outsider position (Merton, 1972). In Japan, social capital plays a decisive role in executive appointments. The executive market is highly constrained, favoring a network of “old boys” who, owing to their relational ties, control the administrative, political, and executive spheres (Ikegami, Maznevski & Ota, 2016; van Rixtel & Hassink, 2002). Foreigners face significant barriers given long-standing stigmas and distrust (Arudou, 2021; Kshetry, 2008). As a foreigner, Ghosn’s appointment at Nissan was unprecedented, precipitated by an exogenous shock (Nissan’s near bankruptcy), which created a unique opportunity for him as an outsider.

Second, his cognitive capacity is contextualized across several dimensions. He led the recovery of two failing corporations (Renault and Nissan), engineering an alliance between these companies that pioneered technology sharing and cost savings globally (Stahl & Brannen, 2013). According to Ikegami and Maznevski (2019), the dynamics of cross-border relationships are difficult to sustain. The relationship between Renault and Nissan lasted for nearly two decades. The sustained success demonstrates Ghosn’s strategic leadership (Ikegami, Maznevski & Ota, 2017). His formation of cross-functional teams broke with accepted management norms and established a structure for solving interdependent problems collectively (Ikegami et al., 2017). Ghosn is the first CEO to lead two Fortune 500 companies simultaneously, evidencing his ability to manage complex multinational operations (see Table B1 in Appendix B for a summary of Ghosn’s career).

Third, Ghosn’s emergence as an outlier was facilitated by several key opportunities, most notably Nissan’s financial predicament and Ghosn’s appointment in 1999 to spearhead its turnaround. Table B2 (Appendix B) reports Nissan’s market capitalization before, during, and after Ghosn’s tenure.

Fourth, motivation played a critical role in his performance, as evidenced by his ambitious goal setting (e.g., the “Nissan Revival Plan” and the “Nissan 180 Plan”)

and long-term commitment (as the longest serving CEO in auto industry history). Thus, Ghosn’s “outlierness” is contextualized across cognitive capacity, opportunity, and motivation. Carlos Ghosn is thus worthy of study because he is both an outsider *and* an outlier. As shown in Figure 1, unique insights arise from outsiders, outliers and their rare intersection—where Ghosn is situated. This duality allows us to probe the reciprocal relationship between these two constructs.

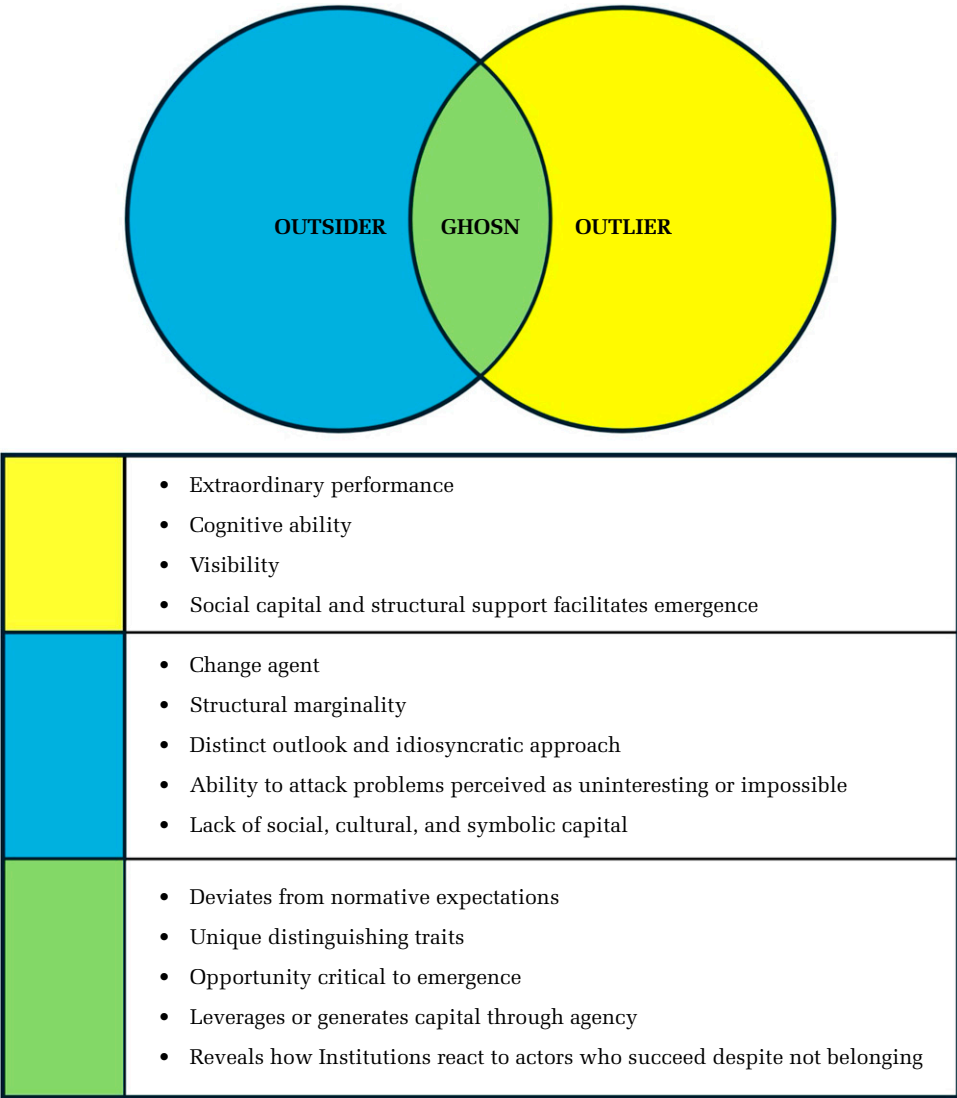
## Data Collection

Within the case study framework, we adopt a narrative lens. Narrative inquiry provides insights into the complexities embedded in stories of an individual’s lived experiences (Clandinin, 2022). The approach is valuable when examining how individuals make sense of process, time, and change in their lives (Boéri & Giustini, 2024: 413). We collected data in several stages. First, we drew on secondary sources to develop a chronology of Ghosn’s strategic decisions in the context of Renault, Nissan, and later Mitsubishi. Sources of data included annual reports, speeches, documentaries, biographic accounts, press releases, and media articles.

The second stage involved examining Ghosn’s own narrative, elicited through in-depth interviews. The extensive face-to-face, semi-structured interviews covered various aspects of his personal and interpersonal life but also centered on the experiences that shaped his values and motivations. The questions were explicitly informed by the literature on outliers. An interview protocol promoted consistency of insight, and the approach encouraged the informant to draw on his own linguistic frameworks to describe significant incidents within his life story (Cooper, Ewing, Campbell & Treen, 2023). We explored a range of themes, inviting Ghosn to reflect on his formative influences, including how his childhood shaped his approach to business, when he first became interested in business, the values that defined his approach to his personal and professional lives (with examples), how these values drove him and underpinned his strategic approach, when he first became aware of the need to manage his reputation, and why public opinion swung against him so swiftly.

The first author conducted all the personal interviews face-to-face with Ghosn at his Beirut residence, which provided an atmosphere conducive to open communication between researcher and subject (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). In total, 16 face-to-face interviews lasting two hours each, on average, were completed. Appendix C records the times and dates each interview took place. To protect the quality of

**FIGURE 1**  
**Intersection of Outsiders and Outliers**



evidence, all interviews were recorded, with Ghosn’s permission, and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 608 single-spaced transcript pages. During the interviews, we gained access to additional archival documents, including legal documents, human rights reports, and several informal interviews with industry associates. We compared the contemporary interviews with previous interviews with Ghosn during his tenure with Nissan and Renault. An additional 918 pages of secondary sources (excluding books and journal articles) served to triangulate the data and enabled a dependable understanding (Hirschman, 1986) of outsider-outlier agency to emerge.

The third stage of data collection entailed 11 interviews with current and former Nissan or Renault executives, four of whom worked just one level below Ghosn in Japan (and interacted with him frequently). We also interviewed an additional six senior automotive industry insiders from outside the alliance. To qualify, all interviewees had to have interacted with Ghosn personally or be separated from him by no more than two degrees. Appendix D details Stage 3 interviewee demographics, and Appendix E presents the Stage 3 interview protocol. The second author, who had never interacted with Ghosn but has an automotive industry background, conducted all

interviews in Stage 3. This process provided the second author with physical, emotional, and intellectual distance from influencing, or being influenced by, Ghosn (Khanna et al., 2021). Similarly, the first author had no contact with any of the 17 interviewees in Stage 3. The secondary interviews with Ghosn before his arrest, and the primary interviews with those close to Ghosn, served to triangulate the 16 face-to-face interviews with Ghosn conducted by the first author in the second stage.

