

### Case Study 10: Different "Vues" of the World

A midsized financial software development firm, The Financial Enterprise Group (TFEG) specializes in creating technology solutions for financial institutions such as banks and brokerage firms. Like many of its competitors trying to survive in difficult economic times, TFEG had cut its full-time workforce in half. The organization had kept the younger (and cheaper) employees as well as the senior talent while laying off much of its mid-level staff. And with fewer full-time employees, TFEG now relied heavily on lower-priced "contractors"—skilled technology professionals hired on a project-by-project basis—to fill the void. Contractors were often hired from outside the United States on temporary work visas, with the vast majority from India. As a result, half of TFEG's current workforce was American-born, while 40% were from India, and the remaining 10% of workers came from Asia and Eastern Europe.

To improve their software development process while minimizing costs, TFEG had recently purchased a new program called Vue. Vue was vastly different from other types of software and required extensive implementation training. One of Vue's brightest consultants, Scotia Brown, along with a team of several others, was assigned to train with TFEG's employees over a 12-month period. Although only 27 years old, Scotia was an expert in software implementation and held an MBA along with a master's degree in technology engineering. She could answer virtually any question, and better yet, she could explain technology in a very direct and easy-to-understand manner.

Each time Scotia began a new training session, she would explain to the employees that Vue was radically different from the traditional software development process. Instead of a single developer "owning" the product through all development stages and operating with a great sense of autonomy, Scotia described Vue's team-based approach. Each person on the team had a single, specific role in the technology development cycle, and each person had narrowly defined goals related only to that development component. Scotia also emphasized that Vue required careful documentation of each stage in the development cycle. This documentation allowed the project manager to supervise the work closely during each phase.

As the training progressed, Scotia and the other consultants noticed discernible differences between the Indian and American workers. Indian employees completed the required self-managed training modules not only in advance of their American colleagues but also ahead of deadline.

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An online bulletin board that Scotia had created to share ideas and best practices was heavily utilized by Indian employees but was virtually ignored by American employees. When a new utility for logging hours was introduced, it was widely disregarded by American employees but used faithfully by Indian employees. Similarly, the requirement to create documentation was closely adhered to by Indian employees but once again ignored by American employees. The weekly briefings she and her colleagues held to keep employees informed of the progress of the Vue rollout were attended almost exclusively by Indian employees.

Uncomfortable chastising the employees' behavior directly, Scotia scheduled a meeting with the company's CEO, Phil Moore.

"The other consultants and I are all noticing a problem with the employees' lack of compliance," she began.

"What exactly do you mean by 'lack of compliance'?" Phil interrupted.

"I mean, half of the trainees actually follow our protocols. The other half seem to do whatever they please," Scotia replied.

"And who are 'some'?" probed Phil.

A first-generation American herself, Scotia hesitated. She didn't want to seem like an ethnocentric tattletale.

"Scotia, stop beating around the bush. I can't help if I don't know the problem," Phil insisted.

Scotia acquiesced, "Look, Phil, it seems to be mostly the Americans. Especially the TFEG veterans. They just don't do what we require. Maybe they're overworked or aren't used to having consultants tell them what to do," she hedged. "I'm sure they're good at their jobs, it's just that without their compliance, we'll never finish this training on schedule."

Phil was astounded. "Get me a list of their names!" he demanded. "We can't afford delays in implementation."

Scotia carefully explained that it wasn't her intent to embarrass anyone or get anyone in trouble. She just wanted management to encourage everyone to participate—at least for the weekly meetings. "If we could all routinely meet together," Scotia reasoned, "I think we could get past some of these tensions. Vue depends on people working together, not against one another."

Persuaded, Phil agreed to assist, and Scotia left the meeting hopeful.

Her hopes sank the next morning when she read the company-wide memo Phil sent, stating that weekly meetings were now mandatory. This wasn't what she had in mind when she said she wanted Phil to "encourage" participation. And if things weren't bad enough before the mandate, subsequent

weekly meetings dissolved into "gripe sessions," with American employees candidly expressing their displeasure with the new process, while openly questioning whether Vue could produce the desired results.

By the end of the year, the disparity in Vue adoption between Indian and American employees was common knowledge. When conducting year-end performance appraisals and calculating bonus awards, management made good on their threat to penalize employees who had failed to achieve the stated adoption goals. As a result, many American employees received unflattering performance reviews and a corresponding reduction in their level of compensation. Although contractors employed on a "temporary" basis were not eligible for the company's salary bonus program, many Indian employees were recognized by their immediate managers for their success with Vue adoption and were compensated with paid vacation days, gift certificates, and public recognition of their achievement at the year-end town hall meeting. The difference in (perceived) compensation and public recognition frustrated the younger American employees and angered the senior American workers, who already bore strong feelings of resentment at the role lower-priced foreign workers were playing in displacing U.S.-born technologists from their jobs. Meanwhile, a number of the younger American employees left TFEI for opportunities elsewhere.

### Questions for Consideration

1. How would Hofstede's dimensions of culture help make sense of the difficulties experienced by Scotia and the other Vue consultants? Make sure to look at both Indian and American cultures.
2. Reflect on Scotia's conversation with Phil. How might gender have played a part in the discussion?
3. How do generational differences emerge in this conflict? What might have Scotia done differently to accommodate the generational differences in her trainees? What might have Phil done to accommodate his employees?
4. What are face needs of the Indian contractors? The American employees? What conflict style does Scotia use to try and resolve her problems with the American employees? What conflict style does Phil use?
5. Do any of the theories emerge as "better" than the others? Why do you believe this to be the case? What situations might surface that would make a different theory or theories better at explaining the situation?