## Data Analysis

Narrative inquiry informed data analysis and interpretation (Sonday, Ramugondo & Kathard, 2020). Data were coded manually in the interpretive tradition. The research process involved multiple iterations and interrelated levels of analysis (Fowler, Das & Fowler, 2022), including coding generation, pattern matching, review, and defining themes. The sequencing of events in time, the weight given to the events, and the connection between elements of the narrative and its overall context were a particular focus (Boéri & Giustini, 2024). Iterative readings of the text involved moving back and forth between the parts of the whole, searching for meaning and analytic patterns (Gadamer, 2013). This process provided an important basis for data immersion and analysis (Braun, Clarke & Hayfield, 2022). As new themes emerged, we revisited and reinterpreted earlier insights with respect to the emergent frame of understanding.

Pattern matching followed exhaustive coding of the thematic and structural aspects of the text. This analytic stage refocused the analysis by moving from keywords to higher-order themes. More broadly, in this search for themes, we systematically sorted the codes into potential themes and collated relevant coded data extracts within the identified theme. We employed ATLAS software to support the analysis. The initial 673 unique codes generated in the first round of coding were refined to 27. Appendix F illustrates the first- and second-order codes, and Appendix G provides an example of the coding triangulation. We triangulated the code “outsider” across several sources: self-proclaimed by Ghosn, confirmed by all 11 Nissan or Renault interviewees, and supported by secondary data (Greimel & Sposato, 2021; Ikegami & Bird, 2023; Stahl & Brannen, 2013).

The iterative, inherently dialogical approach challenged the emergent theoretical argument. The involvement of a second author, who did not participate in the interviews with Ghosn, further strengthened the integrity of the data analysis, providing a

devil’s advocate perspective (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). We sought to capture the lived experiences of Ghosn, as an outsider outlier, through rich detail on contextual thematic elements, including problems, characters’ actions, and resolution. The findings present an emerging theory of outsider-outlier agency.

## FINDINGS

We begin by outlining the core features of personal outsider-outlier agency. Next, we consider the roles of proxy and collective agency in the achievement of outlier performance outcomes. Finally, the findings reveal the antecedents and implications of a loss of agency.

### Personal Agency

Outsider agency was underpinned by two enabling beliefs and characterized by several core features. The first belief was that Ghosn was an outsider. The second was that he would succeed because of his outsider status. These enabling beliefs were central to Carlos Ghosn’s functioning as an outsider. After examining these beliefs, we draw on social cognitive theory in detailing the core features of outsider agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness.

**Enabling beliefs.** Ghosn was foremost an outsider. He was *always* different, by virtue not simply of his nationality but also of his identity.

I’ve been all my life, an outsider. I don’t know if an underdog or not, but certainly an outsider. When I came to Lebanon and I was five years old, I was the Brazilian guy, the Brazilian boy. He barely speaks French, barely speaks Portuguese. So, I was here with the boys from Achrafieh, et cetera, so I was the outsider. Then, when I left school, and I went to France, at university, I was the outsider. I was coming from Lebanon, Brazilian, I was the outsider. Then, when I finished university, and I joined Michelin in Clermont-Ferrand, I was also the guy that they were hiring for the Brazilian project, so I was again an outsider. (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 155<sup>1</sup>)

This early revelation and acceptance of his marginal social status shaped his identity. “So, this image of facing your destiny with very few elements in your hand is something which is probably in the DNA of my family. That’s how the grandfather that I never knew had an influence on me” (Carlos Ghosn, April 28, 2023: 35).

<sup>1</sup> Final numbers in interview citations mark the position of the interview in the ATLAS file.

Ghosn's sociocultural experiences also strengthened this shared sense of self. In France, he was "not typically French" and was perceived as a "Martian" (Ghosn, April 12, 2023, 53, 339). In Japan, he was a "panda"—a curiosity that was tolerated until he became a threat (Ghosn, March 30, 2023, 378). The identity belief was significant to his agency as an outsider, shaping his thought patterns and undertaking actions with purpose. It was complemented by his sense of self-efficacy as an outsider. He appreciated that he could succeed because he was an outsider, not despite it.

Well, when you are an outsider, you are used to doing things differently from others. You are used to giving opinions [that are] different from others. In the car industry, everything I have done is different. The turnaround of Nissan was totally different. The alliance where you are managing two companies at the same time, unique. The launch of the electric car, out of the blue. Nobody predicted it.

So, in a certain way, being used to having different speech, different ideas, coming from nowhere, having the courage to say, no, no, no, we are going to go there, even though nobody thinks [we should]. But, guys, trust me, we are going to go there. It is something—it is an exercise on which I've been prepared for a very long time. For a very long time. So, being an outsider and having been through this position where you have to take a position different than other people, or that people do not expect, was a good preparation for everything else. (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 198).

His self-efficacy as an outsider served as a critical enabler, influencing his functioning as an outsider outlier. A strong sense of efficacy enabled him to transcend the constraints of his social status, developing agentic capabilities that supported his emergence as an outlier.

**Core features of outsider agency.** Identity and efficacy were significant to the development of agentic capabilities. These capabilities centered on Bandura's (2006) core agentic features of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness, and supported Carlos Ghosn's agency as an outsider outlier.

The first core feature of outsider agency is *intentionality*. As an outsider, Ghosn was unrelenting in his commitment to influencing his functioning and life circumstances. This intentionality, whereby he purposefully contributed to his life circumstances instead of being a product of them, was significant to his agency as an outsider.

I didn't become an outsider at 50 years old. I've been an outsider since practically five years old. So, I was

trained for it, you suffer from it, but it's like you've developed a muscle that allows you say, okay, that's fine. This is fine, you have other compensations. You have other rewards from the situation where you are suffering, but also you have a lot of dividends from it. (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 189).

Two distinct motivations guided Ghosn's unrelenting approach to personal agency. The first was self-distinction. As an outsider, Ghosn was comfortable in taking a different position from that of others: "fitting in was never part of his agenda" (Interviewee 8: 117). He was not constrained by sociocultural norms; rather, the liberation from these conventions empowered him to embrace the dominion that came from being fundamentally different. As an outsider, Ghosn was driven not by the need to belong but by distinguishing himself. He had previously experienced belonging, albeit briefly, and recognized its limitations. Consequently, he sought distinction through disruptive innovations that would elicit surprise and exceed the limitations placed upon him.

You've got all the analysts around you saying, what a stupid idea. Carlos Ghosn is—they are delayed on hybrid, that's why they go for electric car. You just have to read what the press was writing about me in 2008. Now, they forget about that. So, this is harsh. Again, you are an outsider. You are an outsider. Big CEO of your own company, you are an outsider with the decision you take when you are an innovator ... You are the only one with this idea, and you are sticking to it. (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 242).

The more "impossible" the task, the greater perceived opportunity for him to "contribute" (Ghosn, March 30, 2023: 80; April 5, 2023: 49). He was defiant in the face of conformist forces, as this offered an avenue to distinguish himself.

The second motivation, autonomy, enhanced Ghosn's agency as an outsider. Although his foundational years were defined by a supportive mother, it was the prolonged absence of his father that impressed upon him the significance of not allowing his life course to be dictated by, or contingent on, others.

Well look, I didn't have, for many reasons, a lot of interaction with my father ... So I was protected in a certain way from the consequences of the legal problems of my father and his absence by my school, by my cousins, by the families. It doesn't mean I don't suffer from it, but frankly, if it affected me any way ... you have to comfort yourself. I mean shit can happen any time, to anybody around you ... [the] lesson I got from it is you're just going to have to rely on yourself in life. (Ghosn, March 30, 2023: 67)

The complicated family dynamic instilled in Ghosn the understanding that one must “take care of” oneself (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 89). An early consciousness of the relationship between “dependence” and “suffering” compounded this realization, strengthening his resolve to advance his agency as an outsider (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 105).

I’ve seen many cases around me where the suffering of people, the malaise of people had probably many roots, but one of them always present was dependence ... financial dependence, or emotional dependence, or physical dependence, or intellectual dependence. People can’t think by themselves, always looking for somebody else’s opinion. This dependence—at the end of the day we’re all dependent, I’m not saying that we cannot be [dependent, but we can also] be autonomous. It’s completely different. So, that’s why I said, well, I want for myself, as much as possible, the largest possible autonomy that I can get by my own work and my own development. (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 105)

Autonomy was an important motivational mechanism. It shaped Ghosn’s active approach to the development of outlier capabilities that would enhance this pursuit. Autonomy and outlier performance were intrinsically connected. “Yeah, your autonomy, that’s it, performance enhances autonomy, that’s why performance is the goal, okay, because if you don’t perform, your autonomy is jeopardized” (Ghosn, March 30, 2023: 448).

The greater Ghosn’s success, the greater his agency as an outsider became. He was relentless in pursuing performance for the purpose of achieving autonomy, through the development of his intellectual capacity and cognitive resilience. The former enhanced his performance, while the latter protected his outsider perspective that was instrumental in challenging the status quo. Unlike his Renault predecessor, Louis Schweitzer, Ghosn was uncomfortable with, if not impervious to, political maneuvering. He saw it as a constraint that diminished his autonomy and threatened his outsidership.

You know that I’m the only CEO in France who never traveled with the French president? I was invited. I always said no. Sarkozy, Hollande, Macron. I said, “I’m sorry, and frankly, I don’t have time to waste spending two or three days with you in Africa, or Nigeria, or the United States, or Brazil, as a kind of decoration for the visit of the president.” (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 424)

He refused to “bend the knee” to the desire of politicians (Ghosn, April 12, 2023: 168), nor did he build “a plant in France for the sake of hiring French people”

(Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 253). Instead, he built it in Morocco because that location was “the most beneficial for Renault” (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 253). “I always opposed the French State in any decision that would not be in the pure interest of Renault or in the pure interest of the alliance” (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 253).

Ghosn’s uncompromising pursuit of autonomy and unrelenting focus on performance unsettled the French political elite.

Usually, when the French president travels outside [the country], he brings with him CEOs. It’s a kind of tradition. The president of the United States does it, the chancellor of Germany does it, et cetera. So, when I became the CEO of Renault in 2005, I’ve seen Chirac as the president, and then Sarkozy, and then Hollande, and then Macron. I had four presidents. I have never participated [in] an official trip. I was invited systematically ... I always said no. I said no because for me it was a waste of time. I’m going to spend two days in the plane with the president talking about politics that I was not interested in. Frankly not doing anything which would help my own goals. (Ghosn, January 24, 2024: 242–243)

Ghosn was a “threat,” positioning himself as an unpredictable element beyond others’ “control” (Ghosn, April 12, 2023: 71). His refusal to accept the status quo, and his relentless pursuit of the extraordinary, were key boundary conditions for Ghosn. In this way, he relentlessly exerted influence upon his life circumstances.

*Forethought*, the second core driver of outsider agency, involved constructing novel future scenarios to guide current behavior. Ghosn actively engaged in and cultivated forethought, projecting himself into alternate situations.

For me, the turf was the world, was globalization; this is a global industry, we need to compete globally. We can’t run from the difficult market; we need to go into the difficult market to prove ourselves and that our products and our people are able to compete with the best in the world. This was my vision, okay? But people considered that Ghosn is a dreamer, is a wishful thinker—“Come on, are you going to compete against Volkswagen, mighty Volkswagen?” Or, we’re going to go to Russia—“It’s very dangerous”; we’re going to go to Brazil—“It’s dangerous.” They were very afraid without announcing it. So they said I’m a dreamer. (Ghosn, March 30, 2023: 337)

Forethought in an outsider context was characterized by ambitious projected goals and anticipation of exceptional outcomes. This generative practice was



central to Ghosn's agency as an outlier. "The first impression I had when I ... met the man was his stature. He was surprisingly small in stature but big in his thinking. I mean, um, there's no doubt he was a visionary" (Interviewee 14: 46–50).

Ghosn readily engaged in mental simulations of alternative courses of action involving self and others. The practice served as a precursor to, and mechanism for, action. It was instrumental to the introduction of disruptive innovations, including the Renault–Nissan alliance itself, as well as to highly innovative new products such as the Nissan Leaf.

Now, everybody talks about electric cars, but when I launched the first electric car in 2008, people were laughing at me. "You don't have the hybrid; that's why you are launching the electric." I said, "No, no, hybrid has no future. It's electric, the future." I was saying this in 2008 already. (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 151)

Forethought was underpinned by cognitive flexibility in exploring unconventional solutions, an open mindset that allowed potentially groundbreaking ideas to emerge, and an "entrepreneurial" state of mind "where nothing stops you and you see possibilities" (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 50; May 10, 2023: 120). Envisioning a desired future, unconstrained by temporal circumstances, empowered Ghosn to exploit promising fortuities and create that future through purposeful action.

*Self-reactiveness*, the third core feature of outsider agency, linked forethought with action. It operated as a dynamic self-regulatory mechanism that governed emotional, motivational, and moral processes. Ghosn's response to adversity is evidence of his strong sense of self-efficacy, but also his ability to regulate motivation and behavior.

Probably 2010 was one of the most difficult years I had. We're out of a crisis, there's a spy story, the divorce, it was too much .... No, it was a very tough year; 2010 was probably even tougher than 2018 with the arrest. It was a terrible year. But, again, I survived it, not for a very long time because in 2011, we had the tsunami. Yeah, 2009, 2010, 2011 was a very dark period. (Ghosn, April 19, 2023: 331–335)

It was not a question of trust in yourself .... I never had this kind of doubt. It's not the question of, am I up to the task ... no, I never had this. But I was exhausted.

I said, "Oh my God, am I going to have the energy to overcome all of this?" This was my concern. "Am I going to have the energy? Because it is so dark. Am I

going to have the motivation, the energy to come back and fight back whenever everything [is] falling apart?" This was my main concern and frankly, I had it. I had it.

It's like the tree which bends through the wind but never breaks. That was it. I think those three years I was bending, and the winds were hitting [me], but I didn't break, and I was rewarded with six glorious years after that. (Ghosn, April 28, 2024: 225–258)

Ghosn developed an ability to withstand extreme pressure, personally and professionally. This mental tolerance was grounded in his early childhood.

Well, obviously when you've been through so many difficulties like this, when you face a new one—a completely different one—it gives you much more solidity [to not] panic, [to not] just give up ... [going] through different kinds of crises and challenges makes you more capable of sustaining more adversity in a certain way.

So, when the shock of 2018 came—obviously it was a shock, it was a completely different situation than the one I faced before, but deep inside me, even though I was shaken by it, I knew that I would manage to get out of this situation. I didn't know how, but I knew that I would not bend, I would not be manipulated, I would not be influenced, and I would find the solution.

But this is coming from the fact that you have been in so many difficult situations before that it gives you this calmness and this focus where you say, you know what, this is another completely different challenge, let's regroup and try to see how we're going to overcome this challenge.

Where usually when you have not been through many crises, it's very difficult to do that because you think that you are in a situation which is practically impossible to repair and you just try to find any less damaging outcome ... but I didn't go there. I just said, no, I'm not going to settle anything here, I'm just going to have to be strong enough, creative enough to be able to face this new challenge, no matter what it is. (Ghosn, April 28, 2023: 306–309)

The pressures Ghosn was under shaped him, strengthening his resolve and ability "to resist" (Ghosn, April 19, 2023: 337). As an outsider, he was conditioned to persevere, disciplining his mind to sustain performance. A shock incarceration could have paralyzed his ability to think generatively with resignation, fear, and "hopelessness" (Ghosn May 5, 2023: 279). He was arrested four times, each time after

the expiry of the 23-day limit for keeping a person in custody in Japan. Ghosn was “questioned daily without a lawyer” to “obtain a confession from him”; “Mr. Ghosn lost a significant amount of weight while deprived of his liberty, as he was provided with food only occasionally and subjected to poor detention conditions” (Human Rights Council, 2020). Nevertheless, he effectively suppressed negative thoughts, maintaining motivation and channeling his mind to construct a future scenario. Though not without emotion, he actively compartmentalized this, separating himself from the hardship to harness the full range of his cognitive faculties and arrive at a solution that preserved his personal autonomy.

It took a long time because I was arrested in November 2018, and in fact, I found the solution one year later. It was just getting out of Japan, was the solution. But it took me one year to do that. It didn't happen six months later, or three months later. (Ghosn, April 28, 2023: 309)

As an outsider, the solution was “creative” and, in his mind, not unethical but consistent with his intrinsic need to spearhead change.

Where nothing stops you and you see a possibility, [a good example of this] is my escape from Japan. [I considered] a completely different angle. Because a lot of people would have said “Okay, I'm doomed, it's finished.” So, I'm in Japan. I'm not in Afghanistan or in Zimbabwe, I'm in Japan. Super organized, super controlled country. How do you get out? You know, so this is another example about no, you know, I can get out if I find the right solution. I'm going to be focused on that. So, this angle is certainly something on which I can legitimately say, you know, I brought two great examples [of how] nothing [is] impossible—as long as you are creative enough and you are focused enough, and you are persistent enough. (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 50)

Ghosn's ancestry served to reinforce his identity as an outsider, and informed his morals. His moral judgments centered largely on performance, which held a purity for him, coupled with his “willingness to contribute, to make a difference” (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 61). As a perpetual outsider, he could not rely on insiders for justice or empathy. He refused to “compromise” on his beliefs, as they defined him as an outsider (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 52–53).

When you are right ... it's your own truth and your own convictions and your own belief, you shouldn't compromise ... Again, I have many, many examples in my life where, you know, people know that, okay,

if everybody agrees but this guy doesn't, we have a problem. Because he is just not going to compromise. He's not going [to] if he thinks he's doing the right things. So ... you don't bend your knee when you're right. I think this is also something which is a legacy. Obviously one example is the fact that the Japanese system which is all coherence and brutality and [attempts to cut hope] from every angle. Cut the ties, cut everything, [but] they didn't break me. They put me in a corner and [said] “Okay, this guy is doomed.” They thought [so]. But they didn't [break me]. This means that, you know, this is also an example for a lot of people. I mean, if you say legacy, legacy means you have an example to give ... when you are convinced that you're right and when you are convinced that this is the truth, and this is the right way. No matter how much [you are] suffering, you're going [to] endure. How much, how much, how much blaming, how much accusation, et cetera, you should just stand on your feet. Not bend, not compromise, not try—no politicking around these positions. (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 52–54)

Ghosn's role was to challenge the establishment, spearheading disruptive change and bringing “hope” to others that he could “prevail” despite the circumstances (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 61–65).

My escape of Japan made a difference. But then you're challenging a hostage justice system that I consider, frankly, despicable that they're trying to hide. So it projected the light on something that ... they will never be able to erase this. Because there will always be a suspicion that there is something—which is true—there is something fishy going on in Japan.

So, these are facts, life realization that made a difference. Made a difference at [the] level of [the] country, at the level of the planet, at the level of the industry, or at [the] level of companies. (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 90–91)

In this way, Ghosn actively leveraged his outlier capabilities to become a successful outsider.

*Self-reflectiveness*, the fourth agentic attribute, entailed judging self-efficacy. Ghosn's agency was rooted in the core belief that he had the power to produce the desired effects through his actions as an outsider. During his Jesuit schooling, he drew a connection from his cognitive ability to his self-discipline and performance.

I think the most important things that I got from my childhood that remain with me—obviously, when you are in a Jesuit school, the first thing that the Jesuits at that time teach you is discipline, organization, competition. Because all the grades were classified, number 1,

number 2, number 3, you had a lot of awards for the people who [were] performing very well. So, during these—I don't know, from six to 17, 10, or 11 years of school, I had a very strong sense of organization, of discipline. I also had a sense that competition is normal life. (Ghosn, March 22, 2023: 47–48)

From these observed conditional relationships, Ghosn constructed expectations about his own situation and brought to bear his own ability to achieve preconceived outcomes. In this way, he transcended the dictates of the immediate environment and sought to shape and regulate his present to fit his desired future. His projection into his grandfather's past outsider identity and “daring” life empowered him to make bold decisions involving significant risk (Ghosn, April 28, 2023: 33). His grandfather, a successful outsider, was an important mental referent for him when making high-risk decisions. In this way, Ghosn was able to selectively animate the past to strengthen his self-efficacy and outsider purpose.

Perceived self-efficacy played a pivotal role in his outsider agency. A firm belief in his capabilities empowered him to take self-enhancing actions, overriding conditions in the external environment. As an outsider, Ghosn confronted challenges in ways that took courage.

First, there is no problem in human activity that a man has created that a man cannot solve. That's number one. ... And for me the perfect example is Nissan. You know, nobody thought that anybody [could] fix Nissan. Because there was no Japanese person capable [of] fixing the company, and nobody thought that the foreigner [could] come to Japan and turn around a Japanese company. So, the company was doomed. So, my legacy was to say, this guy has taken a mission that was deemed impossible by these two standards, and he did it. So, because—I said from the beginning you can—any problem created by man can be solved by man, as long as you know how to be creative enough. That's number one. (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 48–49)

Ghosn's efficacy was the fulcrum of his outlier success. As he met greater challenges, his outlier competences expanded. The greater his perceived self-efficacy as an outsider, the greater his aspirations and the firmer his commitment became. Indeed, becoming an outlier was essential to his agency as an outsider. “Yeah, your autonomy, that's it, performance enhance[s] autonomy, that's why performance is the goal, okay, because if you don't have performance, your autonomy is jeopardized” (Ghosn, March 30, 2023: 448).

Ghosn's self-reflectiveness was an important mechanism that influenced his outsider thought patterns and emotions, and shaped his outlier performance.

### Proxy Agency

Outlier agency in this case was situated within, and mediated by, the social context. As an outlier, Ghosn actively leveraged proxy agency to achieve greater personal agency as an outsider. The mechanism through which he achieved this agency was social learning. He observed, analyzed, and then either accepted or rejected patterns of behavior by mentors.

Well, obviously [others have] an influence on me, but influence ... has two components. By analyzing and living with somebody there are things you are going to adopt, and there are things you are going to reject. So, this influence [goes] two ways. For example, François Michelin was not a very good speaker, and he had a tendency to speak in a very, I would say, vague and emotional [way], and subject to many interpretations. I hated that. But he was my boss, so I was just observing. But I hated [it], which means—as I say, I would never do that. This is his influence.

From the other side, he was a very simple man. He was very attentive to people, and I noticed how this has a great impact on the people around him. I adopted it. So, when you say, influence, influence [goes] both ways. Influence is you're seeing the good side of his management, and you say, “Oh my God, I should reinforce this side.” The side that you consider as boring, a waste of time [you reject] it, so you want to do something totally different.

So, in a certain way, his style of management is completely different from mine, but my style of management has been influenced by him. But when I say influence, it is not the mimicking, it is rejection and mimicking. (Ghosn, May 17, 2023: 96–98)

This pattern of selectively rejecting or mimicking informed Ghosn's own strategic approach. In addition to François Michelin's influence, he noted the “very cold, very analytical, and rational” and “extremely political” approach of Louis Schweitzer at Renault (Ghosn, May 17, 2023: 103). He rejected the politicizing that would implicate his autonomy, but made the “methodical” and “rational side” of Schweitzer a defining strength of his own (Ghosn, May 17, 2023: 103). In this way, Ghosn sought to avail himself of all opportunities to develop the self and enhance his performance. Another key input for social learning was feedback on his own performance and that of others in the form of results.

## Collective Agency

Ghosn worked collaboratively with others to secure that which he could not accomplish on his own. The turnaround of Nissan was achieved through socially interdependent efforts. The greater the perceived collective efficacy, the greater the group's aspirations, motivational investment, and, in turn, performance accomplishments. Indeed, Nissan's revival and the Renault–Nissan alliance's success were only possible through collective agency. Two agentic processes were critical to the mobilization of the collective.

The first process was managing collective efficacy. Ghosn was an inspirational orator who was able to crystallize the complex. His intimate understanding of the collective motivational mechanisms, together with systematic, explicit, and “jargon-free” communication, was instrumental to the collective belief in and attainment of the vision (Interviewee 1: 317). He leveraged socioculturally rich symbolism to communicate his belief in the collective ability to revive Nissan.

People said at the beginning, they used to tell me you're bringing these foreign terms like commitment to the [Japanese vocabulary]. I said, “No, no. Commitment, this is Japanese... Remember when the samurai failed in his mission, he was to do *seppuku*. This is commitment, so you guys are at the origin of what is called commitment, and you are paying for it with your life if you did not deliver on the results. I'm just using one of the basic elements of Japanese culture in a modern context.” (Ghosn, April 12, 2023: 253)

Ghosn leveraged his outsider status and track record of outlier performance to build collective efficacy. The former assured the collective that he was not an “agent of the French” but shared their collective intentions to revive Nissan; the latter engendered “confidence” in Ghosn's capacity to achieve a seemingly impossible corporate turnaround, reflexively heightening the collective's aspiration and reinforcing the belief in a shared efficacy (Interviewee 5: 91). In this way, Ghosn leveraged outlier performance to gain legitimacy for his outsider's vision of “dramatic change” (Interviewee 8: 48; Interviewee 1: 109; Interviewee 9: 102). The greater the collective performance, the greater was the belief in the ability to achieve the vision and the greater was Ghosn's agency as an outsider.

The second agentic process was shaping the social system to advance collective achievement. Ghosn's outsider status was an “icebreaker ... a boat that you send first to break the ice” (Ghosn, April 28, 2023: 206). “[Ghosn] drove innovation, breaking down historical, cultural, and political boundaries within Nissan and its supplier base in Japan” (Interview 3: 35).

Ghosn leveraged this status to “battle” and ultimately dismantle the conservative institutional systems that perpetuated organizational mediocrity, including the *keiretsu*, seniority rule, and discrimination against women (Ghosn, April 19, 2023: 148–151).

I was not against seniority. I was not against it. I said, “Look, whatever exists, I'm going to take it. I will stop it or eliminate it if it's harming the company performance.” That's all. Everything was analyzed in the function of the company performance. Nothing was based on cultural differences. I didn't care about that. I said, “We're not here to change Japan. We are here to change Nissan and change Nissan for the better.” So, when I attacked seniority, I said, “I have no problem with seniority. I have a problem with discrimination against young talent. This is my problem.”

So, if I have a talented guy, and the only reason [why] I cannot give him the job is because he's 35 years old, I have a problem, because I want this talent to work for me. So, when I criticized seniority, I was not criticizing a value of Japanese society. I was criticizing the weakness that this value was creating for my company and changing it. So, when I promoted the first young people into very important jobs, I took care to explain why I was selecting this person, what this person has done that makes him the most legitimate person to take the job, and what I was expecting from him, and people tolerate that.

You tolerate the cultural change if you accept the reasons [why] you are making the change, and particularly if you can see the results of change. So, this was a very delicate process, and I was very careful to take the time to explain it first, and second to show the results. I said, “You see? We did this. You are skeptical. Let's look at the results we're getting compared to what we got before.” Seniority, *keiretsu*, was the same thing. The fact that the company had shares in too many suppliers and distributors, I say, “Let's stop that because, frankly, it doesn't change anything in the quality of the relationship with people if you're not a shareholder.”

On the contrary, having the comfort of cross-shareholding can make you weaker. It can melt you. So, systematically, when I was attacking one of the golden cows of the Japanese culture, I did it only for Nissan and I did it explaining why I was doing it and showing the results after. (Ghosn, April 19, 2023: 148–151)

Ghosn reshaped the institutional framework into a diverse, globally oriented, and performance-driven social system that advanced his outlier objectives. He presided over the organizational social system, designing structures and practices that regulated the

organizational sociocultural functions. Cross-cultural teams were a fulcrum in this regard, breaking down institutional boundaries and facilitating cross-functional and cross-cultural collaboration. In this way, Ghosn proactively and generatively shaped the social system, leveraging his outsider status and outlier capabilities to advance outlier performance through collective achievement.

### Loss of Agency

Embracing his inherent and defining position as an outsider was fundamental to Ghosn's generation of visionary ideas. In turn, these ideas and their execution generated extraordinary outcomes. He leveraged his outlier performance to achieve greater agency, advancing more innovation and institutional change. His focus on performance was singular, and consequently public perception held little significance, though criticism was constant despite his success, especially in the media. A revelation of the inherent value of his position as an outsider led to a reticence for inclusion. "So, performance and delivery of results is the best antidote to criticism that in any way is going to happen if you are an outsider. By nature" (Ghosn, January 24, 2023: 236).

Ghosn was considered a "genius" by some and "respected" by most as a "powerful and engaging leader" with a "chameleon-like" ability to adapt (Interviewee 3: 13; Interviewee 9: 222; Interviewee 7: 258). Some also viewed him as a "narcissist" with an "ego" that was "out of control" (Interviewee 8: 36; Interviewee 9: 372). While serving as CEO of one French and two Japanese automotive companies simultaneously, Ghosn's time was tightly scheduled, the demands of which forced him to spend much of his life on an airplane, distanced from the "Gemba" or "the workforce" (Ghosn, April 12, 2023: 41). The distance undermined collective engagement in the vision.

He was spending more time in the United States. And on airplanes and ... flying around and seeing and—and just assuming it was all happening ... but not being there cost him dearly. (Interviewee 12: 197)

After being absolutely blown away and impressed by Carlos. I became somewhat disillusioned.... I think there's always a risk that your ego—you know, your strengths can be your weaknesses ... and I think he started to be his own undoing ... he became too big, he lost focus, his messaging wasn't as clear as the early days, and I think his motivation was in other ways; it was more about ... global dominance ... and very

much the signs of an ego out of control. (Interviewee 9: 314–322)

As an outsider, Ghosn viewed his outlier performance as his most important source of protection. He believed his outlier status would give him immunity from the effects of being an outsider. Reappointed just months before his imprisonment, after 20 years of outlier performance, his arrest was to him a "betrayal" that profoundly affected his sense of self (Ghosn, April 19, 2023: 225). The loss of trust led Ghosn to be treated as a deviant. The "extremely, extremely brutal" experience conflicted with the belief that his outlier performance would preserve his outsider agency (Ghosn, March 30, 2023: 180).

You're a hero at a certain point in time, you become not a villain but tolerated. Then a villain because you're associated [with] the French trying to interfere with Japanese interests and then Japanese companies. Then it became lethal; I didn't think it would go so far. But it was obvious that nothing like this would have happened without the green light given by the government. [In Japan] nothing of this size can happen without them giving the nod that yes, you can go ahead and do that. (Ghosn, May 3, 2023: 21)

An inability to defend or counter accusations compounded the sense of injustice and gave rise to cognitive dissonance between his outlier and outsider identities.

[They used] and manipulate[d] this event ... but frankly, if you asked me, 'Would you have done all of this [knowing that your arrest would be the outcome]?' No. If I had any feeling that all of this would happen, I would've quit the alliance a long time ago. But ... the pettiness, and the ingratitude, [on] both ... the Japanese side and the French were staggering for me. I was the only stupid guy when I made the decision not to go to General Motors, because I was thinking about a minimum level of [laughs] ... not only recognition or—[but i got] nothing at all, nothing; nothing at all. So, obviously, [even if I have regrets], I would not regret Versailles. (Ghosn, April 19, 2023: 225–226)

The traumatic event of Ghosn's arrest triggered a cognitive shift. He became "more lucid," which led him to consciously reject a more nuanced perception of self that integrated elements of his outsidership with his outlierness (Ghosn, April 12, 2023: 338–339). This binary sense of self diminished his motivation to reconcile his distinctiveness with broader societal values. This reveals a subtle motivational shift from distinguishing to explicitly protecting the self. Yet, it ultimately reveals that even with outlier

performance, the position of outsiders is tenuous, with the social context mediating their agency.

## DISCUSSION

### Theoretical Contributions

The purpose of this research was to understand how outsiders leverage agency to become outliers. Our findings make three key contributions to the literature on outsiders, outliers, and agency. We discuss each of these in turn.

First, we contribute to the literature on outsiders, demonstrating that identity and efficacy moderate their ability to break norms. Ghosn's identity and efficacy empowered him to transcend the dictates of his environment and shape his future through purposeful action. A well-established notion is that outsiders can enable novel breakthrough innovation (Cattani et al., 2014; Ferriani & Cattani, 2021). The findings offer nuanced insights into their role, suggesting that rather than an ignorance of prevailing norms, outsiders possess a unique set of beliefs that enable them to reject said norms. Ghosn's early experiences as an outsider conditioned him to embrace his outsiderhood as a defining aspect of his identity. The findings highlight the significance of personal identity in shaping creative outcomes. Ghosn's self-efficacy was an important mechanism in the relationship between knowledge and action (Bandura, 2006), and was grounded in his outsider identity. We show that self-efficacy is a significant enabling mechanism, offering new insight into how perceived self-efficacy influences an outsider's thoughts and behaviors to enable them to emerge as an outlier. In other words, Ghosn's beliefs were foundational to the development of agentic capabilities that underpinned his emergence as a successful outlier. The findings reveal the explanatory power of self-efficacy in the context of outsider outliers, showing how Ghosn's personal outsider identity and agentic abilities operated in concert.

Second, we advance theory on exceptionalism and outliers by identifying the significance of social learning in the emergence of outliers. Research on outliers has acknowledged the disproportionate impact of exceptional individuals on firm outcomes (Booyavi & Crawford, 2023; Crawford et al., 2024). Recently, research has also shown that individual outliers have unique cognitions, beliefs, and motivations that enable them to achieve exceptional outcomes (Asgari et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2023). Building on these perspectives, we examine when an individual's experience as a cultural outsider can be a driver of exceptional individual and, consequently, firm outcomes. We find that Carlos

Ghosn's sociocultural context mediated his outlier cognitions, with social learning playing a distinct role. To date, research has focused on the significance of individual traits; however, our findings suggest that individual outlier traits are socially situated. This has important implications for outsider entrepreneurship (Clark et al., 2023; Pidduck, Clark & Zhang, 2024), where navigating highly uncertain and intuitionally constrained environments demands cognitively complex approaches to opportunity recognition and problem framing. We extend the work of Pidduck et al. (2024), who suggest that cross-cultural experiences foster a paradox mindset—enabling individuals to embrace complexity and leverage it as a cognitive resource. Our findings suggest that such experiences may shape outlier cognitions, offering a potential mechanism linking social context to exceptional outcomes.

Third, we demonstrate what happens when self-distinction and autonomy motivations moderate the core features of agency. Research delineating individual-level mediating mechanisms is limited. We reveal that the core features of agency are mediated by motivational mechanisms in the emergence of successful outsider outliers. Ghosn was not just a product of his life circumstances; he actively exercised power in shaping them. As an outsider, he was unrelenting in exploring, manipulating, and influencing his environment. His agentic capabilities were underpinned by two distinct motivational mechanisms: self-distinction and autonomy. Ghosn leveraged his outsider status to spearhead change, intentionally dismantling social systems to achieve outlier performance. Innovative outcomes offered an important avenue to distinguishing the self. The study also identifies the significance of autonomy as a motivational mechanism. This finding echoes Pidduck et al. (2024), who find autonomy to be an important boundary condition for entrepreneurial outcomes of cross-cultural experience. Ghosn's performance elevated his autonomy and enhanced his agency as an outsider. Consistent with Bandura (2006), performance standards were raised as his outsider knowledge and outlier competences grew. Thus, the findings contribute to the outsider literature by revealing a new path through which outsiders can achieve legitimacy. Ghosn leveraged outlier performance to obtain legitimacy for his ideas despite being an outsider.

### Agency at the Margins: A Framework for Understanding Outsider-Outlier Success

Though richly insightful, the case of Carlos Ghosn as an extraordinary outsider outlier is not representative, nor is it intended as such. It focuses on *post hoc*

interviews with Ghosn following a series of dramatic events that shaped his view of the past. Further research, therefore, could convert our exploratory research into prescriptive and normative inquiry. To advance this, we offer three research propositions.

Ghosn embraced and actively leveraged his identity as an outsider to increase his agency and become a unique outlier, which empowered him to transcend the dictates of his environment and shape his future through purposeful action. He was relentless in his development of the agentic capabilities of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness, which supported his emergence as the ultimate outlier. We therefore propose that:

*Proposition 1. The greater outsiders' (a) self-efficacy, and (b) belief that their outsidership is central to their identity, the greater their ability to leverage agency in achieving outlier performance outcomes.*

Outsiders also have a unique set of beliefs that inform their principles. As an outsider, Ghosn was inherently uncompromising. Accordingly, he was well placed to disrupt and drive change in traditional institutional contexts hampered by stagnation or decline. His agentic capabilities enabled him to withstand extreme pressure, persevering regardless of criticism and opposition, to achieve the desired results. He neither sought to belong nor adapted to the environment; rather, he created change by forcing the environment to adapt. We therefore propose that:

*Proposition 2. Outsiders guided by motivations of (a) self-distinction and (b) autonomy exhibit an uncompromising pursuit of outlier performance and disruptive innovation.*

While outsiders are well placed to exercise agency in renewing organizations and industries, they may be less adaptable when it comes to their outsider identity. Though charming at first, Ghosn's very leadership challenged the status quo, and his identity opposed the establishment. As such, he was not immune to scrutiny but rather the perfect target for it. This leads us to propose that:

*Proposition 3. Scrutiny is greater when high agency combines with high outsidership and high outlierness.*

Historically, management research has examined individuals and organizations that conform to the patterns of normal distribution, often overlooking outliers. Our research adds to a growing body of work that emphasizes the value of examining those at the margins. It echoes an emerging view that advancing managerial research, policy, and practice requires a shift in focus toward outlier dynamics—particularly

in relation to sociopolitical power structures. The three propositions advance that endeavor. Drawing on neuroscience and psychology to inform outlier research could provide another rich vein; so, too, would an exploration of whether these cognitive processes are present in outliers. We encourage researchers to examine the cognitive practices and processes of outliers with a greater variety of demographic profiles.

## Policy Implications

For political and organizational decision-makers, our study underscores the paradoxical value of outsiders. We outline three implications to this end: (1) the strategic value of outsiders, (2) rethinking talent frameworks, and (3) navigating the outsider identity paradox.

First, outsiders hold considerable strategic value, not despite their differences but precisely because of them. As such, political frameworks need to evolve to harness this value, transforming how policies on immigration, diversity, and workforce inclusion are shaped. With fear-based narratives on immigration and difference gaining traction, shifting political rhetoric toward the vital economic and technological contributions of those who do not fit the mold is crucial.

Second, in an organizational context, recruitment and talent frameworks need to be reimaged to support, rather than exclude, nonconformity. Recruitment frameworks perpetuate the selection of candidates who align with organizational culture and behavioral norms, often through standardized assessments, which implicitly exclude those who deviate from such norms. This creates a bias against, and removes the opportunity for, the selection of those who are different. Consequently, talent identification and development models need to be developed to allow for the anomaly of outsiders and outliers. Talent frameworks, likewise, must expand to actively support outsider potential, ensuring that nonconformity is valued and nurtured. While the cognitive strength and endurance of outsiders appears limitless, they are not immune to cognitive limitations, nor does their strength negate the need for continual cognitive support.

Third, like other strategic assets, outliers require investment and protection. Their management comes with a unique set of considerations and complexities, of which navigating the outsider identity paradox is central. Outsiders are inherently uncompromising, and their agentic capabilities enable them to withstand extreme pressure to achieve the desired results. Consequently, in the long run they can exacerbate the same tensions they once effectively managed and

silenced. That is, outsiders create value precisely because they resist belonging—yet, this resistance can limit long-term adaptability. Organizations must allow outsiders to retain their agentic identities without forcing integration that would undermine their strengths.

## CONCLUSION

Our purpose herein was to advance an empirically grounded understanding of how outsiders can leverage agency to become outliers. Through an exploratory case study, we demonstrate how agency—underpinned by a distinct set of beliefs and motivations—enabled an outsider to transcend the dictates of his marginal status to achieve outlier success. Our findings show that while outsider success is rare, agency can serve as a powerful mechanism for overcoming the structural disadvantages of marginality. We encourage both scholars and practitioners to further consider and critically examine the outsider-outlier dynamic. In summary, we regard outsiders as a high-risk, high-reward group whose outlier success challenges conventional assumptions about talent, opportunity, and organizational design. We hope that our study offers a meaningful starting point for research that furthers theoretical and empirical understanding of how outsiders leverage agency to emerge as outliers.

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APPENDIX A  
CONTRASTING OUTSIDERS AND OUTLIERS

TABLE A1  
Definitions, Theoretical Perspectives, and Empirical Application

	Outsider	Outlier
Definition	“Marginal actors structurally distant from the influence of prevailing social norms” (Cattani et al., 2017: 967). Defined not by personal traits but by positional exclusion, they typically lack access to dominant forms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital, which constrains their ability to participate in dominant social and economic structures.	A subset of individuals whose extreme performance or success deviates from the broader population in unexpected ways (Ruef & Birkhead, 2024). Distinguished not merely by statistical distance but by the magnitude of their achievement relative to others.
Theoretical perspective	Informed by a rich sociological tradition that treats marginality as a socially constructed position rather than a personality trait (Park, 1928). Key perspectives include Merton’s (1972) work on epistemic and structural exclusion; Simmel’s (1950) portrayal of “the stranger” as simultaneously near and far, Coser’s (1962) work on deviant behavior, and Meyer’s (1982) framework for understanding discontinuous events (e.g., economic crises). Grounded in social capital theory (Bourdieu & Nice, 1980; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013) and institutional and field theory (Fligstein, 1997).	The study of outliers is grounded in statistical and econometric traditions, particularly those challenging the assumption of normal distribution in human performance (O’Boyle & Aguinis, 2012). Dominant frameworks are informed by power-law theory (Aguinis & O’Boyle, 2014), showing that a small minority of individuals account for a disproportionate share of outcomes. In parallel, the domains of cognitive psychology and behavioral genetics have informed explanations of outlier emergence, particularly through research on cognitive ability (Lubinski, 2004).
Extant knowledge	Experiences of marginalization are documented across social, cultural, epistemic, and institutional outsider groups. Early research linked marginality to innovation, as exemplified by the “marginal man” hypothesis in scientific discovery (Gieryn & Hirsh, 1983). Debate centered on whether those at the margins were more likely to drive innovation. More recent research coalesced around two streams. The first examines macro-environmental conditions, showing that convulsive moments destabilize dominant logics and create point of entry for outsiders (Sine & David, 2003). The second focuses on micro-level legitimation strategies, analyzing how outsiders mobilize resources, craft narratives and forge alliances to sustain novelty (Cattani et al., 2014). Across these streams, research shows that outsiders approach problems idiosyncratically, often confronting stigma and entrenched norms—but occasionally leveraging their position to develop new logics or approaches (Andriani et al., 2025; Cattani et al., 2017).	Early research focused on identifying, assessing, and handling statistical outliers. Over time, this view has evolved from treating outliers as statistical anomalies to examining the antecedents of exceptional performance. Early studies focused on cognitive ability, establishing that cognitive traits of extraordinary individuals appear at an early age (Lubinski & Benbow, 2006). These cognitive advantages are linked to outstanding human accomplishments across domains, including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields (Lubinski, 2009; Wai, Lubinski & Benbow, 2009). Subsequent work emphasizes that extraordinary achievement is not attributable to cognitive ability alone. Research suggests that even with the requisite cognitive ability and motivation (Call et al., 2015), outliers are unable to perform without relevant opportunities (Asgari et al., 2021). Outliers have been studied across various levels (individual, team, and organization) with increasing attention to the psychological and environmental mechanisms that shape their performance (Call, Campbell, Dunford, Boswell & Boss, 2021; Xiao, Wang, Cheng & Wei, 2024).

**TABLE A1**  
**(Continued)**

	Outsider	Outlier
<b>Current positions</b>	Outsider research has shifted toward understanding the interplay between social audiences and individual agency in shaping the nonlinear, discontinuous process of outsider legitimization in dynamic environments.	The link between cognitive ability and exceptional performance outcomes has been an important focus in research on outliers. Research is shifting toward a more nuanced understanding of outliers, how they emerge, and the detrimental impact that prolonged high performance can have upon outliers (Asgari et al., 2021; Oldroyd & Morris, 2012).
<b>How they relate to Ghosn</b>	Structurally and symbolically marginal; outside dominant cultural and institutional hierarchies. Foreign CEO in France—lacking social, cultural, and symbolic capital with Renault and the French elite. Foreign CEO in Japan—lacking social, cultural, and symbolic capital within Nissan and with the Japanese business elite. Obtained access via an exogenous shock (Nissan crisis)—aligns with outsider or entry theory (Sine & David, 2003). Never fully accepted by Japanese or French elite. High-risk entry into closed field; legitimacy always contested. Outsider status enabled norm-breaking but undermined long-term legitimacy.	Exceptional performer with disproportionate impact relative to peers. Delivered spectacular turnarounds at Renault and Nissan—rare, extreme performance across contexts. Rose to power through cumulative advantage and performance visibility—aligns with power-law logic. High-reward performance trajectory, but as visibility increased so did vulnerability. Outlier success shielded him initially but later exacerbated political and institutional backlash.
<b>Selective quotes</b>	<p>“You know, nobody thought that anybody can fix Nissan. Because there was no Japanese person capable of fixing the company and nobody thought that a foreigner can come to Japan and turn around a Japanese company. So, the company was doomed. So, my legacy was to say, this guy has taken a mission that was deemed impossible by these two standards and he did it. Because—I said from the beginning you can—any problem created by man can be solved by man. As long as you know how to be creative enough. That’s number one.” (Ghosn, April 5, 2023: 49)<sup>a</sup></p> <p>“I was a foreigner who was very singular into the whole Japanese society. A lot of people didn’t like me because I was a foreigner.” (Ghosn, Jan 24, 2024: 203)</p> <p>“So, they were a little bit afraid, they don’t know who this guy is. He’s an outsider. He’s not culturally marked. So, in a certain way, this gave me at least the benefit of the doubt.” (Ghosn, April 12, 2023: 235–237)</p>	<p>“But this is the way I transformed this company, which, in 1999, has \$20 billion of debt, unprofitable for 10 years. Used to sell 2.4 million cars in 1999, which was relatively very small, number three car maker, competitor to Honda, to 2018, where the 2.4 million cars became 5.5 million, so you more than doubled the size, the 140,000 employee[s], even though they came down to 120,000 after the restructuring we were north of 270,000. The number of plants in the world, we have created new plants in the United States, we created a new plant in Indonesia, we created a new plant in Thailand, we opened up Brazil, we went to Russia. I mean the expansion of the company has been tremendous and frankly I don’t think a Japanese guy would have done that.” (Ghosn, March 30, 2023: 198)</p> <p>“After one year I reached a result, they said ‘oh my God, he’s cooking the books,’ but the second year’s going to be more difficult, so he cannot cover this for a very long time and after this was too late, it was done, sold. I had people joining the bandwagon much more numerous than the others, saying ‘look at that, he comes early, he works hard, he meets people, he shakes hands.’ It was a completely different type of management compared to the God CEO the Japanese had, in his big building coming at 10 o’clock in the morning, nobody sees him, he doesn’t make a decision or make it with a few people and it comes—you know, I was totally transparent.” (Ghosn, April 12, 2023: 246–247)</p>

<sup>a</sup>The number marks the position of the interview in the ATLAS file.

## APPENDIX B

### CARLOS GHOSN'S CAREER AND ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

**TABLE B1**  
**Carlos Ghosn's Career Timeline**

Year	Month	Event
1978		After graduation, spent 18 years at Michelin
1981		Became plant manager in Le Puy-en-Velay, France
1984		Named head of research and development for Michelin's industrial tire division
1985		Appointed chief operating officer (COO) of Michelin's South American operations (aged 30)
1989		After turning around Michelin South America, appointed COO of Michelin North America
1990		Promoted to CEO of Michelin North America
1996		Joined Renault as executive vice president (EVP) of purchasing, advanced research, engineering and development, powertrain operations, and manufacturing; also EVP of Renault's South American division
1999	Mar.	Nissan and Renault agree to capital alliance, with Renault buying 36.8% stake in Nissan
	Jun.	Ghosn named Nissan COO
	Oct.	"Nissan Revival Plan" announced
2000		Ghosn named Nissan president and COO
2001		Ghosn named Nissan president and CEO
		Nissan's Murayama plant in Tokyo ends auto production
2002		Nissan raises stake in Renault to 15%; Renault increases its Nissan stake to 43.4%
2003		Nissan establishes joint venture with China's Dongfeng Motor
2005		Ghosn named Renault president and CEO
2008		Ghosn named Nissan chairman, president, and CEO
2012		Nissan and Renault jointly acquire Russian automaker AvtoVAZ
2014		Nissan and Renault integrate production, development, and other functions
2016	Dec.	Nissan acquires 34% stake in Mitsubishi Motors; Ghosn named Mitsubishi chair
2017		Nissan–Renault–Mitsubishi alliance established
2018	Apr.	Ghosn steps down as Nissan president and CEO; stays on as chairman
	Nov.	Arrested by Tokyo district prosecutors at Tokyo airport

*Note:* COO = chief operations officer; EVP = executive vice president.

**TABLE B2**  
**Nissan's Market Capitalization before, during, and after Mr. Ghosn's Tenure**

Year	Month	Market Capitalization (€B)	% Change
2000	Feb.	9.8	
2018	Nov.	30.1	+207
2025	July.	6.8	−77

### APPENDIX C CARLOS GHOSN INTERVIEW JOURNAL

TABLE C1  
Interview Log: Carlos Ghosn Sessions by Date and Time

Date	Year	Time	Place	Notes
February 14	2023	16:40–17:45	Interviewee's Beirut residence	Initial meeting
March 22	2023	09.50–12.10	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
March 30	2023	08.50–11.10	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
April 5	2023	10.50–11.00	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
April 12	2023	09.50–12.00	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
April 19	2023	09.50–12.00	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
April 28	2023	15.50–18.05	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
May 3	2023	10.50–11.10	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
May 5	2023	15.50–6.05	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
May 10	2023	16.15–18.15	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
May 11	2023	15.50–17.30	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
May 17	2023	09.50–12.00	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
November 29	2023	15.50–17.45	Interviewee's Beirut residence	Reflective dialogue
January 17	2024	14.50–16.20	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
January 24	2024	08.50–10.40	Interviewee's Beirut residence	In-depth interview
April 26	2024	20.00–21.00	Video interview	In-depth interview

### APPENDIX D INDUSTRY INSIDER INTERVIEW JOURNAL

Interviewees 1–11 are all Nissan (Renault) employees, 12 is an industry consultant who worked with Nissan, and 13–17 are all highly

experienced non-Nissan auto industry “insiders.” All interviewees are separated from Mr. Ghosn by one or two degrees.

TABLE D1  
Overview of Industry Insider Interviews

Job Title, Brand	Years of Auto Industry Experience	Region of the World	Degree of Separation From Ghosn	Interview Format	Degree of Separation From Second Author
1 Senior manager, Nissan	35	Oceania and Japan	1	Face-to-face	2
2 Regional head, Nissan	42	Middle East and Africa (MEA)	1	Zoom	2
3 Director, Nissan	28	Oceania and Japan	1	Email	1
4 Senior manager, Nissan	31	Europe and Japan	1	Email	2
5 Senior manager, Nissan	40	Oceania	1	Face-to-face	1
6 Senior manager, Nissan and Renault	46	Oceania	1	Zoom	1
7 Country CMO, Nissan	35	Oceania	1	Face-to-face	2
8 Dealer principal, Nissan <sup>a</sup>	29	Oceania	1	Zoom	2
9 Senior manager, Nissan	39	Oceania	1	Face-to-face	1
10 Country CMO and MD, Ford and Nissan	61	MEA	1	Email	1
11 Former country MD, Renault	15	MEA	2	Email	1
12 Senior industry consultant	44	MEA	1	Face-to-face	1
13 Senior manager, Toyota	32	Europe	2	Email	1
14 COO of listed dealer group <sup>b</sup>	30	MEA and Oceania	2	Face-to-face	1
15 Former sales director, Ford	32	MEA	2	Email	1
16 Former CEO	27	India	2	Email	1
17 Former CEO	38	MEA	2	Email	1

<sup>a</sup>Also ex-national dealer council chair.

<sup>b</sup>Also former regional sales manager, Ford.

**APPENDIX E**  
**NISSAN AND INDUSTRY INSIDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (PHASE 3, N = 17)**

1. In your opinion, what motivated Mr. Ghosn? (What drove him?)
2. How important do you think performance (and results) were to him?
3. In your experience, was he different from other senior leaders you have worked with or observed?
  - a. If so, how or why?
4. What organizational or cultural norms did Mr. Ghosn break at Nissan?
5. Would you consider Mr. Ghosn to be an outsider?
  - a. Why or why not?
6. Could you identify and discuss any unique or unconventional traits of Mr. Ghosn that you believe were critical to his success?
7. Why was he successful in executing his vision?
8. Any last thoughts on Mr. Ghosn?
9. Has your opinion of Mr. Ghosn changed since his arrest and escape?
  - a. If no, why not? If yes, how?
10. When did you begin working in or with the automotive industry? What year?
11. When (if at all) did you cease working in or with the automotive industry? What year?

**APPENDIX F**  
**CODING**

**TABLE F1**  
**Examples of First- and Second-Order Coding**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Quotation Example</b>	<b>First-Order Coding</b>	<b>Second-Order Coding</b>	<b>Third-Order Coding</b>	<b>Higher-Order Code Tally</b>
162	“But I was a double outsider, because I was not from Nissan, and I was not a Japanese [either]. So, in a certain way, the advantage of ... being an outsider, is the fact that nobody can blame you for what happened to the company. Okay? Coming from outside I have nothing to do with all the problems you’re talking to me [about], you know ...? Okay. So, this is an advantage. Second advantage, I cannot be seen as part of the clannish and territorial organization inside the company, or even inside the country.”	Outsider	Identity	Outsider enabling belief	421
26	“I sensed since I was a kid, that even though I like this country, that this country was not for me, in a certain way. Which means that in order to give and contribute in the future, I had the sense that I would have to leave the country. I would have to go out. My first instinct was to come back to Brazil, because I was born in Brazil. But I always considered the world as my turf, particularly, professionally. Even though emotionally I was attached to Brazil from one side and Lebanon from the other side, I never considered [either of] them as the only	Conviction of control over desired outcome	Efficacy	Outsider enabling belief	421

**TABLE F1**  
**(Continued)**

Codes	Quotation Example	First-Order Coding	Second-Order Coding	Third-Order Coding	Higher-Order Code Tally
	place where I wanted to live, or the only place where I would be able to work or contribute.”				
50	“I was not interested in wealth, because fundamentally I’m not a materialistic guy, in a certain way. I’m not. I’m going to speak with you very frankly on that. You can say, yeah, I agree, or don’t agree, but I don’t think I’m a materialistic guy. Frankly, I don’t care. But since I was a kid, my obsession was autonomy. I was convinced in my development that the best thing that somebody can aim for in life is to live a life of autonomy. But when I talk about autonomy, I’m talking, obviously, the first one is financial autonomy, because if you are dependent financially then a lot of things are lost.”	Autonomy	Motivation	Personal agency	253
86	“Well, yeah, I mean my legacy is the fact that also when you’re here at the level of a country like Lebanon or a kind of developing country that no matter when you’re coming from, no matter. You can find a way to the top, globally, on the condition that you believe in your star and you build your star. You know this also—that’s why I’m very popular in Lebanon. Not for anything else. It’s not only for the work I’ve done, but also I’m a kind of example that this is a kind of normal, Lebanese guy, educated in a school here who was not helped by the father or the family or the name or the political party, et cetera. He prevailed, not only [in] Lebanon but he prevailed globally. This is one of the reasons for which there are people in Lebanon that like me ... and particularly young people. Because they [see] hope that even if you are in a hole today and you don’t see north, this is an example of [how] you can make it. There is no guarantee but at least there is hope.”	Identity distinction	Motivation	Personal agency	253
55	“No, no, no, but the first two or three months in Japan were horrible. Were horrible. In a certain way what saved me, in a certain way, what allowed me to gather my forces again, and not to be smashed by that, was this profound sense of injustice towards me, and the love and solidarity of my family.	Future oriented: expansion of mind	Forethought	Personal agency	376



**TABLE F1**  
**(Continued)**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Quotation Example</b>	<b>First-Order Coding</b>	<b>Second-Order Coding</b>	<b>Third-Order Coding</b>	<b>Higher-Order Code Tally</b>
	Carole and my kids. They were absolutely unconditional in their support. They came to Japan and supported me, et cetera, in very difficult conditions, and these two things, I mean, injustice and love, were very powerful. You can remove mountains with these. So, this allows me to imagine everything else. First, get out of Japan. That was the first most important objective.”				
22	“So the car of today is more autonomous than the car of yesterday. The car of tomorrow will be even more autonomous than the car of today. When I talk about autonomy, you know I don’t know if I had the opportunity to tell you about that. That the ... car is going to make decisions for you. It’s not any more a machine that you—you know, you push a button, and if you don’t push the button, nothing happen[s].”	Scene construction: Future events	Forethought	Personal agency	454
36	“Frankly, when I was looking in 2005 already to all the statistics about climate change, I said, ‘No we’re not going to go through like this, we can’t go through like this, we can’t go through.’ Frankly, then I looked at the hybrids which were at the moment very popular, but let’s say hybrid is being half pregnant, okay? Let’s go for a full pregnancy, what’s a full pregnancy, is [an] electric car. What’s missing? What’s missing in electric car is batteries; okay, let’s do batteries. Let’s do batteries.”	Hypothetical thinking	Forethought	Personal agency	454
124	“Yeah, I’m much more resistant to adversity than I thought I would be. Yeah, this is where you discover yourself, how tough you can be, how resistant you can be, how strong you can be in front of adversity even though—when you don’t see any more light ... and everything is black around you, and you are being attacked from every angle, and you’re being challenged on the most intimate part of yourself, not only professionally, but even personally.”	Emotional regulation	Self-reactiveness	Personal agency	200
17	“From the other side, he was a very simple man. He was very attentive to people, and I noticed how this has a great impact on the people around	Mimicking	Social learning	Proxy agency	80

**TABLE F1**  
**(Continued)**

Codes	Quotation Example	First-Order Coding	Second-Order Coding	Third-Order Coding	Higher-Order Code Tally
	him. I adopted it. So, when you say, influence, influence is both ways. Influence is you're seeing the good side of his management and you say, oh my God, I should reinforce this side. The side that you consider as boring, a waste of time, and you rejected it, so you want to do something totally different."				
23	"For example, François Michelin was not a very good speaker, and he has a tendency to speak in a very, I would say, vague and emotional [way], and subject to many interpretations. I hated that. But he was my boss, so I was just observing. But I hated [it], which means—as I say, I would never do that."	Rejecting	Social learning	Proxy agency	80
13	"I have very little information about the father of my grandfather ... I think this one—and you know, at that moment—period, did not write too much. I mean, the story was told. I was told this story by my grandmother, that being his wife, who was here in Lebanon—came back to Lebanon. So, the rest is imagination, obviously. You know a little bit and then you build the personage."	Construction of outsider identities	Self-reflectiveness	Personal agency	454
58	"Well making a difference for me is you're bringing hope when there is no more. You're challenging something that people don't like. But ... they consider themselves as powerless in front of the situation. That's what making a difference—that's what really making a difference means. It's just, you know, you attack a fortress that people thought would be impregnable, [that] you know ... you cannot take. It's taking a fortress that was considered as—you know, not takeable."	Challenging fundamental aspects of the system	Deconstructing the system	Collective agency	627
52	"Yeah, I was not against seniority. I was not against it. I said, 'Look, whatever exists, I'm going to take it. I will stop it or eliminate it if it's harming the company performance.' That's all. Everything was analyzed in the function of the company performance. Nothing was based on cultural differences. I didn't care about that. I said, we're not here to change Japan. We are here to change Nissan, and change Nissan for the better. So when I	Altering fundamental aspects of the system	Reconstructing the system	Collective agency	627

TABLE F1  
(Continued)

Codes	Quotation Example	First-Order Coding	Second-Order Coding	Third-Order Coding	Higher-Order Code Tally
	attacked seniority, I said, ‘I have no problem with seniority. I have a problem with discrimination against young talent. This is my problem.’”				
22	“Frankly, if you asked me, would you have done all of this? No. If I had any feeling that all of this would happen, I would’ve quit the Alliance a long time ago. But in the pettiness, and the ingratitude, both from the Japanese side and the French, were staggering for me. I was the only stupid guy when I made the decision not to go to General Motors, because I was thinking about a minimum level of [laughs] ... not only recognition or—[but i got] nothing at all, nothing; nothing at all.”	Betrayal	Negative outcomes of outsider-ness	Loss of agency	522

APPENDIX G  
OUTSIDER TRIANGULATION EXAMPLE

TABLE G1  
Triangulation of Sources Identifying Ghosn as an Outsider

Carlos Ghosn	Documentary	Interviewees	Secondary Documents
“I’m a double outsider. I’m not from the company. I could’ve been Japanese, but not from Nissan. This is an outsider.”	“From the very start, he was an outsider.”	“Fitting in was never part of his agenda.”	“Both a citizen [of] the world and a perpetual outsider.”

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